

Jesus is Lord!

~ Acts 17:29-31 ~

Introduction:

Do you ever stop to think what shocking statements the Christian religion asks you to believe? In an unbelieving world which likes to think "all steeples point to heaven," Jesus has declared: "No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). Or think of Christ's warnings not to let anything come between us and him. He actually suggested that if our eye leads us astray, we should gouge it out, or if our hand leads us into sin, we'd do well to cut it off. It's preferable to lose one part of our body than for our whole body to go to hell (Mt 5:29f).

I suppose it's not surprising that astounding statements like these provoked varying reactions to the man who made them. Some of Jesus' hearers sneered: "He's out of his mind." Others said: "He's in league with the devil." And it's not hard to understand how they were led to those conclusions. Anyone who makes statements like Jesus did is either mad, or he's bad, -- or he's God.

The Scripture has settled the matter for us. We have before us a statement of the apostle Paul which emphasizes a truth which is at the very heart of Christianity, a truth which our world needs to hear:

JESUS IS LORD!

Part I.

You will remember that it was Paul who brought the gospel of Jesus Christ into Europe and, in particular, to the country of Greece. We meet him in Athens, where he had preached in the synagogue and in the public marketplace. News of this got to the authorities, and Paul was brought before the Supreme Council of Athens. He was asked: "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean" (Ac 17:19f).

As he gave his answer, Paul was surrounded by all kinds of evidence of false worship: shrines and statues and altars and temples, all dedicated to false gods. Paul began with a kindly ambiguity (which the Greek authorities may have taken as a compliment): "Men of Athens! I see that you're very religious." But he didn't remain ambiguous for long, vv 29-31. He spoke about a man whom God had appointed, who was put to death, but whom God raised from the dead. Jesus Christ is the one whom God appointed, whom God designated to be the Substitute who would take the place of a whole world of guilty sinners before God.

You can guess this message was hard on the nerves of Paul's hearers. They, like we, lived in a world which had an easy conscience about sin. We don't like to hear that our first parents rebelled against God and passed that rebellious nature on to us. Each of us has a sinful nature, a dark side to our personality that is not interested in God and His plan for us. There's something

inside of me that whispers: "You're the most important person in life. Your life revolves around you!" But whether we realize it or not, whether we like it or not, God knows we are guilty in his court. That's the message of God's holy law, and it offers not one shred of hope for sinners.

But Paul told those ancient Greeks about a man whom God appointed to satisfy God's anger over our sin. He did this by trading places with a human race under God's sentence of judgment. All during his life Jesus took our place under the demands of God's holy law. He kept those commandments perfectly -- for us. And then, on that awful Friday we call "Good," he took our place under the curse of God on sinners. When the sun set over that skull-shaped hill, it surely seemed as though the life of Jesus Christ was over.

But listen again to Paul: "... raising him from the dead." Three days after entering the grave as our Sinbearer, Jesus Christ left the grave under his own power. Death couldn't hold him, because Jesus is Lord!

When we say that we mean, first of all, he is the only one who can bring us to God. He is the only one who met the problem of sin head-on and solved it. Other religions tell you to forget about your sin, to deny it, to make up for it by trying harder in the future. Only a religion which teaches that Jesus is Lord can assure you that your sin was washed away by Christ's death and resurrection. You're assured of a place in God's family, because Jesus is Lord!

Part II.

It's no secret that people today are having trouble with life. Why should that be? Did God design life to be so terribly difficult that the average person is unable by himself to figure out what makes life worth while?

The problem isn't that God hasn't told us, but that we haven't been listening. When Paul got to Athens he met some people (v 18) who had their own ideas about how this life is to be lived. The Epicureans taught that there is no next life. Death ends everything. They also believed that the purpose of this life is pleasure. All a person should be concerned about is to seek the most pleasant existence. Whatever brings pleasure is right. Can you see what a belief like that will lead to?

The Stoics had a different idea about how to live. Their idea was: "Think everything out! Whatever doesn't make sense to your brain (e.g., fear, pain, pleasure, hope), don't accept." Your reason decides what is good and what is bad. The Stoic philosophy taught, e.g., that if a man's life was terribly difficult or unpleasant, and his reason told him to commit suicide, he shouldn't hesitate but do what his brain told him to do.

Now listen to what Paul had to say to these people, vv 30f. To those people who had such mistaken notions about life Paul emphasized: Jesus is Lord! Not only is he the only one who can bring us to God, he is the only one who can make life worthwhile. God has not placed us into this world to be our own little gods, deciding for ourselves what kind of life we're going to live, what sorts of goals we're going to set for our lives. That attitude falls under God's condemnation. Life works only one way, and that's God's way. Take a goldfish out of water, and what have you got? A very unhappy goldfish, that's what. And keep him out of water long

enough, and you'll have a very dead goldfish. You see, his Creator did not design him to live out of water.

You and I were designed for God, and our life is going to be happy and worthwhile only when the Spirit of God convinces us that Jesus is Lord. Whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we do it to his glory. That means that my satisfaction, my pleasure, is not the highest goal of my life. And what my brain tells me is right and good might be wrong and bad.

God appointed Jesus to be the only Savior this world is ever going to have. He led him into the grave in order to rescue us, but God raised him from the dead and made him Lord of all. Brothers and sisters, if Jesus is Lord of all, then he's Lord of you and me, too. He's Lord of our lives. He's Lord of our calendars. He's Lord of our activities. He's Lord of our sexuality -- the way we use our maleness or femaleness. He's Lord of life, and he's Lord of death.

He is the only one who can bring us to God, and he is the only one who can make life worthwhile. He does not exist for my sake; I exist for his sake.

When Paul said this in ancient Athens, there were many who refused to listen (v 32). What they were forgetting is that God has told us this not as an invitation for debate, but as an announcement: Jesus is Lord!

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