

Men's Study: Death in God

Weymouth New Testament

"Therefore let the whole House of Israel know beyond all doubt that God has made both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." Simeon Peter (Acts 2:36)

Who is the main character of the Passion story? Jesus, of course. But who is Jesus? Who was tried by Pontius Pilate, tortured, and crucified? That is the central question in all the debates about the incarnation in the early church. Those early debates got highly very technical. Debates raged about the meaning of philosophical terms like "nature" and "person" and "essence" and "substance." Fine distinctions were drawn between person and essence. As the debates went on, the language got even more technical.

The earliest and most basic of all Christian confessions is the acclamation, "Jesus is Lord" (e.g., Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:11; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5). To confess "Jesus is Lord" expresses a number of important understandings and commitments. It is first of all a recognition of God's unique activity and presence in Jesus of Nazareth. The term Lord, although it is used in many different ways in the Bible, is used throughout the Bible in distinctive ways to refer to God's own being. The Hebrew equivalent *Adonai*, "Lord," is the regular word used in normal speech to speak of God in the Old Testament. When the full scope of New Testament usages are carefully analyzed, it becomes clear that to say that Jesus is Lord is to attribute to Jesus the same sovereign power and authority that we attribute to God. John 20:27-28 *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"*

Therefore to say "Jesus is Lord" is to point to what we believe about who Jesus is, that he is not only "fully human," but also that he is "true God from true God," to use the more developed language of the Nicene Creed. But to say that Jesus is Lord is not merely to affirm his deity; it is also to make the claim that every human authority is finally subject to Jesus. Even though the world may not acknowledge it yet, every governing official, every religious leader, indeed every human claim to authority must finally acknowledge the authority of Christ (Phil. 2:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 11:15, 19:16). This confession has throughout the ages been the backbone of Christian resistance to evil and the hope that has sustained the church through its darkest hours

This confession of the lordship of Christ is thus a response to the saving life that Christ accomplished on our behalf. We acclaim Jesus as Lord not only because of who he is, but also because of what he has done. Indeed, we discover fully who he is only when we realize all that he has done: he has revealed God's love and purpose for humanity. So, Let us think together:

First: The One who died is the One who was incarnate and is God among us. We can only discuss the crucifixion of Christ in its divine aspects if we have settled the historical question that Jesus asked not only those who were with him in ancient times but also every person who turns to him: "Who do you say that I am?" If Jesus is God, then we have the question "What does the cross mean since this is God himself who dies?"

2 Corinthians 5:19

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

Second: The cross event is our focal point to be made into the people of God. We are instructed by scripture that we are to study and fix our constant focus upon the Christ who died on the cross. We proclaim a risen Lord who was crucified.

Hebrews 12:2-3a

Focus your gaze upon Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. He, for the sake of the joy that lay before him patiently endured the cross, while despising its shame, and is enthroned at God's right hand. Ponder him who endured terrible hostility against himself by sinners.

Third: When Jesus was alive, and preaching among us, he spoke of the cross as not only something that would happen to him, but also an event that involved every true follower of his. We are not only to be saved by the One who died on the cross; we are commanded to become participants in the cross ourselves. To follow Christ means to be cross-bearers. One cannot truly follow Jesus unless one is at the same time participating in the fellowship of the cross. Such a fellowship of the cross, the apostle Paul writes about.

Matthew 16:24-26

"If anyone wants to become my follower he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what does it benefit a person if he gains the whole world but forfeits his life? Or what can a person give in exchange for his life?"

Fourth: It can openly be said that it is impossible for God to die. The very nature of God is that he is the "Living God." God is described as eternal. Death is in fact, separation from God or absence from God. God is alive so, we must now ask "How is it that God can die?" This mystery is the message of the Bible. Both the old and new covenant begins by heaven telling the first mothers [Sarah and Mary] that "Nothing is impossible to God."

Genesis 18:14

Is anything impossible for the LORD? I will return to you when the season comes round again and Sarah will have a son."

Luke 1:37-38

"With God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

If any area of human life cannot also be experienced and endured by God, it makes the human richer than their God. Nothing is outside him. All things were created by him and nothing exists that did not have its origin in him. Jesus is God entering into the full depth of human experience and sanctifying it. He is both a fetus and a helpless new born as well as one who can suffer and be brutalized and die. When we say that Jesus is "Lord of all" we also say he is Lord of both the living and the dead. He enters life and subjects life to himself and he enters death and takes dominion over it. Death dies in God. When we speak of death *in* God, we do not speak of the death *of* God. We speak of Jesus as Lord over death so he is the "One who was, who died and is alive again."

Revelation 1:17c-18

"Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."

Fifth: We have said above that death is the separation from God. This separation occurs in God when Jesus upon the cross says "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" God in Christ becomes the God forsaken. God dies absolutely alone, separated from himself. We must see in God, the God forsaken. It is the utter forsakenness of Christ that is the sanctification of the world. In his own person, he bears the deepest dregs of sin and thereby liberates all humankind from their sinfulness. Through death he opens up life for us forevermore.

Isaiah 53:2-10