

FIRST WORDS
1 Corinthians 12:1-3

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There are three words that change everything in your life – the three most powerful words that can ever be uttered by anyone, anytime, anywhere. Can you think of those three words?

No, it's not "I love you," as powerful and life changing as those words truly are. Those three words may be second, but they are not the most powerful triad in language.

The words I'm talking about, once uttered by your heart, will make you forever changed. Words that will transform your relationship with God and your relationship with everyone else around you. These words will take you from darkness to light, from death to life, from sin to salvation. These words are the most powerful three words every put together in a sentence.

"Jesus is Lord."

What is the church? The church is the weekly gathering on resurrection day, Sunday, of those who dare utter those three words: Jesus is Lord. When you, with your heart, declare Jesus as Lord, that statement divides you from the rest of humanity and places you among the people of God. Jesus is Lord. This is the earliest, clearest, and most concise confession of the early church. What did the early church say? Jesus is Lord. Already in John's gospel, chapter 13, Jesus says, "You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am."

The real difference between you and someone who does not believe in Jesus is that you have dared to say those three words. You have dared to say with your lips, your heart, and your actions, "Jesus is Lord. He's the *kyrios*."

You remember that in chapter 12 Paul is talking about spiritual gifts. He begins chapter 12 with that *peri de* construction. *Peri de* – "Now concerning spiritual gifts, I do not want you to be unaware. When you were pagans, you were led astray to those dumb idols. But now (notice verse 3) no one speaking by the Spirit of God says 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Spirit of God."

There it is, the earliest confession of the people of God, "Jesus is Lord." Paul, himself, while he persecuted the church had, perhaps, declared Jesus as accursed. He certainly felt the people of Jesus, the followers of the Way, were accursed. But once he had the resurrection appearance of Jesus on the road to Damascus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul declared in his heart and in his life, "Jesus is Lord."

“Before I talk to you about spiritual gifts,” Paul is saying, “I want you to know that everybody, whatever their gift, as long as they say by the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is Lord, they are living under the power and the influence and the sphere of the Spirit of God.”

Jesus is Lord.

If you have a pencil and paper, this is worth writing down. There is a great deal of theology here, and there will be a lot of references. Put on your jogging shoes, and wake up and get ready – for perhaps you will learn more about who Jesus is in this one sermon than you’ve known in your whole life.

What does it mean to say Jesus is Lord? What does it mean to be part of this group that gathers on this resurrection day to call out and sing, as we have sung, “He is Lord. He is Lord. He has risen from the grave, and He is Lord”? What are we saying when we declare “Jesus is Lord.”

I. To say Jesus is Lord is to say the Christ of faith is the Jesus of history.

Put plainly, the 30 something-year-old rabbi who died in the first century in the city of Jerusalem, this earthly man, this rabbi who had the twelve disciples and other followers, this Jesus who healed the sick and cast out demons and even raised the dead, this Jesus who taught about the kingdom of God, this rabbi who died on a cross, this human Jesus, this Jesus who entered history is the Messiah of our faith. He’s the Savior in whom we put our faith.

In *Acts 2:32-36*, Peter is preaching on the day of Pentecost. Notice the resurrection emphasis with the proclamation of Lord. And Peter says:

“This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘The Lord said to my lord, “Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.’” Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified.”

In this passage Peter is preaching to the multitudes. The Spirit of God has come down upon the disciples. There has been a violent, rushing wind and tongues of fire. And Peter preaches.

Notice in verse 32 the identity of the lordship of Jesus with the resurrection. “God raised Him up again.”

He is exalted in verse 33.

David, who wrote the Psalter, said, “Yahweh, the Lord, said to my lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, and I will make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.’” Jesus ascended to heaven, and David said that God has called Jesus Lord. Therefore, everybody ought to know for certain (look at verse 36) that “God has made Him both Lord and Christ.” There it is. Who is it? “This Jesus whom you crucified.”

If you want to simplify point 1, you can look at it this way: Jesus is the Christ. When you say Jesus is Lord, you are saying that the man of history, that the rabbi of Jerusalem, the one born in Bethlehem, the carpenter of Galilee, the son of Mary is, indeed, the Holy One of Israel, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Savior of God's people. When you say Jesus is Lord, you are saying that the Jesus of history, the one who hung on the cross, who was here in time and space and had a real body upon which to receive the nails – that man is, indeed, the Christ.

II. To say Jesus is Lord is to proclaim the deity of Christ.

When you say Jesus is Lord, you are saying that Jesus is God.

Do you remember Thomas? He wasn't there when the resurrected Jesus first appeared to His disciples. They tried to tell him. "Hey, Thomas, you weren't here, but Jesus – He was crucified, but Thomas, He was here. We have seen the Lord." And Thomas said, "Hah! Unless I see in His hands the scars of the nails and put my hand into His sword-pierced side, I'm not going to believe that man's alive." Eight days pass. Thomas is with them this time. The doors are shut, but suddenly Jesus declares in their midst, "Peace be with you." And Jesus says to Thomas, "Hey, take your finger. Touch the scars on my hands. Take your whole hand and put it in my side. And don't be a non-believer."

But now Thomas believed. And look at **John 20:28**. "And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'"

To say Jesus is Lord is to say Jesus is God. "My Lord and my God."

"Thomas, you saw and you believed. But blessed are they who did not see and yet believe."

In Philippians 2 we have the same teaching. To call Jesus as Lord is to make Him God.

In **Philippians 2:6-11** we read, "Jesus existed in the form of God, but He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." Jesus was equal with God. But (verses 7-8) "He emptied Himself, took on the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Paul tells us in Philippians that Jesus is equal with God. He existed in the form of God. He emptied Himself. And yet there will be that day, Paul says, when every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Listen carefully to me: You will call Jesus Lord. I believe that just as surely as I am standing before you today. There will be a day when you will drop to your knees and you will call Jesus Lord. You have no choice. He is the all-powerful creator of the universe. He is the judge of both the living and the dead. One day, you will drop to your knees and you will call Jesus Lord.

But will it be too late? Calling Jesus Lord at the Judgment is like waiting to call the fire department after the building has been reduced to rubble and ashes. He wants you to acknowledge His Lordship now.

Paul says everyone will do it. The question is: Will you do it today? Will you do it before it is too late?

III. To say Jesus is Lord is to yield all power to Him over the universe, over the church, and over our individual lives.

If you are to call Him Lord, you've got to make Him the King. You've got to give Him all power, all authority, all dominion over your life.

In *Acts 10:34ff.*, we read these words – a sermon from Peter to the Gentiles.

“I most certainly understand now that God is not one to play favorites, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him. The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) – you know the thing that took place in Jerusalem.”

There is the word: All.

Luke acknowledges what Paul has already said, and John has concurred. He is Lord of all.

No place exists where Jesus is not Lord. There is no other planet, there is no place in the cosmos – there is no place you can go where Jesus is not Lord. Paul says in *Romans 10:12-13*, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; for whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” You call Him “Lord,” and you're saved, Paul says. But He's the Lord of all – for the same Lord is Lord of all.

In *Romans 14:8*, Paul tells us that all that we do, we do for the Lord. “If we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.”

In your life and in your death, you must acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Jesus is Lord. Lord of the universe, but also Lord over your life.

In *1 Corinthians 8:6*, Paul says, “There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.” He's the creator, this Lord Jesus Christ.

You think He doesn't have dominion? James, the brother of Jesus, says when he writes to the church, “Don't say you're going to do this tomorrow. Don't say you have this plan next week.” Rather, he says in *James 4:15*, “You ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.’”

Don't be arrogant. You don't know what is going to happen in your life tomorrow. The Lord is Lord of all. Don't make plans that you can't fulfill, for Jesus is Lord. And in His Lordship, He has dominion over all.

IV. To say Jesus is Lord is to affirm the triumph of Christ over death and over hostile cosmic powers, as evidenced by His resurrection.

Said more simply, when you say Jesus is Lord you are saying that He is alive again.

In *Ephesians 1:20-23*, we read these words:

“God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at the right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but in the age to come. He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

We already saw in Acts how we connect the Lordship of Jesus with His resurrection. You don't think He's Lord? He's the one who has power even over the ultimate enemy of death. God has raised Him. Put Him at the right hand, in heavenly places. And, therefore, because of His resurrection, He is over all rule and all authority. He is the Lord everywhere, as evidenced by His resurrection. You show me a man who will not stay captive to the powers of death, and I'll show you a man who is Lord of the universe.

They could not end the life of Jesus forever.

In *Romans 4:24-25*, he says,

“We are called righteous, those who believe in God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.”

V. To say Jesus is Lord is to declare our accountability to Him as righteous judge.

To say Jesus is Lord is to say we have to answer to Him.

In *1 Corinthians 4-5*, he says

“Don't go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.”

Don't judge each other. We are accountable only to the Lord. The Lord is our judge.

In *2 Timothy 4:1* it says,

“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom....”

When you call Jesus Lord, you are acknowledging that He is your judge. And, quite frankly, He is your judge whether you acknowledge him or not.

VI. To say Jesus is Lord is to proclaim your personal faith in Him.

Bob Isgrigs, a member of our church, died years ago. His wife, Nancy, was very sorrowful about her husband's death, and I began to ask about Bob and about his life.

Well, it all started when a friend set Nancy up on a blind date – the most handsome soldier, they said. “Just go on a date with him.” He had a car, and they went to get a coke together. She said on the first date he kept wearing his military cap so low she couldn't tell whether he was really all that handsome or not, so she decided to go out on a second date. And she discovered, indeed, that he was handsome. It wasn't long from that October getting a coke until June 1 of the next year when they were wed.

And they really never fought. I did some research and I found two exceptions. (Does that make you nervous that when you die I do a little research?) I found there were two occasions when they fought in their marriage. One was when they would come home from the grocery store. Bob would take the carton of ice cream and just go sit on the back porch. He'd take a spoon and eat all the soft part around the edges. So when you opened up the ice cream carton there was this cone in the middle where he had eaten all the edges. And Nancy didn't appreciate that.

There was another time, and I'm not completely clear about this. There was a time at Sears (where he worked) when Nancy was wearing a wig, and he didn't like the wig. He said something critical, and she just walked home and let him drive home.

When they got married, Nancy said she didn't ask her mother for permission because her mother would not have granted it. She was still 16 years of age. “Almost 17,” she likes to tell me. “Almost 17.” In fact, it was a covert operation. At 16 years of age, she planned and had her own white dress made, with all pink accessories – pink gloves, pink shoes, pink purse, pink flowers, pink hat. Everything pink to go along with that white dress. And Bob Isgrigs, a little older, in the military service, he wore a powder blue suit. I've tried to imagine what they looked like, and then I quickly tried to forget it – him in that powder blue suit and all that pink around that white dress.

When her parents finally learned about the wedding, Nancy's dad said to him, “Son, all I'm going to say I may be small, but I'm still big enough to whip you. And if you don't take good care of her, you're going to be in trouble.”

Bob Isgrigs was a wonderful husband, but he was not a man of faith. Wouldn't go to church.

They had some friends, Grady and Beth Booth. They had been stationed in the service together in Japan, and Grady and Beth would come and pick Bob and Nancy's daughter Pam up (their only child at the time) and take her to church. There was a deacon in the church named Walter Fancher. And Walter Fancher would see little Pam there and ask her where her parents were every Sunday. And she'd make excuses. “They're sick” or “They're busy today.” But the deacon, Walter Fancher, began to realize and put together what was going on – the parents weren't coming. Some time passed. Grady and Beth Booth were picking up little Pam, but Bob Isgrigs would not take his family to church.

One day, Beth was taking her own three sons to preschool. There was a terrible collision. Her door popped open, and she suffered a head injury and died. Luckily for her three boys, they were not injured. Being friends with Bob, this began to shake him up somewhat. It was later told to Bob, after he had already accepted Jesus Christ, that Beth Booth had said to her husband two weeks before her death, "I would give my life if Bob Isgrigs would call Jesus Lord."

A few weeks passed. Bob was sitting in the house and he said to his wife, Nancy, totally out of the blue – she never would have expected Bob to say these words – "Go call the preacher." "Go call the preacher?" she thought to herself. So she went and called the preacher. The preacher came over and he led Bob in a prayer to receive Jesus Christ and make Jesus Christ his Lord and his Savior. After he accepted Christ, the preacher said to Bob, "On Wednesday night there was a deacon at our church, Walter Fancher, who, during prayer meeting, came down, got on his knees, and cried out loud that Bob Isgrigs would call Jesus Christ Lord."

To call Jesus Christ Lord is to make Him your own personal Savior.

Romans 10:9

"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved."

You see the connection? "You will be saved."

Romans 10:13

"Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

The good news of His resurrection is that if you believe, if you call Him Lord, it's your resurrection, too. Your salvation. When you say Jesus is Lord, you're saying you are yielding everything in your life over to Him. That's putting Him in the number one spot in your life. Not your husband, not your wife, not your job, not your children. Nothing comes before the number one place in your life when Jesus is Lord.

Have you called Jesus Lord? You'd better be careful about saying these words because, once you say them, under the power of the Holy Spirit you will be changed forever.

A man came to visit me in my office. He wanted to know what it means to call Jesus Lord. Unlike some preachers who push and press for a decision, I never do. Jesus didn't. I simply lay out the gospel. And I said with him, "You'd better count the cost, for the Kingdom of God is the Pearl of Great Price. It's the treasure hidden in a field for which a man will go and sell everything he has to claim it. To call Jesus Lord is to change the number one allegiance in your life from worshiping yourself, living for yourself. You begin to live for the Lord, and thus you begin to live for others. It's a radical transformation of the center of your life, around which all that you do and all that you are orbits. It's a change to step out in faith. I want you to do it. I'll help you do it. But I won't twist your arm to do it, because it changes your allegiance from this world to the world to come. It changes the way you live life. It changes the way you spend your money. It changes the way you

interact with other people. It changes everything. It changes what is important to you.” I told him, “I can take you to the mountain top, but you have to choose to leap.”

He said he wanted to think about it. He understood.

Years passed. He chased me down in a retail parking lot, shouting, “I did it!”

“Did what?” I asked.

“I leapt. You told me....”

That man has since died, but he died with faith in the One who lives forever.

Another man came. Asked the same question. I gave him the same answer. I see him out and about, too. But to my knowledge – even see him in church sometimes, just an observer, not ready to commit, he walked away, faded like the flowers that sprout in the spring – he’s never called Jesus Lord.

Both men had the opportunity. Both men had the same explanation by the same person. One uttered those life changing words. One has not.

What about you?

Jesus is Lord. The greatest words you could ever say.