



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

“Lord and Christ”

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Contrary to the impression some of us may have formed from sermons we heard in our youth, the main idea of Peter’s sermon on Pentecost was not repentance and baptism (Acts 2.38). That’s the response to his thesis and the evidence presented for it in Acts 2.22-36.

The main idea is stated in the conclusion in verse 36: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both *Lord* and *Christ*, this Jesus whom you crucified” (my emphasis).

Notice, first, that Jesus is “Lord” (*kyrios*), a title ascribed to him more than 700 times in the New Testament and more than 100 times in Acts alone. Peter’s Jewish audience would not have missed the significance of this word since the Greek Old Testament had consistently used *kyrios* to refer to God (see below).

Second, Jesus is also “Christ” (*Christos*) or “Messiah” (see the Greek *Messias*, transliterated from the Hebrew *māšîaḥ*, in John 1.41; 4.25), a title (not his last name) that meant “anointed.” Again, Peter’s Jewish audience would have understood the significance of this word, namely, that Jesus was the King they had been waiting for, the son of David whose reign would be greater than Israel’s greatest king (cf. Psalm 2.2ff.; 45.6-7; Isa 61.1; Heb 1.5-9). No, Jesus was not the kind of king commonly expected (John 18:36), a reality that at least partly contributed to his rejection by many of the Jews. But, even if they did not accept Peter’s conclusion about the nature of Jesus’ kingship, Peter’s Jewish audience would have understood the claim he was making about Jesus.

Other passages show what it means in practice to recognize Jesus as Lord and Christ. To say he is Lord is to declare our intention in submit to him in obedience (Luke 6.46), acknowledging that he is the anointed one who provides the only way to God and salvation (John 14.6; Acts 4.10-12). He has been given all authority (Matthew 28.18) and his commands are to be followed (John 14.15; 15.14).

Paul elaborated on his lofty status in Philippians 2.5-11, reviewing Jesus' journey from divine equality to humble service to humiliating execution to glorious exaltation. In language the Old Testament used for God himself—making a connection and claim no Israelite with his training in the Law would have missed—he said it was “at the name of Jesus [that] every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus *Christ is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2.10-11; citing Isaiah 45.22-23, where the one to whom they were to bow and confess is named as “Yahweh”; my emphasis).

But notice that Paul did not rehearse the events of Jesus' humility and exaltation in a vacuum, as an isolated Christological statement. Certainly, Philippians 2.5-11 does exalt Jesus to the highest place, but Paul wrote those words to help address a practical concern. The Philippian believers had some strained relationships in their community. Paul said this was the result of their “selfish ambition [and] conceit” (2.3; see also vv. 12-16). His counsel for resolving the problem was for them to remember the most fundamental thing they could know about Jesus: he is Lord and Christ. When they remembered who he is, they could begin to handle their selfishness and resolve their tensions.

The same is true for any problem we will ever face.

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