

***To Believe or Not to Believe***

John 20:1-18; Matthew 20:1-18; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; Colossians 3:1-4

Easter Sunday

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Pastor Alex: John 20:1-18

Pastor Dick

*The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out very early in the morning, around 6:00 a.m, to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them \$100 for the day and sent them into the vineyard.*

*About 9:00 a.m. he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, "you also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went.*

*He went out again, about 12:00 noon, and then at 3:00 in the afternoon and did the same thing. About 5:00, just as the day was coming towards an end, he went out and found others standing around. He asked them, "Why have you been standing around here all day doing nothing?"*

*"Because no one has hired us," they answered.*

*He said to them, "You also go and work in my vineyard."*

*"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going to the first."*

*The workers who were hired about 5:00 came and each received \$100. So when those came who were hired first, at 6:00 in the morning, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received \$100. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. "These men who were hired last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day. It's just not fair."*

*The landowner answered them, "Friends, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for \$100. Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last.*

*Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"*

Matthew 20:1-18 (NIV)

Pastor Alex

*I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts those from every nation who fear him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached -*

*how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

*We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen - by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that **everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.***

Acts 10:34-43 (NIV)

### Pastor Dick

“To believe or not to believe,” that is the question that confronts us all. This morning is truly “the Day that the Lord has made!” Easter Sunday morning. The day in which we celebrate Jesus’ rising from the grave.

It seems to me that we are more like Peter and the other disciple on that first Easter morning. More so than Mary Magdalene. Whereas Mary actually experienced Jesus in person, though she didn’t recognize him at first, Peter and the other disciple were presented with the evidence. They were presented with the evidence of the empty tomb and the burial cloths, all neatly folded. Though the Scripture says that they still did not understand that Jesus had to rise from the dead, for they had still not been empowered by God’s Holy Spirit, it does say that the other disciple “saw and believed.”

In our Bible study on Sunday evenings we have been looking at what is arguably the greatest theological book in the N.T., the Book of Romans. And we are really at the climax in the book. What does it mean to be saved? Paul was concerned about the Israelites and their unbelief. For some reason, they just couldn’t see Jesus as the Messiah whom God had sent. They couldn’t accept the free gift.

*They stumbled over the “stumbling block,” for as it is written:  
See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes  
them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.*

Romans 9:32b-33 (NIV)

Paul’s heart was with the Israelites, the Jews, because he had in fact been one of them. Of course his heart was with the Gentiles as well. His heart was the same as Jesus’, that everyone be saved:

*Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. But they did not know the righteousness that comes from God, and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*

Romans 10:1,3-4 (NIV)

***For they did not realize that a man can only achieve the status of righteousness by God's gift. v. 3***

A gift cannot be earned, it can only be received and accepted. Jesus, the Christ, was, and still is the stumbling block.

Paul goes on:

*"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is the word of faith we are proclaiming; that if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame. For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile - the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* Romans 10:8-13 (NIV)

Pastor Alex

### **1. Confess Jesus as Lord**

Paul tells us in this Romans passage that there are two essential ingredients to salvation. The first is that we must be willing to confess Jesus as Lord. Again as he wrote, "That if you confess with your mouth...you will be saved...Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

The decision to follow Jesus begins in the heart and spirit; it begins with the Holy Spirit working within us, urging us to take the free gift of salvation that is offered, if we would only be willing to give up our own rights and lives. And so we make the choice to relent to the Spirit's calling. Yet, Jesus still calls us to confess with our mouths. What is the significance of this verbal confession? In doing this, we are making a public announcement that we submit to Christ's ruling in our lives. It is not enough to only acknowledge our faith before God but we must pronounce it to others.

What does it mean to call Jesus our Lord? Lord is not a common phrase nowadays. We are mainly familiar with it because of the way it is used in Christian language. If you're like me, and you like to watch historical movies, then you might recall that in medieval times "Lord" was ascribed to the person who ruled over a parcel of land and all of the people living and working on it. For the people to whom Paul wrote, however, Lord had a much more powerful meaning. During early Christianity, when people were still subject to Rome, "Lord" or "kurios" was the title given to the Emperor. The emperor controlled all physical aspects of a man's life. He set taxes and laws; he called men to war and called them back home again. He inspired admiration and fear, which could dictate the quality of one's day to day life.

Lord was also a prefix given to the Greek gods, who were also present in all parts of life. And in fact, the emperor often set himself up as a god, creating a cult of Emperor Worship. The

traditional gods, though, controlled the seasons, the sea, the land, fertility, beauty, etc. People offered sacrifices of incense to pay honor to them and to request their favor.

In giving the Emperor and gods the title “Lord,” people were granting them power and control. So when Paul commands the Church to refer to Jesus as Lord, he is saying we must give Jesus that same kind of authority, the kind of authority that permeates through every part of our lives. We are not just affirming his holiness and his Kingship; we are giving him ultimate rule in our lives. Jesus is now in control of our time, our money, the laws we obey, the seasons...everything.

Now, it can be very easy to confess this Lordship with your lips without confessing it with your life. But Jesus does not want lip service; he wants genuine transformation. In Mark 10, the writer tells a story of a wealthy young man who approaches Jesus to ask about salvation. He must have felt some desperation because he didn’t casually walk up to Jesus; he ran up to him and fell on his knees, the way a beggar might do so. He must have been convinced of Jesus’ power. And in verse 17, the young man says:

“Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

This is a difficult question coming from a Jew, because they still believed that the law saved them in the eyes of God. Jesus, considering all of this, replies:

You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

This would have pleased the young man; he was a devout believer and practiced all of these things. So, excitedly he says to Jesus:

<sup>20</sup> “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

Mark then writes that, “Jesus looked at him and loved him.” He knew that this man was righteous under the law. Jesus loved him and so desperately wanted him to truly know salvation, but he knew that there was yet one thing that he would have to ask of him. And it was going to shake him to the core.

“One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Jesus had asked him to give up his most treasured part of life, and he couldn’t do it. Mark writes that:

<sup>22</sup> At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

He had obeyed the laws his entire life. He knew that salvation was in Jesus, he wanted it so badly, and yet, he wasn't ready to make Jesus the one and only Lord over his life. Something still stood in his way. And it was something big; he was a very wealthy man, and Jesus was asking him to forsake all that he had? How difficult it must have been to be put in that position. How unfair.

And yet, Jesus issues this calling to all of us. It may not be money that we are called to give up; it might be our time, time at work, time in sports or with family. It might be our pride, pride that we might seem foolish to our friends; what's with this Jesus stuff all of the sudden? Why are we so caught up in it? Or maybe it's pride that we're going to be seen with people that others might never associate with or do things radically different, like loving our enemies unconditionally and serving one another.

It might not seem very appealing to give Jesus Lordship, but He tells us that what we gain is so much greater than what we lose. After the young man left Jesus and his company, Mark writes:

<sup>28</sup> Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!"

<sup>29</sup> "Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel <sup>30</sup> will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

We are called to give up our own selves, which is extremely difficult. But in confessing Jesus as Lord and truly making Him Lord of our life, we will receive a hundred times more than what give away. We will be given riches beyond imagination and a chance to spend eternity in perfection with God. May we confess that Jesus is Lord with both our lips and our lives.

Pastor Dick

## 2. **Belief**

The second essential ingredient of salvation is belief. What does it mean to believe? It means to put our trust in God, that Jesus is who he says he is, that everything about him is true: that He is the Son of the living God; God himself (one in three natures - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); that he came down to earth in human form; born incarnate from the Virgin Mary; that he lived a perfect and sinless life; and was crucified on the cross. Crucified for the sins of all human beings - for those who put their faith in Him. And on the third day he was raised to life so that all who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life.

To believe is to put our faith and trust in God, that no matter what happens during our life here on earth, His promise of a better tomorrow will be fulfilled. Belief is trusting in God, not only when things are good, but when they are at their worst. Trusting amongst all the adversity.

*Belief, "faith, is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see . . . And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."* Hebrews 11:1,6

To be a Christian, one must not only believe in his or her heart; he or she must confess with his or her lips, that Jesus is Lord. Christianity is belief plus confession; it involves witness before others.

The two essential ingredients of salvation are present in almost all the people we read about in the Bible who recognized who Jesus was: The Samaritan woman at the well, Lazarus, Peter and the other disciple who ran back to tell the others.

Jesus told Mary, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father, Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary went to the disciples with the news, "I have seen the Lord!"

After the time of Jesus' ascension, upon belief and confession of Jesus as Lord, one receives the gift of the promised Holy Spirit. Eventually Peter would go on to preach the first sermon of the church of Jesus Christ:

*"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call."* Acts 2:38-39 (NIV)

And so, the question is presented to each of us. We are presented with the evidence. Much like the disciples on that first Easter morning, and we need to decide for ourselves whether we are going to believe or not. Whether we are going to put all our faith and trust in Jesus, as the Christ, for salvation, or in ourselves. There is no middle road. To quote the famous poet Robert Frost:

*"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, took the one less traveled by,  
and that has made all the difference."* Robert Frost

Or even better, Moses, speaking on behalf of the Lord our God:

*Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven . . . nor is it beyond the sea . . . No, the word is very near you; it is in*

*your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction . . . Now choose life. Deuteronomy 30:11-15, 19 (NIV)*

Yes, it is a one time decision, and it is also a decision that needs to be made over and over again. This morning we have two among us who are choosing to publicly confess Jesus as their Savior and Lord for the first time. It is also a time for those of us who have already confessed Jesus as Savior and Lord to reaffirm that commitment. To confess with our lips.

“Confessing with our mouth, Jesus as Lord” is not one of our strengths. Confessing with our bodies and our actions, that is what Mennonites are most known for. And that is important. But so is confessing with our mouth. In fact it is an essential ingredient of salvation. So before we partake in communion this morning, before Lucas and Cameron partake in baptism, we are going to confess with our mouths, together:

### **The Nicene Creed**

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven:

by the power of the Holy Spirit

he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;

he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again

in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory

to judge the living and the dead,

and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son].

With the Father and the Son  
he is worshiped and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. AMEN.

Prayer: Lord, God. This is indeed a great day. The day you have made. The day you have given the gift of righteousness to all who believe. Accept our gift back to you. Our gift of confessing you as Lord of our lives. Empower us with your Spirit, to continue to grow into the image of your very own Son, who came and lived a perfect life, and died on the cross for each of us for the forgiveness of our sins. In His name we pray. Amen.

Benediction:

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you have died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears again, then you will appear with him in glory.*

Colossians 3:1-4

*This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!*