

CONFESSION WITH CONFIDENCE

By

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The first gospel sermon ended on the stunning declaration that “God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). The apostle Paul elaborated on this, insisting that Jesus has been made Lord of the entire universe, exalted above heaven and earth (Eph. 1:20–22).

Christian faith is not only to believe that Jesus is the Christ, but that He is Lord, Lord over all, at all times, in all places.

Then someone asks, “If He is Lord, how can things be in such a terrible condition? How is it that evil prevails? Why does He allow such defeats and problems in the lives of Christians?” Sometimes we may be tempted to think that when plans are wrecked and all is suffering and hardship that the powers of the world, the flesh and the devil, are greater than the power of the Lord.

Did the apostles entertain such questions? They had been with Jesus when He demonstrated His total power over all things — over nature, demon spirits, physical disease and even over death itself. He had shown that He was able to rule over all, yet at the climax of this awesome demonstration, He was captured like a criminal, humbled, tortured, shamed and slain. What then of all His power?

For a few days it seemed that He had regained control, even triumphing over death — one more grand demonstration of His power over all enemies — but within a short time His disciples were being hunted like criminals and put to death. How then could they believe that Jesus was Lord over all? That all things worked together for their good? That He could work all things after the counsel of his will?

The apostles understood that suffering is part of discipleship. It is promised by Christ. Of Paul He said, “I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). To all disciples He says “In the world you have tribulation,” and demands self-denial and the acceptance of the cross. It is basic to Christ’s rule that He give us the means of developing faith through suffering. He Himself “learned obedience by the things that He suffered” (Heb. 5:8). How should we learn to be like Him if He removes all suffering?

Faith is to walk without sight, to continue to believe Jesus is Lord even when all seems to be in the hands of Satan. What some want is to have Jesus always standing by to remove every obstacle, to strike off the head of the opponent, to supply health, wealth and worldly success; to rule the world so as to keep his believers from ever suffering or being seriously tried.

C.S. Lewis suggested, “We Christians want not so much a Father in Heaven as a Grandfather in Heaven whose plan for the universe was such that it might be said at the end of each day, ‘A good time was had by all.’ I should very much like to live in a universe which was governed on such lines, but since it is abundantly clear that I don’t and since I have reason to believe, nevertheless, that God is love, I conclude that my conception of love needs correction.”

Our faith must embrace not only the joy of the good news, but the sorrow of the bad news as well. The bad news is the fact of the fall, the cataclysmic tragedy in the Garden, when man — represented in Adam — rejected God and sought to establish his own law. The consequence of this act of rebellion was not only to bring mortality to the entire race (Rom. 5:12) but to subject the whole world to the “bondage of corruption” which produces all the problems (Rom. 8:19–22).

While the good news is that we are now in favor with God, and ultimately will be rescued from this present evil world, we still must live in it and share in its tribulation until the “time of restoration of all things.”

What Jesus gives is not freedom from all pain and trouble, but grace to bear it, to bear it with peace and joy and the assurance that our acceptance and participation as faithful servants of God will be used by Him for His own purpose — and His purpose is always infinitely good (Rom. 8:28).

Paul declares that God “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think...” (Eph. 3:20). But in contrast to his faith we have found a number of clever evasions to cover up our lack of faith. For example we often hear it said, “Pray as though everything depended on God, then work as though everything depended on you.” I see this as detrimental to faith. The person who works as though all depended on his own efforts cannot at the same time have any assurance that the final result will be accomplished because of God’s power. If I attack the job with the conviction that the result is all up to me, I cannot rest in faith that God is sovereign and will accomplish the work either with or without me!

Juan Monroyo of Madrid Spain said, “On the Christian battlefield there are arising many leaders who demonstrate very little confidence in Divine Providence. When they come up with a project, their first step is to prepare a financial budget. Next they write reports and give lectures till they have assured the amount of money needed for the project. But this is not confidence in God. It is simply human calculation. The Bible sets forth a different order of procedure. Evangelization ought not to be the result of a financial budget. First the missionary goes to the field; he begins the work, if necessary without wallet or saddlebags for the road. If the work being done is of God, the money will come when it is needed.” (From Abilene Christian University Annual Bible Lectures, 1983.)

How can we say, “I’m convinced this is the Lord’s project” and then write desperate letters saying that “IF you do not respond, this work may have to cease?”

Men scheme and devise strategies and find methods of manipulating the largest number of people to insure the success of their projects. Prayer then becomes only a plea that they will succeed because everything depends upon them! But our prayer should be that our determination not fail **in our faithfulness to God**, because we depend upon Him. He will accomplish His will. Whoever is used in the accomplishment will not altar the final result, except as it pertains to the one being used. If the children do not shout, “Blessed is the King that comes in the name of the Lord,” Jesus said praise would come forth from the stones in the street (Luke 19:38–40). The Lord chose Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Had Paul refused, the gospel would have gone forth through some other vessel, but it would have been too bad for Paul, who said, “Woe is me if I preach not the gospel.”

Faith in Christ as Lord means to trust Him to accomplish His will, even if it means He must bend us or break us in order to make us what He wants. It is to believe that this problem, this sickness, this disease and this hardship is under His power, and will accomplish that which suits His purpose. The faithful will submit to Him, as Job did, suffering intensely, spiritually and physically, yet saying “Though He slay me, yet will I trust him.” It is trust like that of Abraham, who didn’t hesitate to offer in sacrifice the son who was supposed to be the fulfillment of all his hopes.

It is a sign of immaturity and a lack of confidence in Christ to continually be seeking Utopian circumstances as a sign of God’s favor.

True faith is to believe that God is all in all, through all, and over all, so that the present problems and hardships are part of the means by which He is working all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11). Such faith grows from a constant feeding upon the scriptures which focus upon God, a diet which is woefully lacking in many churches. Themes which occupy much preaching and teaching today focus not on the Creator, but on the creature and what makes him happy, sad, fearful, proud or depressed. Films, taped lectures, and seminars are designed to teach success, how to cope, how to find happiness, how to work out problems. Little time is left to consider the sovereign power of the Lord to work His will in spite of the problems. It would be revealing to find out how many lessons, sermons and studies deal with man’s struggle as compared to how many deal with the Lord’s character and purpose.

The proper study of the church is not man, but God. We are not commanded to preach successful living, but the gospel. Self-esteem is not the road to God and personal charm does not produce salvation.

The world is lost, suffering and dying because it has rejected the Lord Who is its designer and provider. In the end it is His will that will prevail, no matter how neglected or opposed He may be.

The world needs to know that Christ is Lord, that He has all power and authority and that everyone must give account to Him.

When we confess Jesus as Lord we must back it up with complete confidence in His acting as Lord and accomplishing His purpose.

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