

***“Why Do You Call Me, ‘Lord, Lord’?”***

Sometimes, a word that is used over and over and over again begins to lose its impact. When manufacturers package a product in various sizes, they may use words like: Jumbo, colossal, giant-sized (even if the package is quite small). Advertisers love words like “dazzling,” “brilliant,” “best” — all catch-words of relative strength, but soon superlatives become commonplace. Among my all-time favorites are the ones used by every network inviting me to watch the new “hit” program that has yet to be aired (how is that possible?).

But it’s not just in marketing that words lose impact. In our daily discourse, we throw around phrases like, “*How’re ya doin’?*” or “*How’s it goin’?*” Linguists call this ceremonial language — we don’t expect a response because it’s not a question that really seeks information. “*Have a nice day!*” [Some days don’t you just want to growl back, “*You’re too late!*”]

Certain theological words can be so abused. They become part of churchly jargon — something we say repeatedly, yet without real impact. They get recited by rote, but they are not pondered nor do they penetrate. I fear that such a word is “**Lord**”.

In this second Saving Question that we hear from our Lord, He asks, “***Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord’?***” Do we know how to respond? Do we know anymore what the word means? Do we grasp the full meaning of what we say when we call Jesus “Lord”? Or has this become a part of your language uttered without thought: “*Have a nice day.*” “*Jesus is Lord.*” “*How’re ya doin’?*”

The Greek word κυριος (kurios) was originally an adjective, not a noun. It’s adjectival meaning was “*having power.*” It denoted someone or something that could accomplish its purpose. Thus, in pre-Biblical Greek, one could speak of a machine as κυριος if that machine was up to the

task for which it was invented and constructed; or a weapon might be κυριος if it was able to destroy what another weapon could not.

This concept of κυριος is central to our understanding of Christ. *“Having power”* — *“able to accomplish His purpose.”* But not just raw power: power that is at work for our benefit, for our good. For far too many Christians, this idea of Christ’s power — His Lordship — is merely an abstract. It’s something to be acknowledged, maybe even confessed; but it is not something on which they rely. It is not, in that sense, used.

Jesus asks us: *“If my power is not at work in you, for you, through you — if you don’t rely on it — why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord’?”*

A second meaning of κυριος is *“important”* or *“principal.”* This describes what is at the center, what makes up the core of our lives. Κυριος describes what gives us our purpose and aim. Whatever is κυριος for us sets our values, establishes our priorities, forms our opinions, shapes out attitudes. A “lord” therefore is that governing idea, goal or person that drives and motivates our living.

It is a guiding principle in counseling to recognize that *“You cannot motivate anyone to do anything; yet, people are motivated to do things.”* That is to say: I can talk, threaten, cajole, entice, pressure, shame, beat, deprive and in many ways force someone to do what I want, but in so doing I have not motivated them. External pressures may conform people’s behaviors; but it is internal reactions that motivate. That’s lordship!

For far too many Christians, Christ exists on the periphery of life, relegated to the occasional worship hour or moment of prayer. He gets isolated into that compartment labeled *“religion”* which is conveniently segmented away from the other compartments labeled *“work,” “leisure,” “family,” “friends,” “entertainment,” “politics,” “school,” “sexuality,” “finances,”* and many other segments of life. What motivates choices and behaviors within those realms is not Christ, it is something else deep in the heart. Something other than Christ has become the core value that

drive and impels.

Jesus asks us: *“If My purposes are not central to every facet of your life — if what I desire for you does not permeate all of what you are and do — why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord’?”*

A third meaning of κυριος (and the one most widely used in the Scriptures) is “one who has control.” The owner of a slave was that slave’s κυριος . This is the real heart of the Biblical understanding — of Jesus’ understanding — of κυριος . When Jesus employs the word κυριος He has in mind a master-slave relationship. Often we humans rebel at that notion, because it means yielding — or at least recognizing that we do not have — full control of our lives. We don’t want to do that. At the heart of sin is this notion: I am in control!

What we miss is that κυριος is a relationship word. To speak of one who had absolute power over another, the Greeks would use the word δεσποτης (despotes) — power (commonly seen as a negative word). But a κυριος was understood differently. A κυριος did not browbeat underlings into submission; yet he did have control over the disposition of that individual. A κυριος controlled the slave. For far too many Christians, Christ is not the one in control. At best, He is seen as a contributing factor in life. At worst, He is no part of the equation at all; He remains for them aloof, remote, apart, detached.

Jesus asks us: *“If I am not in control of your life — if My purposes do not determine how you relate to others, or how you do your work, or what you choose to do with your possessions, your time, your life — why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord’?”*

Do you call Him “*Lord, Lord*”? Note well the complete question Jesus puts before His disciples: ***“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you?”*** Doing becomes a measure of our answer.

Matthew records Jesus saying this: ***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord,***

***Lord, ' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.***” (7:21) “Lord” is not an honorary title. We cannot call Jesus “Lord” and not have it make an impact on our lives. It is not enough to say “*Jesus is Lord,*” — one can only live “*Jesus is Lord!*”

This is a confession of life — how I intend my life to be lived. Jesus is κυριος — He is the power that empowers me. Jesus is κυριος — He is the center and core of who I am, what I say, what I do. Jesus is κυριος — He is the master; I am the slave — my life is in His hands.

St. Paul says it this way: “*. . . it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*” (Galatians 2:20)

Or even stronger from Paul: “*We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.*” (Romans 14:7-9)

In Through the Looking Glass, Lewis Carroll narrates this exchange: “*‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less.’ ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master — that’s all.’*”

Someone — or some thing — is master over you. That, to you, is κυριος — “Lord” — plain and simple. So, if there is anything that stands between me and Christ as Lord, this saving question comes daily from our the Savior: “*Why do you call ME ‘Lord’?*” and I am brought back to remember: “*I call Him ‘Lord’ because there is nothing else that I want to control me; there is nothing I want to be at my heart more than the One who alone can save me.*”

Amen.