

Can You Call Him Lord? Luke 2:8-14

Today we continue our advent sermon series called “Power in the Name,” wherein we are exploring some of the Biblical names for Jesus and what they mean for our lives today. The name I have chosen to talk about is “Lord” and the passage I have chosen is a Christmas passage found in Luke 2:8-14. This is the classic scene of the shepherds learning about the birth of Jesus – a classic part of the Christmas story. Please listen now for the Word of the Lord.

Read Luke 2:8-14. Pray.

There’s a brand new book up in the church library on the third floor that has been all the rage on the internet in the last year. It is written by Rev. Martin Thielen, a Methodist minister from Tennessee and it’s called, **“What’s the least I can believe and still be a Christian?”** I almost stole his title and used it for this sermon, but then I thought that might be a bit too wordy for the bulletin.

The book is divided into two parts – the first part lists 10 things that people do not need to believe in order to be a Christian, like:

- Good Christians don’t ever doubt their faith; No! Everyone has doubts.
- It’s either science or religion, never both! No, you don’t have to make such a choice.
- God sits up there in heavens and points his finger and causes our car wrecks, cancer and our catastrophes. No – you don’t have to believe in that kind of God to be a Christian.

The second half of Thielen’s book lists 10 things that you do need to believe to be a Christian. Now, I’m not going to list these 10 things for you this morning because you can go read the book for yourself and see what the 10 things are, but if I were to write this book – “What is the least you can believe and still be a Christian?” I would have just one chapter and I would ask just one question. Short and sweet. One question, and it would go like this:

Do you call Jesus of Nazareth, Lord? Can you call Him Lord? Because if you can, then you are a Christian. All the other things are secondary and will naturally flow from your life if you answer “yes” to this question. But if you can’t, well just put the book down. It doesn’t matter what numbers 2-10 are, because you are not going any further in your

Christian journey. If you can't agree that Jesus is Lord, don't bother reading the rest. You're simply not a Christian. So the question for today is: Can you call Him Lord?

Our scripture reading for today introduces Jesus as Lord to readers of the Bible. It is the part of the Christmas story where the shepherds are watching over their flocks by night and the angel appears to them and tells them not to be afraid, that "to you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Lord." This is a truly monumental statement that changed the face of religion from that day forward. The angels say that the one who is coming is The Lord.

The Hebrew Bible, made up of all of the sacred texts of the Jewish people, contains no less than 300 references to the Lord, or Adonai, as the name appears in the Hebrew. It literally means, **"The supreme being to whom all allegiance, obedience and worship is due."** 300 times, the Lord is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, but each and every time, the reader knows that "Lord" refers to God the Father, who is the only manifestation of God known to the ancient Jews. They didn't know the trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), so when they heard "Lord," the reference was always to God the Father. The monumental transfer going on in this passage is that the angel is saying that "the Lord" will be born that day in the city of David. Adonai will be born in the City of David. This declares to all who will listen that the Lord, God the Father, is coming to earth as the Lord, the babe of Bethlehem. Don't miss it, this isn't some offshoot, some imposter, some substitute, little "g" God, no, this is Adonai, the Lord, and he is Jesus of Nazareth. So, shepherds, says the angel, can you call him Lord?

Truly, this is a profound question and it is the sticking point for millions of people in the world today. Can you call Him Lord? We often discuss in church world why people don't want to be a Christian in 2014, and in my ministry, especially in adult education, I often try to tackle the various stumbling blocks. Last spring, when we welcomed Dr. Platt and his friend Jason to lead an adult education class on the intersection of science and faith, I stated many times that modern scientific understanding of the world is often a huge stumbling block to faith. People honestly think that you can't agree with science and be a Christian. I think Dr. Platt and Jason addressed those concerns and we had a great discussion. It's a major stumbling block for some people, to be sure.

This spring, we are going to tackle another stumbling block for millions of folks in the world, and that is the existence of evil. Dr. Platt will return to engage us in discussion

on the topic of how a good God can exist in a world full of evil? What does the Bible have to say about this? Again, this is a necessary and important discussion and it is a major stumbling block to many folks who can't bring themselves to be a Christian.

But honestly, I think that the biggest stumbling block in most people's hearts is simply the question "Can you call him Lord?" Can you say that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior? Is the babe in Bethlehem simply a cute little bundle of joy, or is he God incarnate, come to set us free? Can you call Him Lord?

The stumbling block is this: **If Jesus is Lord, if Jesus is Adonai, then no one else can be.** If Jesus is Lord, then Big Ben Rothlisberger is not lord and we need to stop putting him on the pedestal of lordship and arranging our lives, especially our Sundays, around him. If Jesus is Lord (and I'm directly this one at myself), then Sidney Crosby is not lord, even though he is often hailed as the savior of the national hockey league and the game of hockey worldwide. Sid the kid is the idol of millions of children around the world, and he's a great guy, to be sure, but we need to stop elevating him to worshipful status.

If Jesus is Lord, then neither our kids nor our grandkids nor our spouses are lord, and most importantly, if Jesus is Lord, then WE are not Lord. And all of us are guilty of this, putting ourselves up on that pedestal. We are self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-made, self-serving and just plain selfish. But, if Jesus is Lord, as Luke 2 says he is, then we are truly reliant on Him, dependent on Him, followers of Him, and worshipful of Him and Him alone. Don't get me wrong here, I'm not being critical of our families or our weekend pastimes. Big Ben is great, Sid the kid is great, your grandkids are great, all of us are great, but we are not Lord of all the earth. We're not. And I truly think that the biggest stumbling block for millions of people around the world is removing all kinds of people from the pedestal and giving it to Jesus alone. For he alone is Lord. And the question in my book at least, is "Can you call Him Lord?" If you answer yes, then, welcome to the family, you are a Christian. If not, well, then you're still working on it.

I'm going to give you an example now of how important your answer to this question is, and I'm going to set it in the context of the PCUSA. I am well aware that some folks today have the opinion that in the PCUSA, anything goes. In other words, some folks say, we've gotten so liberal that we don't hold fast to some of the ancient Biblical truths. This is really not true.

I had a friend in seminary, a good friend, who was really a super person. She completed all of the course requirements to become a minister and got very good grades. She completed her ordination exams and then she went before the CPM, the committee that determines whether or not you can be ordained. At her examination, she was asked if Jesus was her Lord and Savior. She could not look the folks on the eye and say yes, I can call Him Lord. She said that she didn't like the word Lord and how it reminded her of serfs on a manor having to obey the Lord of the manor in ancient times. So, they turned her down for ordination. She was, of course, very upset.

She went back two additional times to the committee and they asked her, Can you call Him Lord? Is Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior? Each time, she told them honestly that she could not. Moral of the story is that she is not an ordained clergyperson in the PCUSA; she never will be. She's a lovely woman, heart of gold. But if you can't answer "yes" to the question, you don't belong up here in the pulpit.

So, if I were writing the book "What's the least you can believe and still be a Christian?" my book would contain a bit of trickery in it. It would only contain one chapter with one question. Can you call Him Lord? It would appear so easy – you just answer this one, tiny little question, and you're in! You're part of God's great family! Yes or No. Just answer and be on your way. But, you can see from this sermon that the answer is not as simple as it seems. For if you answer "yes," I can call Jesus Lord, well then your whole life has to change. Then you will put Jesus up on that pedestal because he alone is **"The supreme being to whom all allegiance, obedience and worship is due."** Adonai. And you will willingly give Jesus your heart, your soul, you future, your life. There's no "least" here because it's a lot.

So, this Christmas, as you approach the babe in Bethlehem along with the shepherds, look carefully in that cradle and ask yourself, Can I call Him Lord? Cause he's not just a cute little bundle of joy, he is Adonai, the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Amen.