

Compelling Vision

Together, as the Church of the Brethren,
we will passionately live and share the radical transformation
and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood
engagement. To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and
equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.

Bible Study Series

Session 9
Ryan Cooper



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Focus Question

How do we understand Jesus Christ as Lord?

Scripture Texts

Exodus 20:1-6, Matthew 16:21-24

Focus Statement

To declare Jesus Christ as Lord is to set Jesus as the highest priority, the singular greatest focus of our life. It is a paradigm shift; Jesus is not part of many, but rather the highest one, the one by whom all other aspects of our living should be ordered. Jesus wants no competition in our hearts. Lordship requires personal sacrifice, discipline, and a commitment as a community to place the character and teachings of Jesus at the central point of everything that we are and do. Any obstacle, hindrance, or competitor should be removed.

Supplies

- Pens or pencils
- Scorecard Activity worksheet from page 47

Media Suggestions

- **Books:** *Simply Jesus* by NT Wright; *Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus* by Lois Tverberg; *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* by James Pritchard
- **Movie Clip:** [The Ten Commandments - Parting the Red Sea, 1956](#) (YouTube)
- **Songs:** [“Teresa’s Prayer”](#) by Joseph Helfrich (Vimeo); [“St. Theresa’s Prayer”](#) by John Michael Talbot (YouTube); [“Take My Life, and Let it Be”](#) by Frances Ridley Havergal

Reflecting on the Texts

When the Ten Commandments were dictated to the nation of Israel, they were grounded in response to Israel's unique relationship with God compared to the nations that surrounded them. While other cultures and religions worshipped many gods and goddesses, Judaism worshiped only one deity. This one they declared as Lord freed Israel from the slavery and bondage of Egypt. Each one of the ten plagues demonstrated superiority over a deity that Egypt worshipped (i.e., plague of darkness = Ra, deity of light; plague of firstborn = Osiris, deity of death). The nation's freedom culminated with the parting of the sea and safe passage on dry ground. For the nation, it was unmistakably clear that God was to be respected, honored, and revered. Israel was set free by God's mighty hand; God is superior to all other deities!

The first two commandments focus on the place of God as Lord. God is the one who led Israel from the land of Egypt. Therefore, there should be no other gods before God, or literally, before the face of God. Moses even confirmed this when he sang: "Who is like you, O Lord, among all the gods? (Exodus 15:11)" The second commandment prohibits the creation and worship of an idol, for "the LORD is a jealous God." The phrase here is *El Qanah* or *El, the Jealous One*. Why is this significant? Ancient texts suggest that *El Qanah*, linked here with YHWH and other texts in Exodus, was exiled and replaced by Ba'al in the land of Canaan (Prichard, 1978, pp. 145-158). In the historical context, these first two commandments then truly become a declaration of loyalty and a pledge for faithfulness above all others.

With this revelation comes a deep truth—the nation of Israel should not bring any other deity before the face of God! The nation delivered by YHWH should remain wholly faithful and not split their loyalty with other gods as they interact with the surrounding cultures. The allegiance of the people of God should be centered in God and God alone. Anything else that competed with the place of God, whether an object, a deity of another culture, material possessions, etc., is evidence of divided loyalty. That is why many historical Brethren believed in simple living and the refusal to swear an oath—to have many possessions or swear an oath, our loyalty must be to someone other than God!

Jesus himself affirms this understanding in the Matthew text. Shortly after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, he tried to stop Jesus from going to the cross. Jesus rebuked Peter and then challenged all of his disciples to pick up their own cross and follow. For whoever tries to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for God will find it. To take up a cross is the ultimate declaration of surrender; one must completely surrender identity, objectives, goals, and agendas and take up the agenda of the kingdom of God solely! But we do not aimlessly take up the cross; we willingly do so and follow Jesus. If Jesus is truly Lord, then every priority should be about faithful discipleship. Anything else that we pursue is a rival. Jesus is jealous for our time and wholehearted devotion. Will we follow?

Gathering

Choose one of the following activities to introduce the theme of today's session.

- *Option 1:* What would you say is the most difficult thing you have had to let go and surrender? Or what is the most difficult choice you have ever had to make? Why was it so difficult? What does this say about your values and priorities?
- *Option 2:* Distribute copies of the scorecard activity from page 47. Invite participants to rank common tasks they might complete in an average week in order of importance. After a few minutes, invite participants to share which tasks they ranked as the most important and why. How does your ranking reflect your values and priorities?

Often, when we are faced with a major choice, what is most called into question is what we truly value. When we say Jesus is our Lord, it is a statement of value and priority. What does it mean when we truly say Jesus is our Lord?

Discovering God's Story and Vision

Taking on different personas can provide new perspectives as we read and hear the biblical story. Begin with a meditative reading of both texts by asking participants to close their eyes, breathe deeply, and listen carefully. Read Exodus 20:1-6 and Matthew 16:21-24. Following the reading, ask: "What word or phrase stands out to you in the hearing of the Word? Why?"

Tip: If time allows, play the clip from the movie *The Ten Commandments* of the scene of deliverance at the Red Sea (see link in Media Suggestions). As you read the Exodus text, ask participants to imagine living through the plagues of Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea.

Invite participants to hear the Exodus text again through the lens of a recently freed Hebrew slave from Egypt. Imagine being at the foot of Mt. Sinai waiting for Moses to come down the mountain. Read Exodus 20:1-6. Discuss the following: What was different in this reading? What word or phrase stood out this time? Why? How did this text make you feel?

For a final reading, ask participants to envision being one of Jesus' disciples. You have just witnessed Peter declaring Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus responds by prophesying about his death. Read Matthew 16:21-24 and pose the following questions. What is different with this reading? Why? What do you believe is the true message Jesus was trying to teach the disciples?

Exploring God's Story and Vision

Dig deeper into the texts using these questions.

- The literal Hebrew behind the phrase "before me" is "in front of my face." What are some ways we can have something else "in front of the face" of God?
- What role does our relationships (with God, others, creation) and personal history play in our surrender to the Lordship of God?
- Read Exodus 20:4-6. Why do you think the Lord is jealous? What is God jealous for?
- In Matthew 16, when Jesus challenged the disciples to take up their cross, what was going on in the larger context?
- Read Matthew 16:25-28. What are some of the ways a believer can show God is Lord?
- What does it mean to you to carry one's cross?

Responding to God's Story and Vision

God wants our full devotion. We show our devotion by ordering our lives with God as our highest priority. God should inform the way we live, the way we do business, the way we handle finances, the way we interact with our neighbors, etc. Jesus echoed this same sentiment: if we truly are to follow Jesus, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and walk in his way. It is a total surrendering of our will, desires, and wants, and an embracing of God's vision as the central point around which we order our entire lives--both individually and corporately.

Today, misplaced priorities are also a temptation that we face, especially in a society saturated with faith such as in the United States. We can fall into the trap of following traditions and new initiatives without seeking God first. But if we are to set Christ as Lord, we need to reorient ourselves and follow faithfully, even if it is unpopular or goes against our traditions or culture.

Discuss the following questions: Where does your loyalty lie? Where does our loyalty lie as the Church of the Brethren? What gets in front of the face of God—for you personally and for us as a denomination? What prevents total surrender to Christ—for you personally and for us as a denomination?

Empowered by God's Story and Vision

To wrap up, choose one of the following anchor activities:

- *Option 1*—In what ways can we practically show Jesus is our Lord? If Jesus is our Lord, how should we engage with culture? What types of things should we as the Church of the Brethren be committed to, and why? What about for your congregation? Are there things we need to repent of for failing to place Jesus as Lord of our congregation? Our denomination?
- *Option 2*—On the same sheet as the first scorecard activity, have each participant rank the second list of activities. This time, the list focuses on priorities we all may face. After everyone has finished, ask the following: Where was your relationship with God on your list? Are there other priorities that compete with your relationship with God? How can we work together toward making Jesus our Lord? How do we align our Brethren values, priorities, and vision under the banner of Jesus as Lord?

Sending

Close your time with one of the songs listed in Media Suggestions and this prayer by missionary Elizabeth Elliot.

Loving Lord and heavenly Father, I offer up today all that I am, all that I have, all that I do, and all that I suffer, to be Yours today and Yours forever. Give me grace, Lord, to do all that I know of Your holy will. Purify my heart, sanctify my thinking, correct my desires. Teach me, in all of today's work and trouble and joy, to respond with honest praise, simple trust, and instant obedience, that my life may be in truth a living sacrifice, by the power of Your Holy Spirit and in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ, my Master and my all. Amen.

Scorecard Activity—Gathering

Below is a list of twenty common tasks that you might complete in a week's time. Rank these tasks in order of importance to you, with the number one as the most important, and twenty as the least important.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brush your teeth | <input type="checkbox"/> Eat breakfast |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comb your hair | <input type="checkbox"/> Eat lunch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wash your face | <input type="checkbox"/> Eat dinner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Turn off the lights as you leave the house | <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy some downtime |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commute to work | <input type="checkbox"/> Take a shower/bath |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fill up the gas tank | <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Put on clothes | <input type="checkbox"/> Wash your dishes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take out the trash | <input type="checkbox"/> Wash your clothes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buy groceries | <input type="checkbox"/> Open a door |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Turn on lights | <input type="checkbox"/> Drink water |

Scorecard Activity—Empowered by God's Story and Vision

Again, rank these priorities and values in order of importance to you.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pay your bills | <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment/Sports |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Education/continuing education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Popularity | <input type="checkbox"/> Friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cultivating a relationship with God | <input type="checkbox"/> Rights & Freedoms |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships with a significant other | <input type="checkbox"/> Family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building for future | <input type="checkbox"/> Living in the now |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vacation | <input type="checkbox"/> Peace & Justice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hobbies | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Success | <input type="checkbox"/> Legacy |