



Bible Study: the last word

Who's the Lord of your life?

'THIS good news is about his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ! As a human, He was from the family of David. But the Holy Spirit proved that Jesus is the powerful Son of God, because He was raised from death.' (Romans 1: 3-4)

In the first century AD there was a man who claimed to be the son of a god, the saviour of the world, the bringer of peace, lord of all. This message was 'good news' for all the people. The citizens of his kingdom worshipped him.

His name was Gaius Julius Caesar and he was known as 'the revered one', or as we call him, 'Augustus'. And he was Emperor of the Romans.

Horrible History

Throughout the empire there were inscriptions which describe Augustus as saviour, Lord. One inscription from Halicarnassus (now Bodrum in SW Turkey) describes Augustus as 'Saviour of the common race of men, whose providence has not only fulfilled but actually exceeded the prayers of all.'

See? He was a god. Official. He answered their prayers. There was even a story that his father was actually the god Apollo. Augustus himself wrote a list of his achievements which he titled 'The Acts of the Divine Augustus'. And in virtually every city in the empire, there was a temple dedicated to him where people made sacrifices.

There was one in Caesarea, for example, on a high platform, bang in the centre of the harbour, where no-one arriving by boat could miss it (and the city was named in his honour as well!) Head for Pisidian Antioch and you could see the Temple of Augustus on a high platform cut into the rock, rising above the city. (And you made your way there along a road called the Via Sebaste – which is Greek for Augustus' Road. This bloke got everywhere.)

Now, imagine, you're a Christian in the first century. You meet in a small group in Rome. And you get a letter which



opens 'From Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus . . .' and then goes on to talk about Jesus in the same way that the inscriptions talk about the emperor! Can this peasant from Galilee really be more important than the mighty Augustus?

Jesus is Lord, so Augustus isn't

Emperor-worship was all about control. If the inhabitants of the empire were taught that their emperor was divine, then they would see the whole empire as divinely ordained. They wouldn't challenge it. Every time you went to the temple and sacrificed to the emperor, it reminded you of what – or who – was really controlling your life.

But Christians couldn't sign up to this. They knew the real Saviour wasn't a dead Aristocrat in a posh toga, but a living, risen Jesus. So when Paul opens his letter to the church of Rome with 'the good news about God's son, Jesus Christ' he isn't just mouthing platitudes. He's challenging the entire system. Every time the Christians call Jesus


'Prince of Peace', 'Saviour', or 'Son of God', they used the terms that Romans used of their emperor. They placed themselves in direct opposition to the propaganda of the world around them. Every time Paul writes 'Jesus is Lord', he's saying, 'so Augustus isn't'.

Who's in charge?

The gods we worship remind us who is in control of our life. And today, the gods may have changed, the temples may be different. But they are no less powerful. Today we worship all kinds of things: money, sex, power, beauty; our career, our boss, even our partners. Some people worship music and art. None of these things are evil in themselves. It's only when they become false gods and we worship them that things go bad. (It's easy to create a false god. All you have to do is put something on a pedestal and expect miracles out of it.)

But these words of Paul remind us where our real focus should be. Our 'lords' aren't any of these things, but Jesus Christ. So, do we really follow the Lordship of Christ? Does our behaviour, our attitudes, the way we live our lives, really reflect that He is in control of our life? Or do we pay lip-service to Him before sneaking off to the temples of these other gods?

The first Christians refused to worship the gods of their world. They refused to bow down and worship the emperor – and many of them were killed because of it. They knew that they followed a different emperor and were citizens of a different kingdom.

Today we are faced with the same choice. So who do you worship? Who is really in control of your life? 

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

1. Who are the Lords in your life? What kinds of things do you worship?
2. Are there occasions when you know Jesus wants you to do something and you have ignored Him? Or when you have not wanted to go against the society or culture around you?
3. Do you think we as a Church have worshipped things other than Jesus?

about the writer

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