

THANK YOU, MARTIN LUTHER—CELEBRATING OUR GREAT CONFESSIONS

Confessing Christ in a Selfie Culture

Philippians 2:5-11

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

October 1, 2017

LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/confessing-god-in-a-selfie-culture/>

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, a German monk, posted his 95 these on the church door. He insisted that salvation is by faith, not by works, and thus he unwittingly ignited the Reformation. We celebrate that 500th anniversary with believers all over the world. He confessed what we confess, as we read a moment ago, “Jesus Christ is Lord!” That is our most barebones confession of faith.

Now here’s the curious thing about today’s great confession. It pops up in a discussion about people not getting along. Paul tries to address a selfish culture and breaks out into song (vv. 5-11), no doubt writing the words to a familiar hymn circulating among the churches. And it ends with their confession of faith. Look at it carefully. Christ, graciously laying aside privileges and rights, and in humility suffering and dying. How interesting that one of the most majestic confessions of faith anywhere in the Bible, one that deals with eternity, grows out of every day, ordinary pettiness and irritations.

The selfie has become a symbol of our culture. You’ve seen selfie pictures, taken with selfie sticks. Recently, a Florida paramedic was sentenced to jail for taking selfies of incapacitated victims in ambulances. He and another co-worker had some kind of sick competition going.

Now maybe your selfishness and pride do not manifest themselves in just that way, but we are all infected with the selfie culture. A group of mental health workers were attending a workshop and the leader began by asking each person to write down three of their strongest gifts and abilities. Then they were to write down three times when they had used those strengths to hurt another person. Martin Luther wrote, “The unwillingness of the sinner to be regarded as a sinner is the final form of sin.” This is how you come into the faith—by acknowledging sin and opening up to Christ by faith. We don’t add works to this in order to be saved.

Now think about it. Because of our inherent selfishness, we risk turning the priesthood of all believers, a personal relationship with Christ, into narcissism. “Church is for my needs. Following Jesus is about my fulfillment. You take care of yourself. I will come to faith as a consumer and I’ll shop until I get the best deal!” And in larger culture, “My rights are important, but go ahead and violate the rights of other, more marginalized and needy people!”

The selfie culture is cured only by confessing that Jesus is Lord, not me. The word lord was used of deities in Asia Minor and used to name the current Roman emperor. So confessing, “Jesus is Lord” was an act of sedition. That hacked off the Romans. But to infuriate many of the Jews of Paul’s day, Jesus was given the name “Lord,” the same name as God,. The name Lord was very divisive and radical. And it still should be.

I have a good friend who pastors in Texas. Back in 1992, shortly after the downfall of the Soviet Union, he visited Russia. As he was preaching, he said, "Jesus is Lord." Once the phrase was translated, the entire congregation stood, whoosh! It scared him to death! They were standing in honor of the real Caesar, the genuine czar.

You see, if Jesus is Lord, then our pride is not, our possessions and pleasures are not, our favorite political ideology is not, our comfort is not. Our need to have the last word is not. Our need to have status and attention is not.

The lordship of Christ is not an incidental teaching in scripture, not some optional, like a blue case for your new iPad. The lordship of Christ is the culmination of Christ's mission and the center of our faith confession. "That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Amen!