

One Lord Jesus Christ

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[0 : 00] Wonderful. Well, please do take up your copy of God's Word and turn with me to 1 Corinthians 8.

! As we read this passage together, let me just briefly explain, I suppose, what we are doing here.

As Joe mentioned this morning, apart from the carol service next Sunday evening, the next kind of three Sunday evenings around Christmas, we are going to be looking at the Nicene Creed together.

The Nicene Creed is an incredibly important document in the history of the church. It was the first time that the worldwide church came together and agreed on a statement of faith that all Christians everywhere were bound to believe.

Because it was the very essence of the Christian faith. The Nicene Creed would be good to look at any time. I suppose there are two reasons in particular that we're looking at it now.

[1 : 15] First of all, 2025 is the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. I'm sure we've all celebrated a few milestones this past year, birthdays, anniversaries.

This is another one to throw into the mix. In 325, the Council of Nicaea got together. 1700 years later, here we are professing to believe the very same thing that they did then.

So 2025 is a good year for this. And December is a good month for this. Because part of what stirred up the whole controversy that led to the Nicene Creed was that some people thought that the incarnation was incongruous.

That God simply could not become man. It was in response to those who believed that, that the Nicene Creed was written. And so this evening, we're just going to set up a little bit of the background, put the creed in its historical context.

And then think a little bit about how, how this creed begins its confession of who Jesus is. Let me just say that if you do want to, to dig deeper than we have time to in these Sunday evenings, let me recommend this wonderfully short little book, On the Nicene Creed by Kevin de Young.

[2 : 34] It would be a really great little read to over Christmas. It's only 100 pages or so long. But it's a wonderful introduction to the creed and explanation of all that is contained in it. So let me do recommend that to you for your reading over the Christmas holidays.

It would be a great read. But for now, we are going to read something even better as we come and read God's Word together. 1 Corinthians chapter 8. We're just going to read the first six verses of this chapter together.

Let us hear the Word of God. Paul writes, Now concerning food offered to idols, we know that all of us possess knowledge.

This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that an idol has no real existence and that there is no God but one.

[3 : 42] For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is one God, the Father from whom all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

This is God's Word. Please do keep that passage open in front of you. If you can, it will help us as we go this evening. But let us pray for the Lord's help, first of all.

Father, we do thank you and praise you once again for your Word. We thank you that you are a God who speaks, that you have created us as those made in your image who can listen to the words of our Creator.

So speak to us now by your Spirit that we might confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to your glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, sometimes our answers to very simple questions can set the trajectory for the whole of our lives.

What course are you going to study? Will you accept this job offer? Or, what will you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?

[5 : 10] One or two word answers that can set the course of the rest of our lives. But there is one question to which our answer will not only set the course of our lives for now, but forever.

It is a simple question. We find it in the Bible, we find it in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It comes from the mouth of Jesus, who asks His disciples very simply, who do you say that I am?

Who do you say that I am? I wonder how you would answer that question. Who do you say that Jesus is?

If you were to ask that question in the workplace or the classroom tomorrow morning, you would likely get a range of answers. A good teacher, a prophet, a miracle worker, a moral example.

There is some truth in all of those, but only those who confess the truth about Jesus will be saved by Him.

[6 : 26] Just listen to what Paul says in Romans 10. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

You see, what we confess with our mouth about who Jesus is will determine our salvation.

You might find some people in churches who think good deeds are more important than good doctrine, but the question of Christ's identity is not a matter to be left for theologians.

It is the very essence of the true Christian faith. good deeds. Good deeds are essential, but those deeds are only ever the fruit. The fruit that grows from our confession of who Jesus is.

That is the root, the foundation of our faith. Who we confess Jesus to be. That is where it all begins. There are many questions that Christians can disagree on.

[7 : 35] There are some questions that Christians must not disagree on. Who Jesus is is one of those questions. Before our reading, I mentioned that we are going to be doing a short series on the Nicene Creed over the next few weeks.

The Nicene Creed, like any other creed, is a statement of true Christian doctrine that must be believed by all Christians. And this creed was formulated in response to a controversy which had torn through the early church.

And as you probably guessed by now, that controversy centered on the identity of Jesus. Who do we say that he is?

So let's just begin with a short introduction to the creed itself before thinking a little about its contents. As Joe mentioned this morning, or Joe mentioned the man this morning, the controversy all began in earnest with the teaching of a man called Arius.

Early in the fourth century, Arius believed and taught that Jesus was God, but not God in the same way as God the Father.

[8 : 55] For Arius, it was in Congress impossible that the creator God could become part of his creation, that he could be born and suffer and die.

Arius thought that simply could not happen. And because that was his presupposition, when he read that the Son of God was begotten, there seems to be the answer to his question.

For Arius, if the Son of God was begotten, then the Son of God surely had a beginning. And so the creator God for Arius did not become a part of his creation, it was instead the created Son of God who was born in Bethlehem.

Arius' tagline, if you want to call it that, was there was when he was not. For Arius, begotten, meant at some point the Son of God began.

Arius was gifted, he was intelligent, he was eloquent, and he was not alone. And so as the early years of the fourth century passed by, his voice in the church grew louder, and his influence became stronger.

[10 : 15] Heretics rarely go around wearing heretic badges, and often the most dangerous heresies are those that at a glance appear plausible and perhaps biblical.

If you asked Arius if Jesus was God, he would have said, yes. If you asked him why he thought there was a time when Jesus didn't exist, he would have provided a pocket full of proof texts.

Matthew 24, 36 that we were looking at this morning would likely have been one of them. Not everyone in the church could see the danger of what Arius was teaching, but there were some who recognized just how damaging Arius' understanding of Christ would prove to be, who recognized that if the Son of God had a beginning, that then he was not worthy of worship.

He saw that if the Son of God was not truly God, his sacrifice would not be able to fully atone for our sin. That if the Son of God was not eternal, the Father's eternal plan of redemption would have meant unilaterally imposing indescribable suffering on a sinless creature.

Arius' teaching had enormous ramifications for worship, for salvation, even for the very character of God. And so something had to be done.

[11 : 46] Some consensus within the church had to be reached, and so the Council of Nicaea was called in 325 AD. It was the first ecumenical council of its kind, and as I mentioned earlier, the resulting creeds would be the first declaration of Christian faith that the whole church agreed must be believed.

The Council met over a couple of months, and in the end, the Son of God was declared, as the Bible says, to be the eternal Son of God, of the same essence of the Father.

And Arius' teaching and his followers were condemned, and the creed was signed by all those in attendance. Now, slightly confusingly, the creeds that they produced is different from what we now know as the Nicene creeds.

Another council convened half a century later and kind of fleshed out the content of the original. But while the latter creed has a little more flesh and the bones, the skeleton of the two is exactly the same.

Now, I've said all that, and very few of us will probably know the creed off by heart, and there will almost certainly be a few of us here who have no idea what this Nicene creed is.

[13 : 08] So, just to maybe help us, bring us all up to speed, let me just read the creeds that they agreed upon in 325 A.D. This is what they confessed. We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things came to be, things in heaven and things on earth, who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate and was made man.

He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven. From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead and in the Holy Spirit.

There is then a further paragraph explicitly expelling from the church those who held onto Aryan beliefs. You probably noticed, even just reading through that, that the vast majority of time is spent on the Son, isn't it?

That is not because the Father and the Spirit were less important, but simply that is not where the disagreements lay. And I think it's maybe important to say as well that the Council of Nicaea did not kind of establish a new theology within the church as if this was sort of who they now believed Jesus to be.

[14 : 54] Rather, it formulated the true doctrine of the Christian faith in such a way that not only now promoted what was true, but defended the church from error.

Think of it, maybe, here's a statement that's probably never been said before. Think of the Nicene Creed like a baby gate. Does that need any explanation? Our youngest son is just over nine months old, and for the first nine months of his life, the hallway in our home has been safe territory.

You could let him roam around without worrying about him going anywhere that wasn't safe. But in the last few days, he has discovered that he can sort of climb up the stairs.

And because Finn has started doing something new and unsafe, we have had to implement boundaries that were not previously necessary.

The baby gate at the bottom of the stairs now has to be shut. Not because the hallway was not safe previously, but because now something new is happening that is dangerous and so needs to be guarded against.

[16 : 11] Before the Nicene Creed, the church's understanding of the Trinity was entirely sound. It was right and true and biblical. But because Arius had strayed into new and dangerous territory, the church had to come together and put a barrier up.

Not to change anything about what was believed before, but to ensure no one in the church went into unsafe territory again. The Nicene Creed closed the door on Arius' error and explicitly defined the boundaries that had previously been assumed.

So that is just a little bit of background to the Nicene Creed. As I said, there is so much more to it. Go and read the book. Go and read more into it.

That is just a little bit about how it came about and what purpose it served. But for the next three Sundays, tonight, and then the Sundays at either side of Christmas, we are going to just spend some time sitting in the glorious Christology of this creed.

What does it tell us about who Jesus is? Not so that we learn something new about Jesus, but to remind us afresh of the truths we gladly confess, so that we might not only celebrate this Christmas, but joyfully worship the one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, who came down from heaven for us.

[17 : 43] For the rest of our time this evening, we are just going to think about the very first four words there, the first four words of that statement on the Son of God, and see how the creed immediately establishes the full deity of Jesus.

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ. Arius said that God was not God in the same way that the Father was. The creed instantly declares that to be false.

So let's start with our focus in the confession that we believe in one Lord, one Lord. So far, we've been dealing with some pretty kind of significant matters, haven't we?

Who you say Jesus is has eternal significance. The Nicene Creed was written in response to the greatest controversy, theological controversy, that the church has ever seen.

What is taught in the Nicene Creed is foundational to the Christian faith. So I understand, maybe, if you're wondering why we just read from 1 Corinthians 8, where Paul begins in verse 1 with the seemingly much less significant issue of foods offered to idols.

[19 : 01] Well, let me just set the scene briefly, and I think we'll soon understand why we are here. That there were lots of problems in the Corinthian church, and one of those problems was uncertainty about whether or not food could be eaten if it had previously been sacrificed to an idol.

That was particularly a problem because idol temples in Corinth were kind of their equivalent of the local abattoir. Most meat in the city markets would have come through one temple or another.

And the Christians in Corinth were divided over whether or not such meat was okay to eat. So Paul steps in here in chapter 8 to address the problem. But in addressing what is a localized issue, Paul responds with some incredibly rich theology that has universal implications.

There is one group of Christians in Corinth who are quite happy chomping on a steak that has recently been sacrificed to the local sun god. They don't mind doing that. And Paul says to them, your logic is sound.

They feel free to eat because as Paul says there in verse 4, they know that these idols aren't other gods, that they are nothing, that they are just statues made of gold and silver.

[20 : 30] So, they say, this meat hasn't been offered to any other god because there is no other god. There is only one god. And they are right.

Paul's words at the end of verse 4 echo the kind of Shema of Deuteronomy 6, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. That was the historic creed of God's people that was true from the very beginning.

We believe in one god who is God alone. That is what Paul affirms in verses 4 and 5. God is God and every other supposed God is not a lesser god.

They're not kind of a second grade god. They are nothing. They simply do not exist. Now, already, perhaps we should see a kind of a chink in Ares' armor, shouldn't we?

There is no second tier gods. It is either the one true god or no god at all. But then Paul goes on to make an absolutely mind-blowing assertion in verse 6.

[21 : 40] Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom all things exist. And one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Take verse 6 on its own, out of context, and it might sound like Arius has a point. This might well have been one of his pocketed proof texts,!

But context is king. Put it in the context of the previous two verses before and see that Paul is making exactly the opposite point. There is one God and nothing else.

There is not two gods. There is not one great God and some lesser gods. Paul's whole point in these verses is that there is one God and yet the very next thing he says.

One God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ. One and yet! Two. And just to press this home further in calling Jesus Lord Paul is calling him God.

[22 : 57] The one God. The word there is kurios the Greek word for Lord. It would sometimes be used as a title respect but it is also that the Greek translation of the Hebrew name by which God revealed himself to his people in the Old Testament.

Yahweh what is translated Lord in small capital letters in our Bibles that is who God revealed himself as to his people in the Old Testament the name that God gives himself in the Old Testament and it is translated into Greek as kurios.

That is who Paul is saying Jesus is here. Not a Lord next to one God but one God who revealed himself as Lord in the Old Testament.

That one God Paul says he is the Father and he is the Lord Jesus Christ. Again this is not some new theology that Paul is introducing here.

It is simply that the coming of Jesus Christ revealed to God's people that this stunning beauty the majesty and the mystery of the triune God in a way that they could not previously see.

[24 : 18] Think of it maybe like looking up into the night sky on a clear cloudless night. You stand in the middle of Union Street. You look up and what do you see?

You will see stars won't you? You will be able to appreciate something of their beauty. But then drive 25 miles out into the same thing.

And yet because it is no longer being veiled you see it in much greater clarity and become more aware of its stunning beauty. When Jesus came he unveiled the glory of God so that we could behold him in his trinitarian glory.

So that we could see that the one God of the Old Testament has always been and always will be one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. There is one Lord Jesus Christ, and he is God.

The passage that Anne read for us from Philippians makes this same point with unmistakable clarity. You don't need to turn there now, but if you were to turn to Isaiah 45, that this is what you would read over the course of a few verses.

[25 : 40] Listen carefully to this. Isaiah 45, God says, I am the Lord, and there is no other. There is no other God beside me, a righteous God and a Savior.

There is none besides me. Listen to this. To me, the Lord, every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear allegiance.

That is what the Lord says in Isaiah 45. What did we read in Philippians 2? At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Lord. What the Lord of the Old Testament reserves for himself alone, the New Testament boldly ascribes to the person of Jesus Christ.

This is who we confess Jesus to be. As we were thinking a little bit about this morning, we will be ready for the day when every knee shall bow by confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord now.

[26 : 56] Because the New Testament leaves us in no doubt that Jesus is God, the one Lord. That is where the creed begins on the person of Jesus.

And it matters that this is where it begins. Because part of Arius' problem was that he started in the wrong place. He started with his reason.

He thought the Creator cannot become part of his creation. That was his starting point. Therefore, for Arius, God can't become man. Therefore, Jesus isn't truly God.

Therefore, begotten must mean began. But he ended up with a creaturely Christ because he started in the wrong place.

With what he thought could be true, not with what God's Word declares to be true. If we want to know who Jesus is, we cannot start with what we think God should or shouldn't be, with what we think God could or couldn't be.

[28 : 09] We must start with who the Bible says Jesus is. And the Bible teaches plainly. In 1 Corinthians 8, in Philippians 2, in Mark 2, in John 1, in John 8, in John 20, in Colossians 1, in Romans 5, in Titus 2, in 2 Peter 1, Revelation 5, and any other number of passages, the New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ is God.

The one Lord Jesus Christ. And so, in declaring who Jesus is, that he is the Lord, the Nicene Creed begins in the right place.

And everything else that we see over the next couple of weeks will flow from this fountain. Now, now, a verse like 1 Corinthians 8, 6, and indeed everything we've said in our short time so far, as amazing as it is, might well leave us with some questions, perhaps even more questions than we had before.

How can one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ be one God? Even if we agree that he had no beginning, what does it mean for the Son of God to be begotten? Well, if you have those questions, and perhaps others besides, come back in a fortnight, when Ben will answer all of your questions.

Thank you, Ben. But before we come to the Lord's table together, I just want us to finish by thinking briefly about who this one Lord is, what he has done.

[29 : 48] Because this one Lord is Jesus Christ. Our last and very short point. Think of who Jesus Christ was.

Think of the life he lived. We began by thinking how our answer to the question of who we say Jesus is will determine our eternal destiny. It will also determine how we live tomorrow.

This evening, we have touched on two passages which boldly declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, that he is God. But in both of these passages, Paul reaches to the top shelf of the richest theology.

He reaches right into the depths of who God is. Why? He does so in order to encourage the church to live in humility.

There was a group in Corinth content to eat whatever they pleased because they knew there were no other gods. And Paul says to them, their logic is sound.

[31 : 00] He agrees with their conclusion, but then he says, don't do it. He agrees with their conclusion, but he discourages their conduct.

Not because they are not free to eat it, but because they need to be ready to lay aside their privileges for the sake of those around them.

Look at what Paul says, if you've still got to open, 1 Corinthians 8 and verse 10 and 11 there. He says to these people who feel free to eat because they know there are no other gods, he says, what if a weaker brother, if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged if his conscience is weak to eat food offered to idols?

And so by your knowledge, this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.

Why does Paul bring in the very richest theology at this moment? To remind the Corinthians that the Lord Jesus Christ, who had everything, through whom everything was made, he gave it all up.

[32 : 15] He gave it all up and died for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul says to the Corinthians who feel free to eat a steak on a Friday night, be ready to give it up for the sake of your weaker brother's faith.

There were those around them who would have been led astray, who would have seen their fellow brothers and sisters eating that food and thought maybe it's okay. Maybe it's okay to go into the temple.

Maybe it's okay to worship those gods. Maybe we should be worshipping more than one God. So Paul says to those who know they are free, Paul says to those who know they have a great privilege in Christ, be ready to lay it aside, just as the one Lord Jesus Christ was.

Be ready to give it up because knowledge, theology, comprehending the greatness of God is not something that should puff us up. A true knowledge of God will cause us to lower ourselves down just as the one Lord Jesus Christ did for the sake of others.

It's the very same pattern we see in Philipians. Have this mind amongst yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus. Follow Jesus in lowering yourself, giving up your privileges for others' sake.

[33 : 37] Use your knowledge of who Jesus is to lower yourself and lift him up. As we dwell on the deity of Christ, not only should we worship him for who he is, we should worship him for what he willingly gave up.

He had a right claim to every privilege, every blessing. And yet he laid it all aside. Not for his sake, but for ours.

We come this evening to eat and drink this bread and wine in remembrance of the one Lord Jesus Christ who came down from heaven, who was born of a virgin into a food trough in Bethlehem, who bore our shame and took our pain, who was mocked and scorned by those he had come to save, who was rejected and despised, smitten by God and afflicted for our transgressions, who suffered, bled, died, and was buried, whose body was broken, whose blood was shed, the one Lord Jesus Christ gave it all up so that we might not die but have everlasting life when we confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ. Let us worship and bow before him now as we pray together. Lord Jesus, we praise you.

We worship you as the eternal Son of God. For in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. There has never been a time when you were not and there will never be a time when you do not reign as the Lord of heaven and earth.

[36 : 08] we praise you that through you the heavens and the earth were created, that through you we exist here this evening. We worship you as the one before whom every knee shall bow and tongue confess you are Lord.

We worship you in your majesty and we worship you for your humility. for although you are very God of very God you did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped but came down from heaven to be born as a baby all so that you could one day take the cross to Calvary.

Being obedient to the point of death even death on a cross so that we who were once dead in our sins and trespasses might be made alive again by your grace. we pray that each of us here this evening would confess with our mouth that you are Lord that we would humble ourselves as Christ did that we would consider others more significant than ourselves but most of all we pray that by your spirit you would enable us to worship you the lamb who was slain that you might receive all power and wealth and wisdom and might and glory and honor and blessing.

All this we pray in your name and for your glory. Amen.