

LUKE 22:63-65

MOCKING JESUS OF NAZARETH

“The men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, ‘Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?’ And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him.”¹

Perhaps you imagine that the soldiers who beat Jesus and mocked Him were unusually cruel; surely people in this enlightened day would never act in such a vicious manner! However, mocking Jesus of Nazareth is almost a contemporary sport. Whether it is today’s Lady Gaga or whether we are speaking of a “Hunky Jesus” contest in San Francisco, Jesus has been the subject of ridicule by those who do not know Him.

One attempt at blasphemy, called “Judas,” is from Lady Gaga’s “Born This Way” album. In the “song” she sings about how she’s in love with the betrayer of Jesus. Isn’t that special? It is a “Springtime for Hitler” moment without the humour. Nicki Minaj continues the assault against Christianity with her performance at the Grammy awards this year.² In San Francisco, a gay group employs the cross, the crown of thorns and men with beards as part of their “contest.” I’ll leave the rest to someone’s twisted imagination.³

It has always been something of a curiosity to we who follow the Christ that Jesus was not mocked then—nor is He mocked now—for demonstrating compassion and concern for the poor and showing forgiveness to prostitutes and tax collectors who repented. Rather, He was mocked because He revealed the darkness that lies within each of us and because of the refusal by many to come to the Light. People then, and people now, prefer to remain in darkness rather than come into the light. Perhaps this mocking has something to do with the way a few who claim to be His followers misrepresent Him. That may be worth mocking, but He isn’t.

Today’s mockers would never dare to speak ill of Muhammad—to say nothing of the bloodthirsty Allah—they might have their throats slit, or their homes blown-up. A cartoonist, who did something as innocent as portraying Muhammad wearing a bear costume, received death threats. The New York Times, rapidly becoming infamous as a shill to promote liberalism, recently accepted an ad calling on Catholics to leave their church. However, the same paper refused to run an ad calling on Muslims to leave their religion. The Gray Lady justified the decision by noting that Muslims are prone to respond with violence when they perceive a slight.⁴

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² “Nicki Minaj Slammed by Catholic League Over Grammy Show,” 14 Feb 2012,

² “Nicki Minaj Slammed by Catholic League Over Grammy Show,” 14 Feb 2012, http://www.myfoxdc.com/dpps/entertainment/nicki-minaj-slammed-by-catholic-league-over-grammy-show-dpgonc-20120214-fc_17927921, accessed 16 March 2012

³ See Cal Thomas, “Especially at Easter, It’s Easy to Mock Jesus Christ But Don’t You Dare Mock Other Faiths,” April 22, 2011, FoxNews.com, http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2011/04/22/especially-easter-easy-mock-jesus-christ-dont-dare-mock-faiths/?cmtid=cmt_twitter_Gigya_Especially_At_Easter_It%27s_Easy_to_Mock_Jesus_Christ_But_Don%27t_You_Dare_Mock_Other_Faiths, accessed 20 July 2011

⁴ “New York Times accused of Catholic bashing, double standard on religion,” Fox News, March 15, 2012, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2012/03/15/new-york-times-accused-catholic-bashing-double-standard-on-religion/?test=latestnews>, accessed 15 March 2012; Thomas Yanoti, “The New York Times and the Cafeteria Catholic,” Sarasota Catholic Examiner, March 16 2012, <http://www.examiner.com/catholic-in-st-petersburg/the-new-york-times-and-the-cafeteria-catholic>, accessed 16 March 2012; Ezra Dulis, “It’s Time To Quit Islam,”

Others have been the victims of more than threats. They have been murdered because they “offended” some self-appointed defender of the Religion of Peace. Think of the response of Muslims to what they viewed as mishandling of their holy book by American servicemen. It did not matter to the enraged murderers that Taliban Muslims had already desecrated the books by writing notes in them that fomented rebellion and sought to create trouble for their nation; their holy literature was more precious than human life. The despicable god of Islam is a bloody tyrant incapable of changing hearts—he is dependent upon coercion and threats. No wonder people are afraid to mock Muhammad. Jesus is always a safe target, because His followers are unlikely to retaliate, just as He did not retaliate when false charges were brought against Him.

For the atheists and other unbelievers who enjoy mocking events holy to Christians, I recommend setting aside on the calendar a special day for them to enjoy and celebrate their lack of faith. Let it be April 1; after all, we are taught, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” [PSALM 14:1].

Even on the day we call Good Friday, the day He hung on a cross for the sins of others (not His own, for He had none), Jesus was ridiculed. “Come down from the cross and then we’ll believe” [see MATTHEW 27:40-42], some shouted. They wouldn’t have believed even had He come down, because they refused to believe all the other miracles He performed before their eyes.

As for mocking Jesus, recall the Divine warning penned by the Apostle in GALATIANS 6:7: “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”

Joyous Easter! He is risen, just as He said!

MANKIND HATES THE FAITH — That is undoubtedly a harsh statement; however, I don’t believe it to be overly harsh. I will concede that it is a general statement and that in making this statement I am painting with a broad brush. Moreover, I suppose it is possible to soften the tone by stating that mankind is irritated by the Faith, or by stating that people want to remake the Faith in a form more acceptable to their ideal—an ideal that holds the Faith in reserve when needed, though it should mostly remain unobtrusive and hidden from sight so as not to disturb the idyllic peace of the inhabitants of this darkened world.

Nevertheless, I contend that the Faith is hated; and the primary reason people hate the Faith is that people hate the Author of our Faith. He exposes mankind’s inadequacies and strips away the façade we imagine masks our self-centred lives. The light of His presence demonstrates the darkness in which we live, and that is always painful. His perfect character angers us because we want to present our own efforts at goodness as equal to anything He might be or do. However, we are always confronted by the dark assessment of our puerile efforts to be righteous: “all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” [ISAIAH 64:6].

In order to verify the accuracy of this dark assessment, it may be helpful to review the Word. We are taught in Paul’s Letter to Christians in Rome, “The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God” [ROMANS 8:7, 8]. His statement mirrors that presented by James, the brother of our Master. “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” [JAMES 4:4]. Though it may be insulting to any who are outside the Faith, the Word of God declares, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” [1 CORINTHIANS 2:14].

I am not attempting to overemphasise the matter, but it is important that we understand the divine perspective—and we are presented that perspective repeatedly throughout the Word. Jesus cautioned, “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” [LUKE 16:13]. If an individual serves his or her own interests, if one pursues the desires of their own heart while ignoring the will of God, that one reveals that “self” is master. Such a one cannot help but be deeply offended by the divine call to love God supremely. This is the reason we are commanded by the Apostle of Lord, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” [1 JOHN 2:15]. The concept accords with the teaching Jesus delivered to His followers, “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” [JOHN 15:19].

The Words are stunning, perhaps even disquieting. Nevertheless, in unmistakable terms the Master has taught the cost to those who would follow Him. Listen to the Words of the Lord. “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause’” [JOHN 15:18-25].

To follow Jesus is to identify with Him; and identifying with Him is demanding. Jesus Himself said, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” [LUKE 9:62]. Life as a Christian is demanding; one cannot imagine that he or she will say some words, or perform some rite, and satisfy the True and Living God. The one who follows Christ will be born from above and transformed by the Spirit of God. What is required is the New Birth. Thus, the challenging words Jesus spoke to His followers.

When Jesus spoke these words, He was but iterating a position previously established. “The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil” [JOHN 7:7]. I remind you that the Master spoke those words to His own brothers [see JOHN 7:1-3]. The divine text states of them, “Not even His brothers believed in Him” [JOHN 7:5]. Moreover, when He spoke to His brothers, Jesus was anticipating presenting His followers before the Father in His High Priestly prayer. Speaking with the Father, the Master was recorded as saying, “I have given [those who follow Me] your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” [JOHN 17:14-17].

Unquestionably, the Master drew a bright line distinguishing those in the world from those in His Kingdom. The distinction is not arbitrary—it is based on reaction to His presence. Unbelievers are identified with the world, and they will not be hated by the world because they pose no threat to those of the world. However, those who are born from above have identified with the Son of God, and they can anticipate that the world will hate them. John writes, “Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death” [1 JOHN 3:13, 14].

There was a saying attributed to Jesus that was extant among the early churches. The saying has been preserved in the writings of several individuals and also in at least one Gnostic writing. Understand that though the saying bears the ring of authenticity, it cannot be verified as authentic. This is the saying: “Whoever is near Me is near the fire.”⁵ What *is* true is that following the Master will expose the one following to calumny and contempt from those identified as belonging to this present, dying world.

Nor should anyone imagine that Jesus meant to make following Him easy. Jesus warned, “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” [LUKE 12:49-53].

People generally seek an easy way to practise religion. Perhaps they can perform some duty, or attend to some particular service, or even recite a prayer, and that will suffice to appease the righteous demands of God Who is Holy. However, Jesus was quite specific that only a new life would please the True and Living God; and new life invites opposition.

Moreover, people seem always to seek an excuse for behaviour. The Bible declares we are sinful, but we endeavour to excuse our actions. In that vein, I’m intrigued by the effort to find a genetic basis for our choices. We have heard in recent years of a “gay gene,” though no one is actually able to find it.⁶ Recently, we have been hearing of a “warrior gene” that makes people aggressive; though some who have the supposed genetic code are actually rather relaxed in their interactions with others and some who don’t have the gene tend to be quite combative.⁷ We’ve heard of a “criminal gene,” though some who have this supposed genetic predisposition to criminality are law abiding, and many who are criminals don’t have this genetic marker at all.⁸ Ultimately, we are driven back to the teaching of the Word that we choose to sin and thus bring upon ourselves divine condemnation.

⁵ Origen, *Jeremiah Homiliae*, lat. 3.3 (cited in Uwe-Karsten Plisch and Gesine Schenke Robinson, **The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text With Commentary** (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, Germany 2008), Logion 82; also cited are *The Gospel of Thomas*, Logion 82; Didymus the Blind, *Fragmenta in Psalmos* 883; *Gos. Sav.* 107, 43-48; and Pseudo-Ephraem the Syrian, *An Exposition of the Gospel* 83

⁶ “Is There a ‘Gay Gene’?”, <http://www.narth.com/docs/istheregene.html>, accessed 2 April 2012; “The Fading ‘Gay Gene,’” <http://www.narth.com/docs/fading.html>, accessed 2 April 2012

⁷ Deborah Baum, “‘Warrior Gene’ Predicts Aggressive Behavior After Provocation,” <http://news.brown.edu/pressreleases/2009/01/hotsauce>, accessed 2 April 2012; Deborah MacKenzie, “People with ‘warrior gene’ better at risky decisions,” *New Scientist*, <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn19830-people-with-warrior-gene-better-at-risky-decisions.html>, accessed 2 April 2012; “‘Warrior Gene’ Linked to Gang Membership, Weapon Use,” *Science Daily*, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/06/090605123237.htm>, accessed 2 April 2012; Ely Brown and John Donvan, “One-in-Three Men Have Violence Gene,” *abc News/Nightline*, <http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/warrior-gene-tied-violence/story?id=12422661#.T3olsV7wCuM>, accessed 2 April 2012; Rod Lea and Geoffrey Chambers, “Monoamine oxidase, addition and the ‘warrior’ gene hypothesis,” *The New Zealand Medical Journal*, <http://journal.nzma.org.nz/journal/120-1250/2441/>, accessed 2 April 2012

⁸ Adriel Bettelheim, “No Hard (Genetic) Feelings,” <http://www.bluelineradio.com/criminalbehavior.html>, accessed 2 April 2012; Steve Connor, “Do your genes make you a criminal?”, *The Independent*, 12 February 1995, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/do-your-genes-make-you-a-criminal-1572714.html>, accessed 2 April, 2012; Tom Wilkie, “Scientist denounces criminal gene theory,” *The Independent*, 13 February 1995, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/scientist-denounces-criminal-gene-theory-1572804.html>, accessed 2 April 2012; Paul Arnold, “Nature vs Nurture of a Criminal Mind,” *Bright Hub*, <http://www.brighthub.com/science/genetics/articles/55218.aspx>, accessed 2 April 2012

Because one cannot hide behind a façade of niceness or self-righteousness, he is angered by exposure of his sinful nature and sinful acts. This correlation is implied by Jesus' assessment of those who refuse to be saved. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God" [JOHN 3:16-21].

CHRIST'S PERCEIVED WEAKNESS IS HIS STRENGTH — On a wall near the Palatine Hill in Rome, is one of the earliest known pictorial representations of the Crucifixion of Jesus. The image, now in the Palatine Antiquarium Museum, depicts a human-like figure affixed to a cross. The figure possesses the head of a donkey. To the left of the image is a young man, apparently intended to represent Alexamenos, a Roman soldier or guard. He is represented as raising one hand in a gesture that suggests worship. Beneath the cross is a caption written in crude Greek. Translated, it reads, "Alexamenos worships (his) God."⁹

To the Roman mind, the fact that one was crucified was degrading. That anyone would honour—much less worship—one who had been crucified, was insulting, virtually unimaginable. The so-called Alexamenos Graffito is consistent with the ridicule heaped on early Christians. Tertullian, writing in the late second century or early third century, reports that Christians were accused of worshipping a deity with the head of an ass. He also mentions an apostate Jew who carried around Carthage a caricature of a Christian with ass's ears and hooves, labelled "The God of the Christians begotten of an ass."¹⁰ The mockery that began as the Master was providing the necessary infinite sacrifice for fallen mankind did not end with His death.

In the account of His crucifixion, we read a dark account of the wickedness of mankind. "They sat down and kept watch over him there. And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.' Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, "I am the Son of God."'" And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way" [MATTHEW 27:36-44].

Though His life was taken, it was only because He permitted it to be so. He gave His life as a sacrifice for sinful man. That God should give Himself for mankind is a divine mystery. Yet, He did give His life in our place. We read, "[The Lord] emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" [PHILIPPIANS 2:7, 8].

⁹ See "Alexamenos graffito," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexamenos_graffito, accessed 7 April 2012

¹⁰ Tertullian, "Ad Nationes," Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe (ed.), translated by Peter Holmes in **The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume III: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian** (Christian Literature Campaign, Buffalo, NY 1885) 121, 123

The Christian Faith is forthright in declaring that “[Christ] was crucified in weakness.” However, that same Faith is quick to add that He “lives by the power of God.” Because this is true, we are able to say of our own situation in this world that, “We also are weak in him” and also that “We will live with him by the power of God” [2 CORINTHIANS 13:4]. Jesus was crucified in weakness, and raised in power. Paul begins the powerful letter to the Christians of Rome with this declaration that is central to this holy Faith: Jesus “Was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” [ROMANS 1:4].

From earliest days, those who embraced the Faith recognised the hostility of this world. They were also adamant in refusing to retaliate when they were abused or mocked. The Apostle Peter encourages believers, “To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” [1 PETER 2:21-24].

Again, Peter has taught us, “Do not repay evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing” [1 PETER 3:8]. As he continues writing to those who follow the Master, He raises and answers a significant question. “Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” [1 PETER 3:13-18].

Was Christ weak because He did not retaliate against the insults that were hurled at Him? When His disciples thought to adopt the attitude of this world, attempting to fight when the Master was seized, He restrained them, saying, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels” [MATTHEW 26:52, 53]?

Think of that. God doesn’t need to impose conscription to raise the armies of heaven! Attending Him and surrounding His throne are “myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands” of angels [see REVELATION 5:11]. Before the True and Living God are “innumerable angels in festal gathering” [see HEBREWS 12:22]. These glorious creatures possess unimaginable power that puny man dare not challenge. Yet, the Master did not call on them to punish those who mocked. Nor does He threaten wicked mockers today. Rather, He extends grace and mercy to all who will accept it. Even now, the Son of God offers forgiveness and life to any who will receive it.

HIS STRENGTH HAS BECOME OUR STRENGTH — [Christ the Lord] “was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God.” This is the message of Easter. This is the central message of the Christian Faith. The corollary to that message follows in what the Apostle has written to the Church in Corinth. “We also are weak in him, but ... we will live with him by the power of God” [2 CORINTHIANS 13:4]. If you will, as those who follow the Saviour, we embrace His weakness that we may know His power. For, of this we are confident—Christ is alive, having conquered death. Now, we live in Him.

The heart of the Easter message is wrapped up in this powerful truth. “Christ ... suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” [1 PETER 3:18]. Because the Son of God lives, we also live in Him. Nor should anyone imagine that this is merely some esoteric existence. This gift of life that He gives is called the New Birth for a reason. We are born from above and into the Kingdom of God. If all we have is religion, no one should accept this message. However, if we possess life, it should be evident in joy and peace and confidence exhibited in the midst of a broken, fallen world.

I will not speak in these final moments of joy, though there is true joy in knowing that we are accepted in God’s beloved Son. Neither will I speak of peace, though we have peace in the midst of a turbulent world. Likewise, I will refrain from speaking of confidence, though with the Apostle each Christian can say, “I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” [2 TIMOTHY 1:12]. I will, however, speak of the power that is ours in Christ the Lord.

We have been made alive in Christ. We have access to the throne of the Father, and we know that we are received whenever we come into His presence. We know that God hears our prayers, because they are offered through the Living Son of God who is seated at God’s right hand. Moreover, because He rose from the dead and ascended into the heavens, Jesus has sent His Spirit who dwells in each believer. Jesus taught His people, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” [JOHN 14:15-17]. The Holy Spirit lives within each believer, infusing into each life the power of the Risen Son of God.

We Christians are now declared holy in the presence of the Father. Paul instructs all believers, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” [EPHESIANS 1:3-14].

Similarly, we are taught as the Apostle wrote the saints in Colossae, “You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” [COLOSSIANS 2:13-15]. Christ conquered the powers of wickedness, triumphing over them on the cross. Therefore, we who are in Him also are victorious over the same evil powers because we are in Him.

The child of God has power, not only to conquer evil, but also power to live a righteous and meaningful life. Those are stirring words recorded in the Letter to Hebrew Christians. The writer recounts the exploits of many of the heroes of the Faith, and then makes this observation. “Time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

“And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” [HEBREWS 11:32-40].

This same theme is taken up by the Apostle to the Gentiles. He speaks of his own struggles that he identifies as a thorn in the flesh. No one truly knows what that thorn may have been—whether a physical ailment, an emotional deficit or a spiritual weakness; and I’m glad! Because we don’t know what the Apostle’s thorn was, each of us can insert our own struggle, weakness or deficit into the situation and with the Apostle lay claim to the Master’s promise. Each of us can say with confidence, “His grace is sufficient for me.”

Paul writes, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses—though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” [2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10].

Christ has given power that conquers death—we are alive to God through Him. Christ gives power that enables each Christian to live a life pleasing to the Father. And Christ gives power that fills the heart with hope in the face of a hopeless world. Of what lies ahead, we read, “Someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

“So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” [**1CORINTHIANS 15:35-44**].

This, then, is the glorious message of Easter: Christ the Lord has conquered death, hell and the grave. He is risen from the dead. And now, the power of the resurrection gives hope to all who are born from above and into His heavenly family. Are you twice born? Have you the second birth? Do you have the Spirit of God living within? Is your life marked by His peace, with joy and with hope? Most of all, do you have the power of the Risen Christ enabling you to glorify the Name of the Father through a holy life?

The Word of God invites all who are willing to receive this life and all that is associated with it. Just as Christ is risen from the dead, so we are called to believe this glorious truth. God invites all who are willing with these words, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Master,’ believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father and with the mouth that one agrees with God and is set free.” The invitation of God concludes with a citation from the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Master shall be saved” [**see ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

My sincere prayer is that you now have this freedom given by the True and Living God. If not, let this be the day you believe and come into a right relationship with the Lord your God. Amen.