

REVELATION 1:17B, 18 ALIVE!

“[Jesus] laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’”¹

On one occasion, returning from a fishing trip I had stopped for gas. As the attendant filled the tank, I spoke with him, inquiring about his faith. He proudly stated he was a good Muslim. I testified, “The major deficit in your religion is that you do not have a living Saviour.” Of course, the man wanted to know what I meant. I pointed out that the founder of Buddhism was dead; his body was cremated and relics were placed in monuments. The grave of Confucius is in his home town of Qufu, Shandong Province, China. Mohammed is buried in the Al-Masjid al-Nabawi in the city of Medina. However, I reminded the gentleman that he could travel to Jerusalem where he could see the tomb of Jesus, God’s Anointed One. And that tomb is empty! This exciting truth lies at the heart of the Christian Faith—the Tomb is empty; Christ the Lord has conquered death.

The fifth chapter of Genesis undoubtedly qualifies as one of the darkest chapters of the Word of God. That chapter gives the account of Adam’s descendants to Noah. Each one lived for what we think of as fantastic length of days. However, with the sole exception of Enoch, who was taken directly by God, each account of an individual concludes with this dreadful notation, “and he died.”² God had warned our first father, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” [GENESIS 2:17]. Recalling this dreadful act, Paul writes, “Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come” [ROMANS 5:12-14].

Some weeks ago, because of severe illness, Brother Jason filled the pulpit, reminding us of the Gospel. His masterful presentation, well worth your time to listen to, can be heard here: <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/674082>. Let me iterate that message by pointing again to Paul’s words. “I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me [1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-8]. The Good News of Jesus Christ is that Christ died for our sins, just as prophesied in Scripture; He was buried and then raised on the third day, as prophesied in Scripture; and He was seen. His was not a “spirit resurrection” as some cults argue—He rose bodily from the grave and ascended into heaven.

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

² “and he died,” (GENESIS 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31)

Incarcerated on the Aegean Island of Patmos, the Apostle of Love worshipped on “the Lord’s Day”—the first day of the week. Let me step aside from the message for a moment to observe a significant truth. The first followers of the Master were Jewish. Consequently, they had been trained under the law to keep the Sabbath—the seventh day—as a day of rest. However, Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. After that, the followers of Christ the Lord met on the first day of the week to worship.³ Ever after, this first day was to be known as “The Lord’s Day.”⁴ The Christian focuses on the resurrection of Christ, for in conquering death He has forever set us free from the fear of death. Moreover, the first day of the week became a day for joyous celebration, as is appropriate for a day of worship. The Lord’s Day quickly became a day to rejoice in new life that results from the Christ’s Resurrection.

While worshipping one Lord’s Day, John heard a loud voice saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea” [REVELATION 1:11]. Turning to see, as he says in quaint language, “the voice that was speaking,” he witnessed the Risen Son of God in unveiled majesty and glory. John’s description is not of the “gentle Jesus, meek and mild” such as has been popularised by modern religionists. He saw the Son of God in His full glory.

“In the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength” [REVELATION 1:13-16].

Awestruck, John fell on his face before the Lord of Glory; and no wonder the Apostle fell before this grand personage! However, when he fell before the Master, Jesus relieved his fear, just as He relieves our fear. John writes, “[Jesus] laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades’” [REVELATION 1:17b, 18]. The message the Master delivered is the message of Easter—the message of hope and victory for His people to this day.

I DIED — The Gospel of Jesus Christ begins with His death. “The Bible” has been playing recently on television, and the final episode was presented this week. It ended, as might be expected, with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I’m not a fan of Hollywood interpreting this holy book. James asked, “Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water” [JAMES 3:11, 12]. Why should anyone anticipate that a corrupt entity such as the movie industry will accurately present the biblical message? Similarly, I do not require Hollywood to inform me what is meant by God’s presentation of divine truth.

Let me say quite clearly that Jesus presented His life as a sacrifice. He Himself testified, “The Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” [JOHN 10:17, 18].

³ See ACTS 20:7; 1 CORINTHIANS 16:2

⁴ Cf. “Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, To the Magnesians,” 9:1, in Michael William Holmes, **The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations** (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 1999) 155; Justin Martyr, “The First Apology of Justin, LXV, in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe (ed.), **The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume I: The Apostolic Father with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus** (Christian Literature Co., Buffalo, NY 1885) 185; “The Didache, 14:1,” in Thomas O’Loughlin, **The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians** (SPCK, London 2010) 170

I understand that Roman soldiers drove the spikes into His hands and His feet. I am fully aware that Pilate pronounced the sentence that He should be crucified. I am well-versed in the knowledge that the Jewish religious leaders demanded His death. However, we must not forget that Jesus made it quite clear that He presented His life as a sacrifice for fallen man.

We read the words that are printed saying that we understand what has been written; however, they present divine mystery that leaves us to wonder. Paul urged believers, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but 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 2:5-8].

Moreover, we have each read the words with which the Apostle opens the Letter to Roman Christians. “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” [ROMANS 1:1-4].

How the death of Christ provides propitiation for mankind’s sin cannot be explained; it can, however, be experienced. There is provided, in the Letter to Hebrew Christians, an explanation that is as close as we shall ever come in this life to receiving an explanation of what transpired. The passage is somewhat extended, but it will undoubtedly prove fruitful in gaining understanding of the purchase secured through the sacrifice of the Master.

“It was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

“For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

“Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

““Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me;
in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.
Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

“When he said above, ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’ (these are offered according to the law), then he added, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will.’ He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” [HEBREWS 9:23-10:10].

Throughout the days of His flesh, Jesus maintained a singular focus on His great mission. “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” [MATTHEW 20:28]. Obviously, His sacrifice became a central facet of the Good News proclaimed by those who followed our Master.

Writing of the faith of Abraham, Paul speaks of, “Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” [ROMANS 4:23-25].

As he opens the Letter to Galatian Christians, the Apostle writes, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” [GALATIANS 1:3, 4].

One of the moving testimonies presented in this Galatian Letter speaks to the heart of God’s people to this day. Paul’s testimony, and ours also, is, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” [GALATIANS 2:20].

To Timothy, the Apostle testifies, “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time” [1 TIMOTHY 2:5, 6].

In his Letter to Titus, Paul pens a glorious truth that states, “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” [TITUS 2:11-14].

The death of Christ was no accident; He gave His life. And He gave His life for those who would receive the new life that He offered. Peter writes of the purpose of Christ’s sacrifice in this manner, even as he recalls the eternal purpose of the Father. “If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you” [1 PETER 1:17-20].

How powerful is Isaiah’s prophecy pointing to the Master’s willing sacrifice for sinners.

“It was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”

[ISAIAH 53:10]

Jesus, the Son of God, gave Himself as a sacrifice in the place of sinful man. That He died is essential to the Gospel account.

Because I have already addressed the futility of attempting to picture the sacrifice of the Master through cinematography, I am compelled to point to a serious deficit in any film representation. All that man can do is attempt to picture physical suffering. Isaiah opens a door into a darkened recess where no individual has ever gone and then returned to report what was witnessed there. The prophet writes of the suffering of God's Servant, speaking of His soul making an offering for guilt. His words penetrate into an aspect that no film director can portray.

In His sacrifice, the sinless Son of God was separated from the Father. Paul will say, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" [2 CORINTHIANS 5:21]. We struggle to grasp what Paul is saying because the statement seems so stark! A surprising number of theologians argue that Paul was clumsily, unartfully attempting to say that Jesus was made a "sin offering." To say that He was made "sin" is too difficult to comprehend, they contend. However, the language Paul uses makes it obvious that Jesus truly became sin in our place. He endured the pangs of hell, because of us.

Here are a few recent translations to emphasise this truth. "Christ had no sin, but God made him become sin so that in Christ we could become right with God."⁵

"[God] made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."⁶

Permit me to appeal to one further effort from the Expanded Bible, "God made Christ who had no sin to become sin for us, so that in Christ we could become right with God."⁷

Christ Jesus, the sinless Son of God, experienced separation from the Father. Because He is the infinite Son of God, the separation He experienced was infinite. In fact, Christ the Lord experienced hell for all mankind. In His death, the Master experienced your hell, your separation from the Father. For this reason, no mere mortal will ever be able to reduce to a pictographic representation what the Master experienced in His death.

I AM ALIVE FOREVERMORE — Had Jesus died like millions of other mere mortals, and as have thousands of heroic figures, it would certainly be a tragic death. In that event, we could perhaps even speak of His death as noble. However, we could not speak of Good News. The Faith in which we stand is truly Good News precisely because the Son of God has conquered death. Thus, the Risen Master testifies to John, "I am the Living One." And the reason He can lay claim to this title is that though He died, He is able to say, "Behold, I am alive forevermore."

Jesus attested, "Because I live, you also will live" [JOHN 14:19b]. It is because Christ the Lord has conquered death that we can testify, "God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" [EPHESIANS 2:4-7].

I often refer to one passage in particular when speaking with people about the Master's death. The Apostle has written of God's purpose and provision, "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" [ROMANS 5:6-8].

⁵ **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2005)

⁶ **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2009)

⁷ Tremper Longman III, Mark L. Strauss and Daniel Taylor, Contributing Scholars, **The Expanded Bible: New Testament** (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, Dallas, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, Beijing 2009)

The reason these verses are so powerful is revealed in what follows. “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” [ROMANS 5:9-11].

We Christians have a “know-so” salvation. We do not “hope” that we are saved; we “know” that we are saved. The Apostle of Love encourages all who believe with this testimony, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life” [1 JOHN 5:13]. God wants His people to walk in confidence, to live in certainty, to know without doubt that they are alive in the Living Son of God.

Take note of the transition in Paul’s focus as he points to the life of Christ the Master and how His life is now revealed in us who believe. “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And 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 2:8-15].

The Christian who has obeyed Christ’s command to identify in baptism has declared a powerful truth. That believer has testified that she has counted her old nature dead with Christ, and that just as He was raised from the dead, so she has been raised with Him. Listen to that same truth from another letter Paul wrote to Christians in Rome. “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” [ROMANS 6:1-11].

The believer who has identified with the Risen Saviour in baptism has testified through that act that she is alive in Christ. That one has confessed that Christ lives and that she also lives. Through baptism, she has testified to the historical truth that Jesus died, that He was buried and that He was raised from the dead. More than that, however, the believer has testified that just as she identified with Christ in His death and that by faith he is now alive in the Living Christ. Then, looking forward to the victory at Christ’s return, she testifies that even should she die in the flesh, she is confident that she will be raised at the resurrection.

I suggest that more of the professed saints of God need again to hear this message; those who have so testified through baptism must no longer live as they once did. For this reason, the Apostle has appended this word of admonition, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” [**ROMANS 6:12-14**].

Too many of the professed saints of God are seemingly confused; they imagine that they do what is good in order to be saved. However, according to the Word of God, because we are saved, we will do what is good. This truth is powerfully trumpeted by the Apostle as he writes Titus. “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” [**TITUS 2:11-14**].

The matter is too important to ignore—Christians do what is right because they are saved. No one can be saved through doing what is right; but one who is saved will do what is right. Again, Paul writes, “The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” [**TITUS 3:8-11**].

Because the Master is alive forevermore, we are to walk as He walked. Let me make that point markedly clear by pointing you to the transformation that should be anticipated in the child of God. “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” [**COLOSSIANS 3:1-17**].

On one occasion, I was asked to provide a funeral service for the father of a woman in attendance at a church I served. Her father had lived as a member of a cult for his entire life. In his final illness, his daughter had pleaded with him to believe the message of life in Christ the Lord. To her delight, he did confess faith in the Master shortly before he passed from this life. What could I say in such a circumstance? I could not speak of any good the man might have been supposed to have accomplished, for our righteous efforts are as filthy rags before the Lord [see **ISAIAH 64:6**]. I dared not speak of the man's wasted years lest I dishonour him in the eyes of his daughter. Therefore, I spoke of Christ raising Lazarus, focusing in particular on one verse of the Word of God as Jesus testified to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" [**JOHN 11:25**]. A funeral is for the living; as such, it provides opportunity to refocus the gaze on that which is eternal. Truthfully, no greater evidence of the Christian Faith can be offered than this truth: because Jesus is alive, we shall live with Him.

I HAVE THE KEYS OF DEATH AND HADES — When Jesus testifies, "I have the keys of Death and Hades," He is not merely making a statement of possession—He is stating that He has authority. In this instance, Death and Hades are virtual synonyms for the unseen realm of the dead. "Death" refers to the condition and "Hades" refers to the place where the dead would go. The Risen Saviour has both access and authority over death; He controls life and death. Why should this matter to the child of God? What comfort can be found in this declaration?

You may recall something that Jesus taught His disciples on one occasion. Jesus said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" [**MATTHEW 10:28-33**].

The redeemed have nothing to fear from Jesus because He has conquered death, having been raised from the dead. The redeemed child of God can testify that Christ the Lord has already delivered him from death and Hades by His own death. Now, with the Apostle, the child of God can testify, "We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" [**2 CORINTHIANS 5:8**]. There is in the Letter to Hebrew Christians one of the most encouraging passages ever given to the saint who struggles with facing death. Listen to the passage. "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" [**HEBREWS 2:14, 15**].

Christ's assertion that He holds the keys of Death and Hades becomes the divine emancipation proclamation. The child of God cannot be enslaved again; she has been freed from fear. What can the wicked do to the redeemed? If you threaten to take his gold, he will tell you he has treasures laid up in Heaven where neither rust nor moth destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. If you threaten his friendships, he will tell you that he has a friend that sticks closer than a brother. Threaten his family and he will tell you that he has brothers and sisters and mothers and children. Threaten him with loss of property and he will say that he has already received houses and lands. If you say you will take his life, he will testify, "My life is hidden in Christ." Will the foolish denizens of this earth really threaten to send the child of God home?

There is this comfort, also. Because He has the keys of Death and Hades, He has given authority to His people gathered in assembly. Jesus has given His congregations authority over those who endeavour to unite with them. “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” [MATTHEW 16:19]. This is not Peter’s authority alone, to be transmitted to popes or prelates; this is congregational authority until the Master shall return to take us home. When the assembly of the Lord has spoken in the Name of the Lord, they are able to point people to life or to warn them of death.

On the authority of God’s Word I am able to declare to you that the Father has “given [Christ Jesus] authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom [He] have given Him” [JOHN 17:2]. Not one shall perish whom Jesus has undertaken to save. I know there are those who wonder at the declaration that Christ redeems and that those whom He has redeemed shall never be lost. However, this is the clear declaration of the Word. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” [JOHN 5:24].

Jesus has testified to His disciples, “This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day” [JOHN 6:39].

Of His own the Master has boldly stated, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” [JOHN 10:27-30].

How comforting is the Master’s word, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” [JOHN 6:37].

This, then, is the comforting message of the Resurrection of Christ the Lord. Do you know Him? Are you walking in the light of His life? Do you possess that life which He alone can give? This is the Word of God! Jesus died because of your sin, He was buried and He conquered Hades by breaking the bonds of death. Now, He calls on all people to believe this message. Therefore, it is written, “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. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9-13]. Amen.