

ROMANS 1:1-7

DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD IN POWER

“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, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

“To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹

If Christ has not been raised from the dead, we Christians have no Good News to declare at Easter, or at any other time. We have no message of hope if Christ did not conquer death. If Christ did not rise from the dead, our message has no hope nor is it any more valid than fanciful stories such as that of an illiterate, paedophile Arab who rode a white steed from Mecca to Jerusalem in one night.

The Apostle Paul has written, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:14-19].

However, Christ the Lord did conquer death, rising from the tomb and presenting Himself alive to those whom He had called and who had walked with Him during the days of His flesh. In Him—the Risen Lord of Glory—all who believe are forgiven all sin and every transgression against the True and Living God. Those who are thus forgiven are redeemed—adopted into God’s divine family and called by the Name of the Son of God.

The Christian Faith is distinct from all the other religions of the world. Christianity is concerned with ethical living; but ethics divorced from the knowledge of God is meaningless. Christianity is deeply concerned with morality; but morality without the power of a regenerate life is a fantasy that can never be attained. Christianity is concerned with the life to come; but those who focus on the world to come while ignoring this present life are deceived at best and utterly useless to the inhabitants of this fallen world. The Christian Faith brings a message of transformation through faith in a God who conquered death and rose again to life. Those who have been thus transformed by God’s divine power no longer live solely for their own pleasure; rather, they seek to glorify Him who has redeemed them and brought them into union with Him.

The lives of the disciples were transformed. These men, terrified and cowed, were changed into lions. Threatened by theological and civil powers, they responded, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” [ACTS 4:19, 20].

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.

ROMANS 1:1-7
DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD IN POWER

When they were threatened with beatings and hardship, they returned to their friends, where they “lifted their voices together to God,” praying for even more boldness to continue speaking of His power that was at work in them [see **ACTS 4:23-31**].

Beaten and imprisoned, they united in prayer and in singing hymns in the midnight hour [see **ACTS 16:25**].

These men were unstoppable. One of them would write in **2 CORINTHIANS 11:24-33**, “Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.”

That man would conclude by testifying, “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 12:10**].

Having seen the Risen Son of God, these men were unstoppable. And throughout history have been found men and women who met the Risen Saviour. Their lives have been transformed by His presence. As was true of those who preceded them in the Faith, so it is true for them. “Through faith [these saints] 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” [**HEBREWS 11:33-38**].

It is amazing how one singular event permeated the faith of the earliest believers. They had heard Jesus speak, and yet they didn’t dwell on his voice. Neither did they invest inordinate amounts of time speaking of His philosophical musings, nor even of the theological truths He presented. They did speak of His conquest of the grave and what that means for all who are born from above and into the divine family. The Resurrection of Jesus was central to the apostolic message; and flowing from that message of God’s triumph is the promise of man’s triumph over death, hell and the grave.

The Apostle to the Gentiles penned a missive to saints living in Rome. It is a gem presenting foundational truths marking us as God’s own people. In light of the centrality of the message of hope in Christ’s resurrection, we should not be surprised that the Apostle opens the letter by speaking of that singular event. On this Easter Sunday, this day of joyous celebration for believers in the Risen, Conquering Christ, it is appropriate that we reflect on what the Apostle has written. Turn, then, to the opening words of Paul’s Letter to the saints in Rome.

ROMANS 1:1-7
DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD IN POWER

THE GOSPEL OF GOD — “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.” No one decides to be a servant of Christ Jesus as result of serendipity. Tragic is the situation when an individual decides to enter into the service of Christ the Lord because he considers it a job with low demands on his time, or because he imagines it will provide a good living, or because he seeks stature in the community. The condition is tragic because those whom he is called to serve will be deprived, suffering mystical malnutrition. Woe to the congregation that exhibits signs of spiritual scurvy, deformation of the soul.

Such was not the case with the Apostle. He confident that he was a servant of Christ, certain that he had been called to his position and set apart to the Good News of God. Christ alone is able to appoint whom He wills to His divine service. No seminary can make a man a servant of Christ. No presbytery can make a man a servant of Christ. No hierarchy can declare a man to be a servant of Christ. God appoints to holy service. God calls His servants by Name.

They are known by various titles—pastor (or shepherd), teacher, elder or overseer, and even as evangelist. However, their appointment always carries the responsibility to advance the cause of the Risen Son of God through presenting the Good News of His triumph. The servant of Christ is not appointed to be a counsellor, though he will counsel parishioners through pointing them to the will of God as revealed through His Word. He is not appointed to serve as a community liaison, though he will seek to represent Christ wisely in the communities served. He is not appointed to make people feel good about themselves, though he will be diligent in his endeavours to build them in the Faith. Each of Christ’s servants will bear light into the darkened places of this fallen world, evangelising through declaring the message of life in the Risen Son. God’s messenger will always be conscious that he must not compromise His first responsibility of advancing the cause of Christ the Lord.

What is this Gospel, this Good News, ascribed to God? When was it promised and what does it say? Writing a young preacher on another occasion, the Apostle opened the letter thusly, “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior” [TITUS 1:1-3].

This gives us a little more information. Permit me to expand what the Apostle is saying, however, by citing something he wrote to another young pastor. He urged that young pastor, named Timothy, “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher” [2 TIMOTHY 1:8-11].

The Good News of God is the declaration that God would save fallen people. He would do this for His own purpose and because of His grace. Moreover, this grace was expressed in Christ Jesus “before the ages began.” This Good News is not merely old; it is timeless. The Good News of God began in eternity and extends to eternity; it has, however, been manifested in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God purposed, even before man fell into ruin through the sin of our first parents, to provide for the redemption of lost people.

ROMANS 1:1-7
DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD IN POWER

I draw great comfort from the opening words with which Paul began the encyclical we have received as the Book of Ephesians. “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].

It is Easter, and we Christians declare with renewed joy and with fresh determination the Gospel of God. The reason we speak of the Resurrection of Christ our Master is that for us this was the culmination of God’s provision of life. The Gospel is “Good News” for good reason. ***This news is good because it comes from God.*** The Apostle testified to the Galatian churches, “I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” [GALATIANS 1:11, 12]. He never allowed that this message of life was born out of the fertile imagination of any mere mortal. Moreover, when he had received this message of life, Paul did not hesitate, but immediately preached what he had received. Again, he told the Galatians, “When he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus” [GALATIANS 1:15-17].

To the Corinthians Paul attested, “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 15:3-8]. What was delivered was what was received; and what was received came from God Himself.

That which comes from God is good, for God always gives what is beneficial for His people. This is the reason James writes, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” [JAMES 1:17]. The Psalmist has testified of God, “Yes, the LORD will give what is good” [PSALM 85:12].

All that comes from the enemy is wicked, since he seeks to exalt himself rather than God who is good. God cannot do what is evil; and the wicked one cannot do what is good. Therefore, we rejoice in all that God has given knowing that what He gives is good. We cannot say that any gift that does not come from God is good. Jesus testified of God, “No one is good except God alone” [MARK 10:18].

ROMANS 1:1-7
DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD IN POWER

We observed the continuing ordinance this morning. Whenever we observe that Meal, we read again the apostolic word as delivered to the Corinthian believers. As Paul begins to speak of the significance of that rite, note again how he begins. “I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you” [1 CORINTHIANS 11:23]. The Lord’s Table is a testimony of relationship, for the participant confesses his remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice because of the sin of the one sharing in the Meal. That rite is a confession of anticipation, for the one participating confesses that his or her faith is in the Living God who has provided salvation and who is coming again to receive His people to Himself. The Communion Meal is a confession of fellowship, for the participant confesses that God has provided rich fellowship through the people of God. It is, if you will, a confession of the Gospel of Christ from beginning to end.

This news is good because it is eternal. During the days of the Great Tribulation, an angel shall fly above the earth, crying out, so that all mankind hears what shall be announced. John writes, “I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water’” [REVELATION 14:6, 7].

This news was proposed before the world began and it will be valid long after time has ceased. It transports the redeemed out of this moment identified as “now,” placing them in the eternal. Already the redeemed are safe in the Beloved One. Already their sins are forgiven. Already they are known as God’s holy people. Already they are rescued from the judgement.

This news is good because it assures us that the debt of sin is forgiven. Of Jesus, it is said, “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” [JOHN 1:10-13].

The precision of the Saviour’s language gives rich assurance to the child of God. Jesus said, “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]. Having heard the Word and believing God who sent the Son brings life to each person. Not only do they now possess life, but they have already passed out of death; and therefore they shall never come into judgement.

In the first of his letters included in the General Epistles, John has written, “Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” [1 JOHN 5:10-12].

This news is good because it announces the death of death. After exploring the concept of the resurrection in his first letter to Corinthian believers, Paul breaks out into praise. “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

ROMANS 1:1-7
DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD IN POWER

‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’
‘O death, where is your victory?’
O death, where is your sting?’”

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-57].

This news is good because it enables us to live victoriously as God intended. Did you notice that final exclamation of praise? “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 5:57]. The Gospel of God is a victorious message. It is not as though God merely promises victory; we now live victoriously, if we are actually living in the Gospel of God. John testifies of the believer, “Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” [1 JOHN 5:4].

Who can read without being thrilled Paul’s exultation of victory written to these Roman Christians [ROMANS 8:31-37]? “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD IN POWER — “[God’s Son] 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.” The Gospel of God concerns Jesus, the Son of God. Many times people will hear an expository message and aver, “That was a great Gospel message.” However, no message qualifies as a Gospel message if it fails to point us to Jesus. Should the message fail to tell us that we are great sinners and that Christ is a great Saviour, it cannot qualify as a Gospel message. Should the message fail to tell me of life in the Beloved Son, it cannot qualify as a Gospel message. If the message does not speak of His conquest of death, it has failed to meet the criterion of a Gospel message.

Jesus asserted, “Salvation is from the Jews” [JOHN 4:22]. No wonder the wicked hate the Jews, they are God’s Chosen People. This week past, a man motivated by hatred for the Jews shot and killed a Methodist grandfather and his grandson before travelling to another site where he killed a Catholic occupational therapist. All these were killed as they parked at Jewish centres in Kansas City.²

² Family: Boy, grandfather ambushed in parking lot of Kansas Jewish center, fatally shot in head, Associated Press, April 14, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/04/14/family-boy-grandfather-ambushed-in-parking-lot-kansas-jewish-center-fatally/>; Police ID suspect in attacks on Jewish Center sites near Kansas City as known white supremacist, Associated Press, April 14, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/04/14/police-id-suspect-in-attacks-on-jewish-sites-near-kansas-city-as-known-white/>; Jewish Community Center Shootings: Frazier Glenn Cross makes first court appearance, Associated Press, April 15, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/04/15/kansas-prosecutor-files-murder-charges-against-man-accused-in-jewish-community/>

ROMANS 1:1-7
DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD IN POWER

From the first announcement of a Saviour to redeem fallen mankind, Satan has raged, fighting against God and setting himself against the salvation He brings. God announced that from the seed of the woman would come One to crush the serpent's head [see **GENESIS 3:15**]. The whole of the account of the Old Covenant is a scarlet thread leading to the promised Messiah. When the Master gave His life on the cross, it appeared that evil had prevailed. However, Christ was making atonement. Paul writes of the Master, "In him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form, and you have been filled in him, who is the head over every ruler and authority. In him you also were circumcised—not, however, with a circumcision performed by human hands, but by the removal of the fleshly body, that is, through the circumcision done by Christ. Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead. And even though you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he nevertheless made you alive with him, having forgiven all your transgressions. He has destroyed what was against us, a certificate of indebtedness expressed in decrees opposed to us. He has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. Disarming the rulers and authorities, he has made a public disgrace of them, triumphing over them by the cross" [**COLOSSIANS 2:9-15, NET BIBLE**].

Though wicked people, filled with hate and blinded by the evil one hate God's Chosen People, it is still true that "Salvation is from the Jews." Jesus was born of a Jewish virgin, raised in a Jewish village and spent His entire earthly life in the Jewish homeland. Paul has written, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" [**GALATIANS 4:4, 5**].

God's choice shows His sovereignty. He chose a people that were neither many nor mighty. He chose a people that were slaves, bent under the burden of cruel taskmasters. He chose a people without hope and without power to change their condition. The condition of those Hebrew slaves mirrors the condition of those who comprise the churches of our Lord today. Reviewing the composition of the Church of God in Corinth, Paul wrote, "Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" [**1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-29**]. God is in the business of transforming that which is of no value in the world so that it is precious in His sight.

At this point, we reach the heart of the Easter message. "[Jesus] ... was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead." What does Easter mean? We speak of salvation, and Easter does speak of salvation for those who receive the Risen Christ as Master of life. We speak of life in the Beloved Son, and the only real life is that which is offered in Him. We speak of the forgiveness of sin, and there is forgiveness in Him. However, Paul assures us that His resurrection was God's evidence that He was very God.

It is vital that we take a moment to examine what Paul has written. To be certain, the Apostle says that the resurrection certifies Jesus as Son of God; however, a qualifying clause must not be ignored—"in power." It is the same concept to which Matthew points when He quotes the Risen Saviour saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" [**MATTHEW 28:18**]. Jesus was buried in weakness and raised in power. Paul is making a contrast between Jesus who was born in the flesh and Jesus raised as Son-of-God-in-power.

ROMANS 1:1-7
DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD IN POWER

What does this mean in a practical sense? It means that Jesus is able to do all that He has promised. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” [MATTHEW 11:28-30]. He alone has power to give rest to the weary soul.

Jesus promised, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life” [LUKE 18:29, 30]. He possesses power to reward richly all who have depended on Him.

Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” [JOHN 3:3]. Those who are born from above shall see the Kingdom of God because He has power to ensure that this shall be.

Jesus promised, “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]. He has power to translate the believer from death to life.

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” [JOHN 11:25]. He has power to fulfil this promise.

Jesus said, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” [JOHN 14:23]. He has power to assure His child of the Father’s love and to assure that same child that the True and Living God makes His home in the believer’s life.

Jesus testified, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” [JOHN 5:17]. He, alone, has power to work. And His power is given to those who follow Him. The Risen Master promised, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:18-20].

John Peterson, inspired hymnist of the past generation, wrote a powerful song entitled, “He’s the One.” The chorus of that song says:

Jesus holds all power
in His mighty hands divine
He’s the One who healed the sick,
turned water into wine;
He makes all things possible
and He’s a friend of mine:
Blessed Jesus – He’s the One!³

Why would anyone wait to serve Him? Why would anyone be content to dabble in mere religion when they could walk with Him in power? Why would anyone attempt to pretend that they know Him when they can have assurance they are accepted in Him? We must not wait! We must believe now! We must be born from above and into His Kingdom! Amen.

³ John W. Peterson, “He’s the One!”, <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/John-Peterson-Hes-One-lyrics.html>, accessed 18 April 2014

FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST — “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The Gospel of God is the account of His rich provision for all who are willing to receive life in the Beloved Son. This Jesus is declared Son of God in power by His resurrection from the dead. Thus, all that is offered is given by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian now possesses grace and peace—precious commodities given by the Hand of the True and Living God. We have a faith that is vibrant and alive; we are not resigned to repetitious rituals in dreary hope that we can somehow placate a distant and unconcerned god. We serve God who is alive and active both in the world in our lives. We do not merely hope that things will work out—we know that He is working things out for His glory and for our good! Thus, we who believe have been and are being transformed by His power and by His presence.

As I worked on the message, I came across an ancient writing that speaks of the life of the faithful who have been transformed by God’s grace and who now walk in peace with Him. The account was written by Aristedes of Athens. This is what he wrote of the early Christians. “The Christians . . . have found the truth; and as we learned from their writings, they have come nearer to truth and genuine knowledge than the rest of the nations. For they know and trust in God, the Creator of heaven and of earth, in whom and from whom are all things, to whom there is no other god as companion, from whom they received commandments which they engraved upon their minds and observe in hope and expectation of the world which is to come. Wherefore they do not commit adultery nor fornication, nor bear false witness, nor embezzle what is held in pledge, nor covet what is not theirs. They honour father and mother, and show kindness to those near to them; and whenever they are judges, they judge uprightly. They do not worship idols (made) in the image of man; and whatsoever they would not that others should do unto them, they do not to others; and of the food which is consecrated to idols they do not eat, for they are pure. And their oppressors they appease (lit: comfort) and make them their friends; they do good to their enemies; and their women, O King, are pure as virgins, and their daughters are modest; and their men keep themselves from every unlawful union and from all uncleanness, in the hope of a recompense to come in the other world. Further, if one or other of them have bondmen and bondwomen or children, through love towards them they persuade them to become Christians, and when they have done so, they call them brethren without distinction. They do not worship strange gods, and they go their way in all modesty and cheerfulness. Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food. They observe the precepts of their Messiah with much care, living justly and soberly as the Lord their God commanded them. Every morning and every hour they give thanks and praise to God for His loving-kindnesses toward them; and for their food and their drink they offer thanksgiving to Him. And if any righteous man among them passes from the world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God; and they escort his body as if he were setting out from one place to another near. And

ROMANS 1:1-7
DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD IN POWER

when a child has been born to one of them, they give thanks to God; and if moreover it happen to die in childhood, they give thanks to God the more, as for one who has passed through the world without sins. And further if they see that any one of them dies in his ungodliness or in his sins, for him they grieve bitterly, and sorrow as for one who goes to meet his doom.”⁴

On this Easter Sunday, the question that must be asked is, “Do you have peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ?” Are you now walking in the grace of God and of Christ? That grace is extended to all who will receive it. Moreover, it is a transforming grace that will make you all that you were meant to be. You cannot receive this grace through joining a church, or through participating in a rite, or through reciting a prayer, or through some particular act of devotion. Grace and peace come only through being born from above and into the Family of God.

The Word of God tells us of divine love—love revealed through the sacrifice of the Son of God. The Good News is that Christ the Lord did not remain dead; He conquered death, hell and the grave, rising from the tomb on the third day. He was seen by those to whom He presented Himself before ascending into Heaven. Seated at the right hand of the Father, He offers life to all who will receive Him as Master over life.

The Word of God promises, “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 one agrees with God and is set free.” That portion of the Word concludes by citing the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Master shall be set free” [see **ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**]. We offer to all who are appointed to life this divine promise. Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Amen.

⁴ Aristedes of Athens, “The Apology of Aristides,” in **The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Gospel of Peter, the Diatessaron of Tatian, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Visio Pauli, the Apocalypses of the Virgil and Sedrach, the Testament of Abraham, the Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena, the Narrative of Zosimus, the Apology of Aristides, the Epistles of Clement** (Complete Text), **Origen’s Commentary on John, Books I-X and Commentary on Matthew, Books I, II and X-XIV**, Allan Menzies (ed.), D. M. Kay (trans.), vol. 9 (Christian Literature Company, New York, NY 1897) 277