

As follows in Jesus' name:

Afterward [Jesus] appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen. And He said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

So then the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Christ is risen! **He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

Dear fellow redeemed, brothers and sisters of our Lord, Jesus Christ,

If one does a cursory study of ancient civilizations, such as the Roman civilization, one will learn a lot about the leaders, lords, kings, and emperors.

These were the ones who often had the histories written.

You will often learn of how they ascended to the throne, what great deeds they did, what legacies they left behind, who followed them, and so on.

Some are famous. Some are infamous.

In our Disney-fied world of fairy tales, it is easy for us to romanticize how wonderful it can be to be in the royal family, with access to the best luxuries and servants and other such trappings.

But that is not the reality. Sometimes there were benefits to being the relative of the king, but sometimes, you were looked upon as a threat, whether justly or not.

If you made him angry, the punishment might be more severe for you, than for someone who lived in relative obscurity and who otherwise did not seem to pose a threat.

One case in point, after a string of assassinations ordered by Herod the Great,

Caesar Augustus reportedly said, "It is better to be Herod's pig than son,"^{Macrobius, Saturnalia, 2:4:11}

since an unclean pig would not have killed for food in Judea,

while Herod's own flesh and blood were murdered based upon suspicion.

Dear Brothers and Sisters of our Lord,

The Son of God came in the flesh to be your Brother.

He will never put off His human nature. It is forever united now to His divine nature.

When Jesus ascend into heaven, His human nature ascended as well, to sit at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

This does not mean that His human nature is sitting in a certain location, as yours does,

since the right hand of God is not in any one location, but is the authority and power of God.

So this can be either a really great thing... or a really bad thing.

Your brother, Jesus, has all authority in heaven and on earth.

As the Son of God, *who is coming to judge the living and the dead*,
this could be a very bad thing for us.

As the Son of God, He is omniscient (that is, all-knowing).

There is no seditious thought or desire in your heart that He does not know;
no rebellious words that are kept from His ears;
no acts of defiance or disobedience that you can keep a secret from Him.

And as the Son of God, He is omnipotent (that is, all-powerful).

There is no power that you can have over Him.

You cannot threaten Him; blackmail Him; scare Him; or tempt, force, or coax Him
to do what you want or keep Him from doing anything that He wants to do.

...

If He were a vindictive, power-hungry, paranoid, conniving, Lord... and brother,
this would leave us in a very dangerous place.

Where could you go to get away from His judgment?

The mountains are not big enough to cover you.

The depths of the earth are not deep enough to hide you.

Psalm 139:8

As the Psalmist says, **If I ascend to heaven, You are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there!**

But this is not the Lord we see and hear about, is it?

After His unjust death, He did not immediately return to heaven to sulk and plan His revenge.

He did not leave the disciples with threats to "just wait" until He returns with all His mighty angels.
Instead, He came to speak to them, yes, to **rebuke** and correct them but so that they might confess
their **unbelief** and humble themselves, softening their **hardness of heart**.

He returned to comfort them and give them peace and bid them "be not afraid,"

because "Yes" He died... and "yes" it was a horrendous death for our sedition, our rebellion,
our disobedience and unbelief and disbelief and misbelief and hardness of heart,

... but He died on purpose to take all those sins away from you,

so that when He returns on the last day to judge the living and the dead,

those sins, your sins, are all paid for in full.

Jesus, our Lord, returned to continue to teach His disciples and to prepare them to

"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel."

He taught them... commanded them to baptize the nations so that our sins would be washed away;
so that by the faith given in baptism, we would be **saved** and not condemned.

And He gave them accompanying signs so that those who heard His apostles speak this good news
that is too good to believe, would have **the message confirmed by accompanying signs**.

And yet, while He **ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God**,

we see that Jesus was not far from His apostles, but was right there with them.

St. Mark reports in the final verse: **as [the apostles] went out and preached everywhere**,

... **the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs**.

And it is still true today, that where your Lord's Word is taught, there He is among His people...

here He is among us.

He is not a disaffected Lord who cares little about what happens among His people.
He desires that all His human brothers and sisters would be gathered into His kingdom,
to live AND REIGN with Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

You see, He is not like the famous or infamous kings of old.

He is not threatened by you, His brother or sister,
but loves you and desires to see you ascend with Him,
and so uses all His authority over heaven and earth to wash away your sins and cleanse you
and to speak and declare His forgiveness to you.

for there is no sin that you have committed that He has not suffered to redeem.

Instead, on the last day, He will return to lift you up,

and bid you to **come, as those blessed by His/our Father to inherit the kingdom
prepared for you from the foundation of the world.**^{Matthew 25:34}

Christ is risen! **He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

Soli Deo Gloria