

# **Editorial: Jesus Christ: Conquering warrior or crucified lamb?**

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As we approach Easter, we need to remember who Jesus is.

Against the politics of our day, we need to remember who Jesus is.

Amid the temptation to win the world, we need to remember who Jesus is.

We are right to worship Jesus as Risen Lord—Conqueror of sin and death. We are wrong to separate his prevailing from his travailing—or from just how he travailed.

Jesus is the crucified one. He is the Lord who succumbed to arrest without a fight, stood for a sham trial without complaint, absorbed a horrendous beating without an ounce of retaliation, gave himself up to a merciless and utterly humiliating execution without the least resistance. Jesus is the one who died.

In the world's eyes—then and now—Jesus was weak, a loser, a sucker. Only with the advantage of hindsight or reinterpretation can someone cast Jesus as a conqueror.

Blessed are those who believe without the advantage. And what is the advantage? That Jesus rose from the dead. And that he appeared alive again to more than 500 people before he ascended to heaven.

Blessed are those who are not offended, who are not repulsed, who do not reject Jesus as he is. And what is the offense? That he is “the lamb who was slain,” “slain from the creation of the world,” as John tells us in Revelation.

This is the testimony of Scripture and 2,000 years of the church's witness.

So, who do we say Jesus is? Conquering warrior or crucified lamb?

While it's more complicated than an either/or, our answer matters immensely.

## A different kind of conqueror

Some Christians today make much of [Christus Victor](#), which Robert Kolb defines in an essay for The Gospel Coalition, as “the element of the atoning work of Christ that emphasizes the triumph of Christ over the evil powers of the world, through which he rescues his people and establishes a new relationship between God and the world.”

Certainly, Christ is the Victor. Jesus did triumph over the evil powers of the world, and he most certainly overcame sin and death. Our greatest hope is that he rescues us and reconciles our relationship with God.

Yes, Jesus is a conqueror—and a conqueror like no other. Christians celebrate Easter—Resurrection Sunday—for just this reason. In fact, we gather to worship Jesus as Lord *every* Sunday for just this reason.

The problem isn't that Jesus really is a conqueror. The problem is when we transform him from a conqueror on his terms into a conqueror in worldly terms.

Jesus is not a conqueror in the way the world understands conquerors. Jesus is not a political or military conqueror. He never aligned himself with or overthrew Caesar, Herod, the Sanhedrin, the Zealots or any other political body. He never led soldiers armed with literal swords into battle. He never even called down a legion of angels, despite his ability and the taunts to do so.

Yet, there are those today who would have us believe a Constantinian Jesus is the true Jesus. In a vision, the Constantinian Jesus promised the Roman emperor military victory if an [image of the cross](#) went ahead of his armies.

Whether Constantine really saw such a vision, whether he really did convert to Christianity, the cross of Christ has gone before armies ever since.

## **‘Meanest, toughest son of a gun’**

The battles in which Christianity has been engaged in America today are legal, cultural, social and political more frequently than military. We can agree with Paul that these fights are against the powers and principalities of this world, but we’re not ready to believe those forces aren’t flesh and blood.

We still pray—that most spiritual of fights. And we also spread hateful memes or lash out with our own angry condemnations on social media. We cut off relationships with friends and even family who disagree with us. We give undying support to those who promise to conquer our earthly foes in Jesus’ name.

Evangelical Christians are frequently political conservatives, and so they tend to provide the easiest examples of Christians involved with politics. Over the last 10 years, more than one conservative evangelical has called for a conquering warrior and a masculine Christianity.

For example, in 2016 Robert Jeffress, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, contradicted [Max Lucado’s assessment](#) of then-candidate Donald Trump as indecent.

[Jeffress said](#): “When I’m looking for a leader who’s gonna sit across the negotiating table from a nuclear Iran, or who’s gonna be intent on

destroying ISIS, I couldn't care less about that leader's temperament or his tone or his vocabulary.

"Frankly, I want the meanest, toughest son of a gun I can find. And I think that's the feeling of a lot of evangelicals. They don't want a Casper Milquetoast as the leader of the free world."

Other Christians want more than a strong leader. They want complete dominion.

## **'Have dominion over ... the earth'**

Dominion theology, in general, is the belief the church is to have dominion—power and control—in this world now. A more thorough explanation can be [read here](#).

Some adherents of dominion theology would have us believe Christians—specifically, Christians who hold to a strict conservative reading of the Bible—should be in key positions of influence, if not outright power, throughout society.

Lance Wallnau, a leading proponent of this view, lists "[seven mountains](#)" of culture Christians should occupy: "church; family; education; government and law; media (television, radio, newspaper, Internet); arts, entertainment, [and] sports; commerce, science and technology."

The aspiration is wrapped in evangelistic language: Transform the world with the gospel. But the dominionist idea is grounded in at least one error: Jesus never instructed us to take key positions of influence in this world. In fact, he rejected that temptation when it was presented to him.

Which takes me back to where I started.

Who do we say Jesus is? A conquering warrior or a crucified lamb?

Some among us would have us reject the crucified lamb in favor of the conquering warrior. They would have us take, hold and exert earthly power.

Yes, Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. In that respect, he is a conqueror. But not without also being “the lamb who was slain,” “slain from the creation of the world.”

And his call to us is not to conquer this world, but to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and to follow him.

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