

1Corinthians 15:20-28 "Our Sure Future"

Last week we left Paul painting a picture of life without the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the hopelessness that accompanies such a truth.

1CO 15:17-19 "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

Our eternal destiny hangs on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If He has not been raised from the dead, then we've been spinning our wheels claiming to be Christians who know this risen Savior, when in fact, if He has not been raised, we are really a sorry group of people who have been duped. And as Paul says, we are to be pitied more than all men.

But the fact remains that Christ has risen bodily from the dead as Paul has made clear in this chapter, as he points to the witnesses who saw the risen Christ, and fellowshiped with Him, ate with Him and sat at His feet during those 40 days as our risen Lord taught on the kingdom of God.

And this is where we pick up in our text this morning as Paul continues to encourage these believers in Corinth, and us as well.

1CO 15:20 "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

Paul can make such a bold statement because like so many in Jerusalem at the time of Christ's resurrection who saw the risen Christ, he too saw the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. Jesus has indeed been raised from the dead. Paul's not making this up, he's not creating some sort of story to just make these believers feel better. He is stating a fact that can be corroborated with eye witnesses.

But then he makes an interesting statement at the end of verse 20. Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

This is a powerful truth which speaks to the reliable faithfulness of our God who has every intention of raising our mortal bodies from the grave to give us incorruptible and glorified bodies like our Lord Jesus'.

In using the term “firstfruits” Paul is addressing a Jewish practice which he certainly explained to these Corinthian believers when he was with them. This teaching has to do with firstfruits which were commanded by God to be delivered up to Him in worship. This practice is found in the book of Leviticus.

LEV 23:10-11 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. 11 He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath."

There were a number of things the Lord was teaching the Israelites through this firstfruits offering.

- 1) He was teaching them that He was the one who provided such fruit.
- 2) He was the one who was to be worshipped through the act of bringing such firstfruits to Him.

But the way in which this is a parallel to the resurrection of Jesus Christ in our text is that in offering the firstfruits to the Lord "this action consecrated the entire harvest, expressed their faith in the future harvest, and showed their thanksgiving for it. [Therefore], Christ's resurrection was a divine pledge that a future harvest of dead bodies [planted in the ground] would occur. In particular, this is a guarantee of the resurrection of the saved." (Robert Gromacki)

Because Jesus Christ is that firstfruit dedicated to the Lord, in that He is the first one to rise bodily from the dead with a new glorified body, we can be guaranteed that further fruit will come, and that fruit is you and me in Christ as we too will be raised from the dead with glorified bodies to live forever with the Lord.

Just as surely as night follows day, the future harvest will follow the firstfruits offered up to the Lord. And Jesus Christ is that firstfruit. And if we are in Christ then His harvest will be gathered up to the glory of God.

But this firstfruit is also the first demonstration in power of the eschatological Kingdom of God over which Christ rules now but will find its ultimate fulfillment in the new heavens and new earth where Christ will rule and reign with His people.

Another aspect of the Kingdom, which is also a firstfruit of Christ's resurrection, is the down payment of the Holy Spirit who seals us for the day of redemption.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 ²¹ Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, ²² who also sealed us and gave *us* the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

The NIV puts it this way.

^{NIV} **2 Corinthians 1:22** set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as *a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

And now Paul goes on to explain the need for such firstfruits, such a demonstration of power in the resurrection of our Lord, as he contrasts death and life.

1CO 15:21 "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

Paul takes us back to the original intent of our Creator, and that is to create man with the express purpose of living with God forever. In creating Adam, however, God set about to test him by giving him the choice to love the Lord above all or to seek his own way in disobedience.

We know that Adam was created perfect without a sin nature because everything created by God was deemed to be very good. Man could not be considered good if there was sin already in his life at his creation.

But in creating Adam the Lord was creating the prototype of man together with giving this prototype the responsibility and privilege of representing all future human beings. In other words, the actions of Adam would be passed down to all men.

If Adam passed the test of remaining faithful to the Lord, then all future generations would have been born without a sin nature, and without the possibility of ever sinning, thus living in perfect communion with God and men forever.

However, if Adam failed the test then all future human beings would be born with that sin nature and the consequences of sin which would be death. In theological terms Adam was our federal head or representative.

What he did, either good or bad, we would inherit. It was in his lap and what he did with it would determine the future of all mankind. Well, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to figure out that we don't live in a perfect world devoid of sin and in perfect communion with God.

Adam failed the test and in so doing we inherit that failure. Death has entered the world together with separation from God forever. This is the fruit of Adam, and this is what Paul means when he says, "death came through a man..."

As far as humanity is concerned death did not come through Satan. Satan is not our representative. Satan is not a man. Adam could have told Satan to go and take a hike because as for me and my house we will serve the Lord. Satan was simply the agent through which man would make a deadly choice.

In fact, it appears that Satan simply speeds the process up. Man was given the choice to obey or disobey whether Satan was involved or not. It was certainly possible that man could have chosen to eat of the forbidden fruit whether Satan tempted them or not. But, man made the choice in a perfect state in a perfect world. It was always man's choice to make. Death came through a man.

And because man made a choice to die, a man would have to make the choice to live and obey perfectly and then choose to make the choice to die in mankind's place so as to be restored perfectly to that original communion God desired for man.

Our first representative failed and through him came death. But God promised to send another representative and through Him would come life. But notice that Paul first says that through this representative would come the resurrection of the dead.

In other words, it is assumed that all men would eventually be dead and buried. And since men were not created to be disembodied spirits, they must be rejoined back to their bodies. Now, if Christ had not come into this world as the last Adam, or our second representative, we would all be resurrected unto eternal damnation.

The point Paul has been making is that because Christ, our perfect representative in the flesh, came to this earth to take our penalty for sin, and because He rose bodily from the dead as He pleased the Father with His sacrifice, we now have access to the Father through the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

All men, both believers and unbelievers, will rise from the dead. The question simply is, to what will you rise? Life or eternal separation from your Creator?

Because Christ is the firstfruits there is that guarantee that a future harvest of believers will also rise bodily like our Lord unto everlasting communion with our God and Creator and Savior.

1CO 15:22-23 "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him."

By the way verse 22 is not teaching universalism as though simply because you're a human being you will be saved. The contrast is between death and life and the representatives who accomplished each.

Because Adam was our representative all men since him are born with a sin nature, and all men will be judged because of their own sin and will consequently die, both physically and spiritually in that they will be separated from God forever.

But when Paul says that in Christ all will be made alive, he simply means that there is life only in Christ and you must be in Him by faith to have this life He offers. All who take it by faith will receive it.

But then Paul goes on to give an explanation of how this new life will manifest itself in the resurrection. There is an order here as it relates to a resurrection life.

Each will rise in his own turn. No cutting in line here. "Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him." (1CO 15:23)

It is necessary for the righteous Christ to rise first. All of those who have accepted His righteousness by faith will subsequently rise when He comes. In fact, Paul breaks it down even further when writing to the Thessalonians. Technically, those who have died in the Lord before and after Christ, and who are in the graves, will rise first at His coming and then those who are alive when He comes will then rise.

1TH 4:16-17 "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and ***the dead in Christ will rise first.*** 17 ***After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together***

with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

And so, the order goes like this. Christ rises bodily from the dead. He is the firstfruits. The rest of the harvest will rise bodily when He comes for the church on the last day. And though that will happen in the twinkling of an eye, those whose bodies are in the grave when He comes will actually rise first and then we who are still alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

The point is, it's a done deal. We can take it to the bank that we will rise from the dead in Christ because He has gone before us.

Well, as Paul continues this chronology he lays out for us what comes after the resurrection of believers at His final coming.

1CO 15:24-26 "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

Then will come the end, Paul says. By this he means a couple of things. "The words the end suggest not only last in sequence but also the conclusion of Christ's redemptive work for His people." (Simon J. Kistemaker)

There is an end to all of this. And the end has to do with the saints of God living in glory as well as the Lord dealing once and for all with those who rejected Him.

It is at this time of the end when the eschatological Kingdom of God that Christ preached about during His earthly ministry will finally come to fruition. It is this eternal Kingdom that our Lord inaugurated with His death and resurrection and identifies as "the age to come."

Luke 18:29-30 ²⁹ And He said to them, "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*, ³⁰ who will not receive many times as much at this time and in *the age to come, eternal life.*"

But this Kingdom is established by the Father and given to the Son, who in turn will present the prize to the Father as the gift that was established for the Son.

John 6:37-39 ³⁷ "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. ³⁸ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

It is this very Kingdom about which Daniel prophesied as those who are purchased, and the One who purchased them, will share in the eternal Kingdom and rule and reign together.

^{NAU} **Daniel 2:44** "In the days of those kings *the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.*

^{NAU} **Daniel 7:27** "Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of *all* the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; *His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.*'

But the time of the end has not yet come, but in the meantime our Lord is still on His throne.

1 Corinthians 15:25 ²⁵ For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

There has never been a time in the existence of this universe, that God created in the span of 6 literal days, where He has not been King over His creation.

This notion that God gave up the rights to the earth when Satan successfully tempted Adam and Eve to relinquish their mandate to rule and reign on the earth is simply silly. God does not cease to be King of kings because of man's sin.

Psalms 50:10-12 ¹⁰ "For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹ "I know every bird of the mountains, And everything that moves in the field is Mine. ¹² "If I were hungry I would not tell you, *For the world is Mine, and all it contains.*

When Paul says, that the risen Christ will reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet, what he has in mind is when our Lord finally deals with Satan once and for all to where there will be no

more power or authority or dominion which Satan can wield in this earth. The Lord is going to put an end to it.

Once He has dealt with Satan and His followers He will then take this kingdom of believers along with His rule and authority and He will hand it over to the Father. We know that it was the Father who had put it into His hands. David had spoken of this in the psalms.

PSA 110:1-2 "The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." 2 The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies."

David's Lord was the Son of God. And he essentially says that the Lord, (that is the Father), says to my Lord, (that is the Son), "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies."

We see where Jesus accepts this mantle from the Father of all rule and authority when He says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (MAT 28:18)

Christ sits at the right hand of the Father ruling and reigning to the end when at which time the eternal Kingdom of God is established for His people and all enemies of the cross will bow before their God and Creator.

But there is one last enemy that was first in mind for Adam and Eve, and that is death.

1 Corinthians 15:26 ²⁶ The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

And now we've come full circle. It was death which came into this world as a result of one man's sin, and it is now death which will be taken out of the way forever by the last Adam.

There will be no more death, no more suffering, no more crying, no more temptation and no more desire to rebel against our King and Lord and Savior. Everything will be perfect.

The One who rose bodily from the dead, who completed the Father's work by dying on the cross for us, and who now gloriously sits at the right hand of the Father, will come to this earth once again to finish the work of His reign where He will deliver it up with gladness to the One who sent Him.

1CO 15:27-28 "For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all."

As our Lord Jesus told His disciples, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. And the implication is that it was given to Him by the Father. This is what Paul means here when he says that God Himself put everything under Christ.

But in saying" that this does not include God Himself", or as some of your translations put it in regards to this subjection," that He is excepted from this subjection", Paul is saying that the Father is over the Son in regards to authority as it relates to redemption.

This in no way teaches that the Father is greater than the Son in His divinity, since the Father and the Son and the Spirit are all the same God, revealed in three distinct persons. To say that the Father is greater than the Son is to say that God is greater than God.

But it is clear that regarding the redemptive work of God it was the Son who subjected Himself to become a man and die for our sin. It was the Son who humbled Himself at the Father's will to come into this world. It was always the Father's good pleasure which Jesus desired to accomplish. And in that sense He is subject to the Father, the Father is not subject to Him.

All of this has to do with the work of our salvation. And since Jesus chose to humble Himself and take on flesh forever He will be identified as not only the Son of God, but also the Son of man. The Father in no way can be identified as the God/man. This distinction goes exclusively to the Son.

And yet, what is amazing in all this is that knowing that the Son would be in subjection to the Father in this regard He still chose to take on flesh, die for our sin, though being entirely sinless, and then rise from the dead assuming a glorified body He would have forever. Oh, how much He loves us and desires to be identified with us as our only Lord and Savior, our last Adam.

After this the Son delivers up the kingdom to the Father, although we know that He will also obviously share in this kingdom.

ISA 9:7 "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,

establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this."

DAN 7:14 "He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

When we come to the New Testament we see the same thing.

LUK 1:32-33 "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. ***The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.***"

Here now we come to the very end of the plan of God. The new heavens and the new earth. In this new heaven and new earth our Lord Jesus will continue to be our God and Savior whom we worship and adore.

REV 3:12 "Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name."

REV 21:2-5 "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

REV 21:21-25 "The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. 22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. 25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for

there will be no night there.
26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it."

This is what is in store for you and me in Christ as we will, in our glorified bodies, dwell with the Lord forever. None of this would be possible if Christ were still in the tomb. But He is alive and will bring us with Himself into the presence of the Father and He will be our God and we will be His people.

This is our hope. This is our joy and this is our sure future. May we glory in it and look forward to it as we find ourselves serving the Lord here and now until He comes back.