

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

**But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 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. 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.**

I heard once that some news organizations have an obituary and in some cases a video montage already put together for an important person in the event that person dies. I e-mailed a national news organization (that shall remain nameless) to see if that's true. They sent me this already done obituary. Maybe you can figure out who it is. So and so, age 8009, of planet earth died suddenly surrounded by no one (apparently everyone hated this person).

So and so was born in a beautiful garden and spent his childhood in many different locales. He quickly became renowned for his intimidation and uncommon focus. He loved weapons and used them in infinitely creative ways with terrible and lethal effect. In recent years, he became an explosives expert and a dead-eye with a gun. He liked cars, and had a particular affinity for high cholesterol and carcinogens. That's how the obituary read. I know you're wondering, "Who is this talking about?" My thoughts exactly... until I read this part of the Bible.

A quick aside before we find out who the obituary is about. There are what I'll call hamburger parts of the Bible. Then there are double cheese burger parts and then there's steak. This is what we would call a 32 oz. steak part of the Bible. In fact, the whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 is like that. It's one massive spiritual meal about resurrection. If you want to have some more steak, go home and read the whole chapter. Honestly do that. We're going to be taking a close look at just a few verses of the chapter. These verses read like a rock solid obituary for one person - an obituary authored by Christ the King.

**“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (v. 20)** Let's unpack this verse. The verse says “Christ has *indeed* been raised.” Never did the Corinthians question that reality. Never. They always believed that Christ is resurrected. They wondered if *they* would rise, but they never wondered if Christ rose. The evidence is too convincing. After the resurrection, Peter saw Jesus. Then the Twelve saw Jesus. Then more than 500 believers saw Jesus at the same time. Imagine if a DA put well over 500 people on the stand to give corroborating testimony to Jesus' resurrection. That's much more than what's required to rule out reasonable doubt. That's indisputable proof. Christ is absolutely alive. And the verse says that Christ's resurrection (and this is where the Corinthians were having trouble) impacts those who have fallen asleep.

Before we talk more about how it impacts the people who have fallen asleep, we need to understand what it means to fall asleep. Only Christians fall asleep when they die. We wouldn't call what happens to unbelievers when they die sleep. Why do we call the death of a Christian sleep? For three reasons: #1

Jesus did. He wanted us to think of death as falling asleep. That brings us to point number two. Sleep is a good thing. I mean, come on, we all love sleep. Who doesn't love a good nap? I can't think of something less threatening, more peaceful, and more important than sleep. That's why Jesus wants us to think of death as sleep. #3 it's called sleep because sleep is temporary. We go to bed at 11pm and get up at 6am. It's only temporary. We always get up after sleep. That's what death is *for the Christian* – with the emphasis on the for the Christian part. It's only sleep – a wonderful thought.

Now let's talk about how Christ's resurrection impacts these Christians sleepers. To understand, I have to tell you a little story about firstfruits. Abigail shook Ezekiel awake. As his drowsiness wore off he saw that she had already loaded their donkey with the first harvest of grain. She was excited to get on the road to the big city of Jerusalem. He was a little annoyed at himself for being such a pile and promised himself that when they brought the rest of God's offering he would actually get himself out of bed. Abigail, he guessed, wouldn't let him hear the end of it so he was glad that he had less than two months to go before he would bring the rest of the grain according to the Lord's command. And that's the point. There was more grain to come. They were bringing the firstfruits, but not the last fruits. Christ is the firstfruits. But now think like Ezekiel. Christ is only the firstfruits of resurrection. He is not the last resurrected person. There are more resurrections to come. Many more.

How do I know that? Because, **“Death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.” (v. 21)** Why is it true that Jesus is the first one resurrected, but not the last one? Because resurrection works exactly the way that death works. Look at how death works. Death goes back to Adam. Don't worry about creating some sort of complicated a family tree to get from Adam to you. Draw a straight line from the first man to you. Adam gave you death. So let's all say together, "Thanks a lot, Adam." Before you had a chance to suck down your first breath of oxygen from the atmosphere, you already had received a little note from Adam that read, "Happy birthday, little one, my gift to you is death." We didn't even have a chance. Because Adam took that bite, we get death. That's how death works. Doesn't sound fair, does it? Think of it like this though: if someone stole my rusty, winter bike from my garage and someone replaced it with a nice new one, I'd actually thank them for stealing my bike. So I suppose we can be mad at Adam, but the better response is thanks 'cause we actually get a better, more glorified body than the original one. How is this possible? Well, resurrection works the same way death does. The first man died. You die as a result. God sent a replacement Adam, Jesus. And the replacement Adam, Jesus rose. So draw a straight line from Jesus to you. Jesus rose. You rise. That's how it works. When you had your rebirth, your baptism, Jesus dropped you a little note that read, "Happy birthday, little one, my gift to you is resurrection." That's how resurrection works. So let's all say together (this time without sarcasm), "Thanks a lot, Jesus!"

It helps me to think of Jesus' resurrection like a train. Trains used to fascinate me. They get going and the cars always follow the engine. We used to count all those cars that always followed the engine as they went past below our house in the Minnesota River Valley. We got hitched to engine Jesus by our baptism. And remember: cars always follow the engine. We know where the Christ express is headed 'cause we saw him go there ahead of us. He rose. That's the destination. We're hitched to an unstoppable train that is headed to resurrection depot.

I told you. It's like eating a steak. This is thick teaching from God here, but it's awesome. So far we've looked at Christ's role as firstfruits. Those who have fallen asleep will rise because you can draw a straight line from the replacement Adam to you. He rises. You do too. You're hitched to his train. So did you figure out yet who the obituary is about? If you haven't yet, you will now.

You can't read the Bible without getting this distinct impression: Christ reigns. Forever. He puts everybody under him. That's it and that's the end of the matter. Paul says here, **"For he 'has put everything under his feet.'" ( v. 27)** Talk about a winning pose. Kings used to put their feet on the neck of their enemies. Now that is total domination. Look around you though. Christ is King, but we don't yet see him with his foot on the neck of all his enemies - one in particular that bothers us. **"The last enemy to be destroyed is death." (v. 26)**

Death. It's where we end up showing some chinks in the armor of our faith. We are all afraid to die – at least a little bit. There's this book that's been taking the nation by storm. It's called *Heaven is For Real*. It's a story about a boy who says he took a trip to heaven. I have a theory about why it fascinates us so much. It's because we're all desperately seeking confirmation. We want something, anything really that will confirm for us that death isn't the end. That there's more and that we actually don't need to be afraid.

Why does death make us so afraid? Because death is the great human enemy. We've learned that death doesn't discriminate between nationality, gender, or race. It doesn't hesitate. It's endlessly innovative and perfectly ruthless. I hate death. I hate it. I hate it. I hate it. And I know I'm not the only one. But do you know what I hate the most about it? I hate that it tries all too successfully to crawl through little cracks in our faith armor hissing, "I'm coming for you." Then instead of confidently saying, "Death, I defy you. Come and do your worst." We say, "Death, not yet. I need more time. Please don't hurt me."

That's exactly why we are talking about this on the final weekend of the church year. That's why this is the topic for Christ the King weekend. We need to hear that Christ forgives our weakness. And he does. We need to hear that Christ will conquer all. And we need to hear that his final enemy is death. At the end, Christ the King will put his foot on death's neck in a pose of complete and utter domination. The King got a really good start at his resurrection. Consider this story.

Once upon a time, a dragon terrified a kingdom. He would fly over their villages and in fits of rage he would send out blasts of flames killing people in those villages. The people lived in fear. The king, of course, loved his people so he sallied forth to slay the dragon. People gathered to watch their king take on their enemy, but instead of a fight they saw what looked like a rout. The dragon scorched the king and then swallowed him whole. For three days the people mourned. On the third day they awoke to find a gaping hole in the side of the dragon where the king had carved an egress for himself. There stood the king victorious. The King undid the dragon's damage to himself. He'll do that for us too. It's called resurrection.

So celebrate. People who fall asleep in Jesus will rise. It will happen. You are hitched to the Christ express. He is unstoppable pulling you towards resurrection depot. He lives. You will too. He also rules. And he will rule. When the end comes, he will stand there with his foot on death's neck.

We don't need a prefabricated obituary from a national news organization. God has already released an advance copy of death's obituary right here in 1 Corinthians 15. It's dated the Last Day. I picked up the obituary and happily thought to myself, "This is the last obituary ever to be written." Here's how it reads: Death, age 8009, died today. He was disliked by everybody and will be missed by nobody. To what we're all sure would be to his incredible dismay, he is survived by all the Christians who woke up with glorious resurrections. They just met Christ their forever King. Amen.