



Last week, we were able to rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus. We saw in 1 Corinthians 15 the hopelessness we have if there was no physical resurrection of Jesus, and we ended with verse 20, where Paul then writes: **But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**¹

Jesus has, in fact, risen from the dead. And, therefore, he is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Right here, many of us might be confused. This sounds either exciting (but we don't know why) or it sounds bizarre and we're wondering why people are sleeping. Let's untangle the misperceptions in these phrases. First, by way of reminder, the phrase "fallen asleep," is referring to people who have trusted in Jesus but have since died. Some might read this and think that because Jesus rose from the dead, all people will raise from the dead and be saved. That goes against what Paul has said throughout this letter. Beginning in chapter 1, Paul wrote, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."² There are those who are perishing and those who are being saved. Going on in the letter, "those who are being saved" are those who have turned from their sinfulness and turned to the Lord for forgiveness and acceptance by God. Those who are perishing are everyone else – meaning, we're all born as perishing. Oh, how I do pray that everyone here genuinely trusts Jesus – and even you would right now turn to him if you haven't. Because, as I said last week, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, don't listen to him. But if he did rise from the dead, then everything he says matters.

Why does this matter so much? Well, because his resurrection means Jesus is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Meaning, he's the firstfruits of believers who die. In reality, unless you're taken up by Jesus when he returns, every Christ-followers will die. Now, some can be tempted to think that if Christians, atheists, agnostics, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, etc, will all die, then what difference does Jesus' resurrection really make? Here's the hope right in this paragraph! And, this is profoundly glorious. For Jesus to be the firstfruits is phenomenal.

What is the firstfruit? From an agricultural perspective, the firstfruits was the first revelation of a harvest. And, if the firstfruits was good, that meant the harvest would be good. The firstfruits represented the rest. Apply this to Jesus then. Jesus experienced death. We will experience death. But Jesus conquered death. And so, all who trust in Jesus will conquer death, too! But there's more to this. Does Jesus only conquer death? Will we just rise from the dead and experience a miserable eternity? And, what does all this have to do with our lives right now? The illustration of firstfruits actually answers these questions for us, too!

The main idea of this sermon is: **Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection.** And verses 20-28 unpack more life-giving and life-shaping realities based in this illustration. Let's jump in then.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:20.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:18.

As the firstfruits,

1. Jesus, and his resurrection, defines all followers of Jesus (vv. 21-22).

Look at verses 21-22 again with me: ²¹For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.³

The word “For” shows up to begin both verses 21 and 22. This word connects both verses to verse 20, where Paul says Jesus is the firstfruits. How can Jesus’ resurrection represent the rest of us? Well, go back to God’s design in creation. He created Adam and Eve, and God designed for Adam to be the representative of all humanity. And so Paul says that by Adam, death came to the entire world. Humanity’s representative is Adam. Everybody is born in Adam, and we have Adam to thank for sin’s entrance into the creation. And before anyone says, “No, it was Eve!” Just remember that God had given man the responsibility of ultimate responsibility. Adam didn’t stop Satan’s temptation one bit – and he was with Eve. No love for her. No love for God. Then the entire cosmos broke because of sin, and death entered creation’s experience. Adam eventually died, and whether we like it or not, Adam represents all humans. Thus, we all die. This is what these verses are saying: Adam brought death, and we’re all associated with Adam and therefore we die, too.

But the same is true regarding Jesus. In the same way that death came through Adam, resurrection from the dead came through one man. And, in the same way that it wasn’t Adam only who experienced death, but all who Adam represents experiences death; so, it is with Jesus. All who Jesus represents will also experience resurrection.

This is the reality of the firstfruits. Firstfruits guarantees a similar harvest. Adam’s horrific rebellion guaranteed a crop of death. Jesus’ glorious obedience through his life, death and resurrection guarantees the crop of resurrection. This is the reality of the firstfruits representation. Do you see it?

One reality that I hope we do not miss is that beautiful confidence we have in being “in Christ.” In verse 19, Paul brings up the phrase. In verse 22, Paul brings up the phrase again. You are either in Adam or In Christ. To be in Christ is the most glorious position you can be in. This means that Jesus represents you, and this also means that Jesus is your identity. What do I mean by that? Well, let me ask you, if you look at yourself in the mirror, what do you see? You might say, “an addict” or “depression” or “failure” or “loser” or “fat” or “ugly.” For all sorts of reasons, you think of those phrases first. Those are defining phrases for you.

Let’s take this a little further. Give spiritual words to what you see. You, as a child of God, when thinking of yourself, may primarily think of yourself as a sinner, a wretch, depraved. And while we definitely still sin –and we still can say we’re the worst sinners we know, the reality is that our ultimate identity is not ultimately in being a sinner or wretch. Being our firstfruits and being in Christ, our identity is Jesus. He defines us! Therefore, you are righteous, loved, holy. Bask in these realities. You who were an enemy of God are no longer an enemy of God because Jesus died and rose from the grave. He took the eternal punishment of sin and he reconciled you (and so many others to God). What is your identity? Jesus is the firstfruits. And we, as the remaining harvest, are defined by Jesus! Amen? We must preach the

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:21–22.

reality of the hope of being in Christ and all the assurance this brings to us. This leads us to the next point of Paul in verses 23-28. As the firstfruits,

2. Jesus rules to conquer all enemies of God (vv. 23-28).

For those of you who always feel like failures and that's your destiny in this life, these verses should give immense hope. For those who are afraid of death, these verses should give immense encouragement. For those who wonder if Jesus cares, these verses reveal his utter care for us. As the firstfruits, we have seen that he represents us and defines us. And as the firstfruits, we will also see that he conquers all of God's enemies – which are our enemies, too.

Before jumping into the verses, it's important to notice that Paul uses multiple military/kingdom terms. In verse 23, the word "order" refers to army rankings. Then the phrase "at his coming" is the Greek word "Parousia," which referred to when a King would enter into a city and the town would have a large celebration. Then we have the word, in verse 24, for "destroying," which could probably be better translated as "dethroning." Finally, we have Paul's consistent usage of the phrase "Christ" to refer to the one prophesied in the Scriptures as the One who would come, in accordance with prophecies, who would enter this broken world and make untrue all the things Satan and Adam brought into this aching and dying cosmos. Christ Jesus would be the anointed of God who would be the new Adam who would faithfully rule under God's rule and defeat every enemy of God. Thus, all our enemies are defeated!

According to Paul here, Jesus, who is the Christ, comes first in rank. Because he resurrected, he reveals that he defeats sin and death. Then, this defeat is also experienced over time, and when the last and final enemy is dethroned, he will appear again in victory – and all who entrusted themselves to him will be with him.

But, I know, this might all sound high and lofty. Sounds nice, but again, what does this mean? Paul doesn't write with a perfect timeline in these verses. There's past, future and present listed here. But for ease, we're going to work through Paul's points as a timeline. As the firstfruits, Jesus reigned, continues to reign and will reign for God's glory and our eternal good.

His reign, to dethrone enemies and bring life, began in the past (v. 27). Verse 27 says, ²⁷For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him.⁴

Before commenting more on this verse, remember that in Adam all die and that in Christ, all are made alive. So, Jesus' goal isn't simply to destroy enemies. That's simply deconstructing. But Jesus came to bring life. So, his reign destroys enemies and brings life! This purpose of Jesus began in the past. The reason you have quotation marks in verse 27 is because Paul is quoting the Scriptures. Psalm 8:6 talks about God giving the Christ dominion. When was Jesus given dominion? Well, if you're talking about Jesus' deity, he has always had dominion, right? He's God. But we're not talking about his divinity here. Paul is specifically emphasizing Jesus' humanity because we're talking about physical resurrection from the dead. We're talking about Jesus being the perfect Mediator and representative of humanity as the God-MAN! So, when was everything put in subjection under the Jesus, as the God-Man?

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:27.

Some say that this hasn't happened yet. It won't happen until some future day when Jesus rules on this earth, but I think that misses the clear teaching in this text. Certainly, the Kingdom is yet to come, but the Kingdom is also right here. This is what Christians throughout the ages have referred to as the "already-not-yet." Jesus ascended and rules right now from Heaven's throne. His death and resurrection has led to greater power for all he has saved. We have the Spirit's power in us to declare the gospel and this message is spread throughout the world! Jesus reigns today because his reign began in the past. In Colossians 1:13, Paul says that those who believe on Jesus have been transferred to his present Kingdom. First Peter 3:22 states that Jesus is as the right hand of God (which is the place of power), and he is above all authorities and powers – being subjected to him.

This is what Paul states here, too. Because Jesus resurrected and ascended, God put all things in subjection to Jesus. Jesus is ruling today. But you might say, "Well, if he's reigning today, then he's not doing a good job. Look at my life. Look at the messy church. Look at this world!" But I just want to say, "Look at verse 25."

His reign continues in the present (vv. 24b-25). Read verse 25 with me: . . . destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.⁵ Do you see that Jesus must reign *presently* until he has put all his enemies under his feet? So, for those who think Jesus' reign is only future, they miss out on very beautiful truths for today. Only as a result of Jesus' resurrection and reign can any of God's enemies be attacked in this present world, or at any point in time. So, Jesus *must* reign in the past and also presently.

But again, what does this mean for us today? Well, let me remind you of the phrase "in Christ." When you read that Jesus must reign and put all enemies under his feet, you may think of yourself as maybe a Christian is simply watching Jesus doing this. It's like Jesus is the Olympiad and you're the spectator. But that's not how the Bible sees it. Listen to John's words in 1 John 3: The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹No one born of God makes a practice of sinning. . .⁶ Wait. John says that Jesus appeared to destroy the devil's works. And in the next sentence, John then says that means that anyone who is born of God cannot make a practice of sinning. Why? Because Jesus saved them and they continue the work of their Savior. Jesus both rules over us, and by the power of the Spirit, reigns through us! And, if you think I'm stretching this, think of Paul's words to the Romans 16:20: The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.⁷ "Hold on! I thought the Messiah was to crush the serpent?" Yes! And, because we are so united with Jesus, Jesus continues his work of destroying and dethroning the enemy through *us!*

This is the clear direction Paul is going in this chapter, and this should give us immense hope. So, please listen carefully here: if Jesus is your identity and then you have the promise that in this present life you not only can follow God and grow in obedience, but that God has promised to give you the strength and promise to ensure your growth, then you should feel amazingly helped right now! You are weak, but he is strong and his strength is at work in and through you. Oh, rejoice! Jesus' resurrection means that he presently is dethroning God's enemies.

But there is one thing I need to qualify here. If Jesus is reigning over us, and also reigning through us by the Spirit, then who are Jesus' enemies? When we think of God's enemies, many think it's the abortion

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:24–25.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 3:8–9.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 16:20.

clinics and cannibals and devil worshippers who put blood in tennis shoes and sell them. While it's true that all of this is sinful and evidence of Satan's work in this world, that's not all that is the enemy of God. The moral Pharisees were told by Jesus that they would be judged with greater judgment than the immoral Sodom and Gomorrah. The reason? They used morality to deceive people into thinking they were fine. Listen, morality apart from God, is a great tool of Satan to anesthetize people and lead them coasting into Hell.

I say this because we must realize who God's enemies are. I believe these enemies referenced here are the same Paul references in Ephesians 6. We wrestle not against flesh and blood. So, Jesus is dethroning God's enemies. And we join in that. But *how* do we do that? I fear that many Christians have taken Satan tactics as opposed to Jesus'. Too often we can treat humans as the enemies we feel they are. Yet, Jesus has told us how we are to treat human enemies of God! We are to love those who hate him. We are to pray for them. Even with the Pharisees, Jesus wept! When was the last time you wept over and prayed for whatever people group you view as an enemy or get angry at? Have you wept? Have you cried out that the Father would forgive them? Jesus attacks the Enemy, the Serpent, through loving humans with gracious truth and truth-filled grace – and we are to do this as well. Yet, have you ever treated enemies like enemies? What are your thoughts and prayers towards Cannibals or Republicans or Egalitarians or Democrats or Marxists or Feminists or Mysogynists or fill-in-the-blank. Now, I'm not saying there isn't right or wrong, but what I do want to emphasize is that in Jesus' battle against all of God's enemies, we are to follow our Firstfruit King in dethroning the enemy with his love, grace and truth!

Ventura, this is how we are set free to live. And Paul states that Jesus is presently doing this through us! Will you align with Jesus' mission? Will you reveal that you believe the resurrection through living this way today? Maybe you need to repent for confusing enemies or maybe you've used the devil's tactics towards unbelievers, or even believers. The resurrection speaks life, while destroying the enemies of God – who are Satan and his demons, the world, and our sinful flesh.

So, we see Jesus' reign began in the past, continues in the present, and now

Jesus' reign will conquer every enemy, including death (vv. 24, 26). ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.⁸

After Jesus destroys every rule, authority and power – and finally the last enemy of death – *then* Jesus will deliver the kingdom to God the Father. Jesus will conquer all of this. This reveals the future power of Jesus as well as the extent of his power. He is over all!

Now, you might wonder, why is it that Jesus is the one doing this? Why does Paul say in verse 25 that Jesus *must* reign until this happens? Why *must*? Why couldn't the Spirit do this? Why not God the Father? Why Jesus? Remember again that Paul is talking about Jesus as the God-Man. The *man* Jesus is being emphasized because humanity needs one who is the perfect representative. Whatever that representative accomplishes, accomplishes on behalf of people. Therefore, when death is destroyed (along with all other enemies of our souls and bodies), then Jesus as the God-Man will deliver the kingdom to God the Father.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:24, 26.

What a glorious future hope, right, Ventura? Think of the pain of this world. Think of the sin in your own self that still remains. Think of the trauma various people groups experience around the world. Think of natural catastrophes. We can think of so much more, but now think that all of that is gone. And, then abundant life and perfection only remain! No more death, sorrow and pain. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!

Because Jesus physically rose from the dead, he began his reign as the perfect representative on our behalf. He continues his reign over the world, working through us. Finally, he will someday defeat every enemy of God. Jesus, our firstfruits and King, guarantees our harvest over all of this opposition. Therefore, Paul ends this paragraph with verse 28: When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.⁹

This can be a very confusing verse to understand, but again, remember that when Paul is speaking here, he's emphasizing Jesus in his humanity. Even this usage of the word "Son" is unique here - emphasizing Jesus' humanity. As divine, Jesus will not cease to reign as part of the Triune God. But as Man, because he's the mediator, he will be the continued representative of all eternity so that God may be in all in all for us. What hope and joy this brings.

Do you know this hope? Do you rejoice that Jesus is our firstfruits, who guarantees our resurrection, defines us and ensures victory over all God's enemies? If not, I pray you would call out to him. If so, pray to the Lord that he would affect your heart in rejoicing in him all the more.

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⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:28.