

Christ Has Been Raised

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28 • RESURRECTION (PART 3)

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****COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE****

It is a great blessing to be together this morning! I hope all of us have the elements for the Lord's Supper (either from home or from the table in the entryway), as John/I will be leading us in the prayers for the Supper right after our study today. And then, Michael/Noah will be leading us in three songs before we head outside to do our visiting outdoors.

Today is the last day for Josh and Shelby to be with us for a while! I wish we could have a great big fellowship dinner to say "goodbye" today, but we aren't quite there yet. But, we do wish them well on their new adventure. We got to know Josh first, then Shelby, and they have both shattered any stereotypes about the younger generation not being interested in spiritual things. They have jumped in in every possible way – from shoveling snow, to coordinating our Bible classes and Vacation Bible Schools, to serving in worship and in other ways. And, as many of you know, Josh played a key role in the appointment of elders here for the first time a number of years ago. So, we wish them well, and we know that they will be a blessing to God's kingdom on their journeys and wherever they land in the future. Last week, I tried to get them to sign up for building cleaning in July, but they did not fall for it! Both of you/them will be in our prayers, and we are looking forward to some good updates over the next year or two.

As our tradition has been since the pandemic began, we've been explaining God's plan of salvation before the lesson (instead of afterwards), and that's a tradition I hope we can keep. This is important, and since we don't know whether this might be the first, last, or only time somebody might be with us (either in person, online, or on the phone), we want to make sure we at least briefly explain God's plan for saving us. Paul summarizes the gospel as being the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. This is what God has done, and in response, we must believe this good news and obey it. We turn away from sin, we confess Jesus as being the Christ, the Son of God, and then we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, for the forgiveness of sins. At this point, God adds us to his kingdom, the church, and the Christian life begins. If you have any questions about this, if you would like to study together, we would invite you to get in touch.

Also, as our tradition has been, we are passing along some good news today! The picture on the upper left is of Baylee (in the yellow top), who was baptized yesterday at the church in Honolulu, Hawaii. And then, the picture on the bottom right is of Sara (in the green top). Sara was baptized after class at the Willow Avenue congregation

in Cookeville, Tennessee, this past Wednesday. So, we rejoice with Baylee and Sara this morning, and we share this by way of encouragement: What these women have done this week, you can do today. Pull me aside after worship, get in touch with either one of our other elders, and we would be more than happy to open the word of God and study together.

Before we get to our study today, I'd like to give another brief update on the tech-outreach side of things. We've given a few updates on the website, and YouTube, and the captions, and Google Maps, and the phone stream, and today I thought we should give just a brief update concerning our Facebook page. We only post every week or two, but the Facebook page has been a valuable tool for people finding us, especially those who are passing through town. We had six visitors last week, for example, who found us through Facebook – Kevin Rhodes and his family met in the Dells last week (from Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri). Kevin directs the Brown Trail School of Preaching down in Texas. Unfortunately, his daughter broke her arm at a water park last Saturday evening, so they were dealing with that, but he still managed to get here. I mention this, because Kevin and I connected through Facebook maybe two months ago as he was looking for a place for them to worship up here.

But this is where YOU come in: All of us have the ability to interact with our Facebook page. Several of you have left reviews, and whenever you share or interact with the page, whenever you “check-in” as being here for worship, your friends are able to see it, and this increases the number of people who are able to find us.

I would also point out that our website now has a way for us to share our lessons. Under the “GROW” tab, go to sermons; or, the latest lessons are linked on the homepage. And from there, once you click on one of those lessons, we have links for sharing on social media at the bottom of each page. And usually we have a full text PDF, the audio (MP3), and also a link to the video. Several months ago, we learned of someone who is blind and deaf and wanted to access our lessons (here in Madison), so we added a “plain text” file as well, to make it a bit easier for his system to convert it into Braille. So, we have several options.

And just a quick update from YouTube last week: Several days ago, my wife was talking to one of her middle school students and showed him a family picture taken at our daughter's graduation a while back. As soon as he saw the picture, he said, “You know the Four Lakes Church of Christ guy! You know the Four Lakes Church of Christ guy! How do you know the Four Lakes Church of Christ guy?” My wife explained, “I've been married to him for 28 years!” This student then referred to our Bible classes in front of the wood pile and how the Four Lakes Church of Christ is “his church.” We have no idea how that connection was first made, but this young man is a faithful follower of our YouTube channel, and we are thrilled to have him join us online.

This morning, I would invite you to return with me to 1 Corinthians 15. Several months ago, one of members asked for a lesson on a rather difficult verse in this chapter (we will get to that verse next week, if the Lord wills), but as we make our way to that passage, we are spending several weeks in 1 Corinthians 15, which includes what is perhaps one of the first written accounts of the Lord's resurrection.

Like Madison, we learned that Corinth is built on an isthmus. And we learned that Paul visits Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey (in Acts 18). The church in Corinth has some issues (as a young congregation in a difficult place); so, Paul writes a series of letters back to this congregation, answering their questions. And in 1 Corinthians 15, he seems to be answering some kind of concern about the resurrection. It seems, in fact, that some of the members are perhaps questioning the possibility of a future resurrection.

Two weeks ago, then, in the first eleven verses, Paul starts to combat this by appealing to the resurrection of Jesus. He starts with what they already believe. If you are a Christian, you believe in the resurrection of Jesus, so he starts here, with three reminders or appeals. He appeals to the existence of the Christian faith, he appeals to the scriptures, and he appeals to a good number of eyewitnesses. And then, he applies all of this by writing about the change that the resurrection makes in our own lives. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, Paul himself went from being a persecutor of the church to being a gospel preacher. And what changed Paul also has the power to change us.

Last week, we moved into the next paragraph, and we came to a new line of reasoning, as Paul tries to get these people to imagine what life would be like if Christ had never been raised. Some in Corinth were suggesting that there is no resurrection, that people simply do not come back from the dead. He takes that, and he spins it around, and he argues that, **“...if there is no resurrection of the dead, [then] not even Christ has been raised.”** And he tries to get them to picture what this really means. If there is no resurrection at all, then that includes Jesus, and here are some consequences. This is the logical result of not believing the resurrection. And his conclusion is, if Christ has not been raised: Our preaching is vain, your faith is vain, all of the apostles are false witnesses, your faith is worthless and you are still in your sins, those who have died are truly dead in every possible way and are not coming back, and we of all people are most to be pitied (we have sacrificed for nothing, we have wasted our lives).

This morning, we come to the next paragraph, found in verses 20-28, and as we look at this passage, we are leaving the hypothetical as Paul starts with a statement of fact, **“But now Christ has been raised from the dead.”** This morning, then, we look at the consequences of Jesus’ resurrection. It’s not **“if Christ has not been raised,”** like we looked at last week, but this week it’s SINCE **“Christ has been raised.”** These are the benefits. And the main idea here is: Since Christ has been raised, the best is yet to come; since Christ has been raised, we have some good things to look forward to. So, as we look at this next paragraph, let’s keep an eye out for a series of benefits. Let’s look together at 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, the words of Paul,

²⁰ But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. ²¹ For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, ²⁴ then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be abolished is death. ²⁷ For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

As we look at what Paul says here, let’s go back and hit the highlights. Because of Jesus’ resurrection, this is what we have to look forward to.

I. **And we start in verses 20-24, as Paul explains that because of Jesus’ resurrection, WE WILL RISE.**

And we have two pictures here, starting with Jesus’ resurrection being described as the **“first fruits of those who are asleep.”** The **“first fruits”** goes back to the book of Leviticus, where God’s people were to bring the first fruits of the crop as a sacrifice. If you’ve done any gardening at all, you know that the first fruits are almost

always the best. The first fruits come before the pests have a chance of taking a bite out of everything. The first fruits come before the heat of the summer. The first fruits come before the plants get damaged by the sun. Not only are the first fruits usually the best (quality wise), but the first fruits are also the most highly anticipated. We've been planning all winter, we've purchased the seeds, we've worked the soil, we've planted, we've watered, we've waited, and we finally have something to show for it. I know I've told you before about my first pear tree down in Janesville. I planted this twig of a tree and pruned it and cared for it for several years. I had done research on the variety and how to care for pear trees. And finally, several years into this process, after years of pruning and spraying, we had our very first pear on that tree. We watched it grow from the blossom to the mature fruit. We were looking forward to eating that first pear. But one day we came home from church, and as we pulled our car into the driveway, I looked across the yard and saw a squirrel eating my very first pear. With an explosive burst of righteous anger I leaped out of the car and ran across the yard, ready to go hand to hand with a squirrel over this pear. Thankfully, the squirrel ran off, but then I faced my first pear, sitting there in the grass, half-eaten. I had a decision to make: What do I do with a half-eaten pear? Obviously, I shared it with the squirrel! I was thinking, "Okay, there's a chance of rabies here, but this is my pear. This is literally the first fruit, and I refuse to throw it in the compost." So, the squirrel had one half, and I had the other half. That's the importance of the first fruits! They are the best, they are also the most highly anticipated, but they are also something of a promise. If something is first, there is usually more to come. First implies second, and third, and fourth. And this is why God demanded an offering of the first fruits. If you had enough faith to give God the first fruits, the rest was symbolically his as well. And that's the way Paul uses this picture here. Jesus' resurrection is pictured as **"the first fruits of those who are asleep."** Because he rose from the dead, we also will rise. Because he was raised, we will also be raised. His resurrection is a guarantee, a down payment. His resurrection is the first of many. His resurrection is a sample, a prototype. I think of a 4-H'er bringing vegetables to the county fair – they are the best and the first of more to come. I think of a restaurant owner who frames that first dollar – it is important because it is hopefully the first of many. In the same way, Jesus' resurrection is the **"first fruits."**

The other picture Paul uses here is something of an analogy, a comparison. To get into grad school, I had a choice of taking the GRE or the Miller Analogy Test. The MAT sounded a bit more interesting, so I went that direction. The test was proctored by a professor down at Beloit College, so I drove down there and spent the entire time making comparisons, "Sock is to foot as glove is to hand," and so on, but a bit more complicated than that! But this is what Paul is doing here. Some might wonder how the resurrection of one man has any chance of affecting us, and so, Paul explains with a comparison (in verses 21-22), **"For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive."** Just as the sin of Adam brought death into the world, so also the resurrection of Jesus brings life into the world. Some have misapplied the comparison to suggest that Jesus' resurrection saves everybody. Just as Adam's sin brought physical death to everybody, so also Jesus' resurrection brings spiritual life to everybody. But notice, Paul says that so also **"in Christ"** all will be made alive. So, it's not everybody who benefits, but only those who are **"in Christ."** Salvation is available, but not everybody will accept it. As Paul will go on to explain in Galatians 3:26-27 and in Romans 6:1-7, we are baptized into Christ; we are baptized into his death and raised up with him in his resurrection. So, there is something for us to do, but this is the comparison: Just as the sin of Adam brought death into the world, so also the resurrection of Jesus brings the hope of resurrection. Adam brings death, but Jesus brings life. Because he has been raised, we will also rise.

II. This leads us to a second consequence or benefit to the resurrection: Because Jesus has been raised, DEATH WILL DIE.

As Paul says (in verses 25-26), *“For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”* We might not always think about this, but death is described in Scripture as our *“enemy.”* And we understand why. Most of us know this from personal experience. We can think back in our own lives and remember all the ways death has touched us and harassed us through the years. In my own life, I was protected from death pretty well. My grandparents lived into their 80’s so that didn’t hit me until later. In high school, though, I remember hearing about the death of a friend at the hands of a drunk driver in another state. She had been my dance partner in a musical back in middle school. She then moved and died as a senior in high school. Somebody I knew personally had died. A short time later, I graduated early from high school, and while I was away at college during what should have been my last semester in high school, one of our classmates died, working under his car, beheaded when the jack failed. Another acquaintance had died. After graduation from college, we got married and moved to Wisconsin. Just a few weeks later, I was called upon to preach my very first funeral, the newborn son of one of our members had died at only two days old. It was awful. Death is an enemy. And then many others have died through the years – some were close friends, and then there have been a good number of funerals for people I’ve never met. Some deaths were expected; others were tragic. But in all cases, death was an enemy. Death has been our enemy since the beginning, and it will continue to be our enemy until the end of time. It may get us in the middle of the night as we sleep, it may find us as we drive down the interstate, many will be taken in war, others by disease, many will die in storms or accidents. Whether rich or poor, whether rulers or servants, death will find all of us. But, because of the resurrection, we are assured in this passage that death is an enemy that will be abolished. Because Jesus has been raised, death will die.

As with all other enemies, death will also be put under Jesus’ feet. It’s the picture of an ancient king who would win a battle and put his foot on the neck of his enemies. Death is the last great enemy, and the victory over death was set in motion at the resurrection. So, because Jesus has been raised, we will rise and death will die.

III. This leads us to the third positive consequence: Because Christ has been raised, GOD WILL REIGN.

There’s a lot of *“subjection”* going on in verses 27-28. I think I’ve seen that word used at least six times in those last two verses, but it all goes back to the resurrection. The resurrection has set in motion a series of events, where Christ rules from the time of his resurrection until the end of time, this period of time we refer to as being the Christian Age. He reigns from his first coming to his second coming, we might say. And at the end of this age (as we saw back in verse 24), Christ (at the end) will hand over the kingdom to the God and Father. And at that time, as I understand it, God the Father will continue to reign in perfect unity with the Son, for eternity. This is all made possible by the resurrection. And we are heading for eternity, *“so that God may be all in all,”* as Paul says. In the end, no one will be left to challenge God’s authority. The last enemy will be defeated, and God will reign for all eternity.

Conclusion:

Jesus really did come back from the dead, and because of his resurrection, the best is yet to come: We will rise, death will die, and God will reign.

I'm looking forward to coming back together next week to look at the question from one of our members that led to this study. I would encourage you to read ahead. We hope to look at verses 29-34 next week.

Before we partake of the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the God of life and the God of all who live. We have come together as your people today to honor you and your Son and his resurrection from the dead. We are thankful for what we have learned from Paul this morning. We come to you in awe, amazed at your plan, rejoicing in your great love for us. We look forward to seeing you face to face when our life on this earth comes to an end.

In the meantime, we ask for your continued grace and mercy on us. We pray that you would forgive us just as we forgive those who sin against us.

Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. In Jesus we pray, AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com