

**+ 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 + Celebrate the Reign of the Risen Christ! +  
+ Last Sunday of End Time: Christ the King + 23 November 2008**

**“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...”** That’s one of the most unbelievable statements in all of Scripture, but one of the most comforting teachings in all of Scripture. **“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...”** ...But that’s not how it normally works! Dead people don’t normally come back to life. When you’re dead, you’re dead—and that’s it! We’ve all lost a loved one we wished would come back to life, but normally that doesn’t happen. Even the tabloids don’t write about resurrections. They peddle a lot of unbelievable stuff, but they draw the line at resurrections, because such a story would be considered “over the top”, even for them.

For example, suppose your neighbor told you, “Did you hear what happened over at Oakwood Cemetery yesterday? You remember Bill from across the way. Well, he died last Saturday and they buried him on Tuesday, but on Thursday he came back to life and came out of his grave!” We would think that’s unbelievable. So we can understand why the people of Corinth struggled with the idea of a dead person coming back to life.

In response, the Holy Spirit moved St. Paul to write 1 Corinthians 15, in which he affirms the truth of Jesus’ resurrection, but he does more than that. Paul helps us understand what Jesus’ resurrection means for you and me personally as we look forward to Christ’s return on the Last Day. As we do so, we **CELEBRATE THE REIGN OF THE RISEN CHRIST!**

In the verses before our text, Paul lays out “the awful alternative to Easter.” You see, some Corinthians had claimed, **“There is no resurrection from the dead.”** So Paul explained what that really meant. What he wrote doesn’t make for pleasant reading. In fact, it’s awful.

As the apostle says, if there is no resurrection, then Christ isn’t raised either. All our preaching is all lies. Our faith is worthless too, since we believe in a dead Jesus. All the deadly sins we commit every day...well, they’re not forgiven, and all loved ones who have died are now suffering God’s wrath in hell—all awful alternatives to Easter! If Jesus didn’t rise, then we have to quit kidding ourselves, drop all this nonsense, and admit that, as Paul wrote, **“we are to be pitied more than all men.”**

...But that’s not reality! Paul tells us **“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...”** What a simple, but incredibly powerful statement! Human reason may tell us people can’t rise from the dead, but reality is something far different. Your mind may stagger at the thought and even raise an objection or two, but Paul brushes them all aside with this simple, unmistakable affirmation: **“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.”** Jesus was literally dead and buried, but he literally rose and lives right now!

Of course, Paul doesn’t merely say, “Just trust me.” Instead, he lays out a long list of those who saw the risen Savior with their own eyes. He ticks them off one by one: Peter, the 12 apostles, over 500 believers, James, all the apostles, and finally Paul himself. That list includes both those who believed and those who had to believe in spite of their own skepticism.

The glorious truth of the Gospel—the heart and center of the Good News—is this simple, but indisputable truth: Christ is risen from the dead. We have a risen, living Savior. Do we always live in the joy of that resurrection? Do we always reflect that in our daily lives? Or do we sometimes have our moments of weakness and doubt? The economy stinks. The bills are piling up. The snow is piling up. A loved one is sick. Your health isn’t great. The stress level at home, at work or at school is rising rapidly. Oh, and it’s all about to get busier as we get closer to Christmas. Easy to forget, isn’t it?

So much can rob us of the joy of the resurrection that sometimes we simply need a reminder—**“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.”** When Martin Luther used to have questions or doubts like us, he would often write **“Vivit! Vivit! Vivit!”**, in large letters on his desk and the walls of his room. **“He lives! He lives! He lives!”** Luther reminded himself that he had a *living* Lord, and that made all the difference. Now we probably won’t write on the doors and walls of our homes, but perhaps we need to have those words of comfort on the fridge or the bathroom mirror or on your desk. At the very least, we need those words inscribed on our hearts and minds through the study of God’s Word. That way when you emotionally feel like holding another pity party, you can celebrate the reign of the risen Christ.

Jesus isn’t just risen, though, but he promises to raise us too, as Paul writes, **“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 also comes through a man...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.”**

Did you catch Paul’s picture there? He describes our risen Savior as **“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”**. An Israelite farmer would harvest the first sheaf of grain and then present it as an offering before the Lord to give thanks for God’s gracious generosity. He had absolute confidence that many other sheaves would follow. We

have the same confidence because Jesus lives. Our risen Lord was the firstfruits of the resurrection harvest, and we with all believers will one day follow him.

Hang on to that picture for a moment and find the comfort of Christ the King there. Jesus was first. That means others will follow, including you and me. As Christ was raised, so we, too, will be awakened from the “sleep” of death. That’s what death is for those who are in Christ—a “sleep.” For us, death is not some terrible, dreaded specter, but a sleep at the end of which we open our eyes to see the loving face and open arms of our living Savior. His resurrection guarantees that, since he went first for us.

Paul underscores this truth by explaining how Jesus’ resurrection completely overturns what our first father did. You see, **“death comes...through a man.”** That man was Adam. When Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, his sin brought death into the world. He passed on his sinful nature, and now **“in Adam all die...”** We enter this world under the sentence of eternal death because of the sin we inherit from our parents and the sins we commit every day.

We started dying the moment we were conceived, but another “Man,” our Lord Jesus, has undone what Adam did. By his death, Jesus faced sin and its consequences head on for us. On the cross our Savior paid in full the penalty for all sin, including yours and mine, thus satisfying the demands of God’s divine justice. By his resurrection, however, Jesus destroyed death’s power over us and restored our immortality. In doing so, he opened the door to heaven for all believers and assured us that all who believe in him **“will be made alive.”** When Christ the King returns, he will raise us to life, so we can enjoy eternal life with him forever in the glorious comforts of heaven.

So how do we celebrate the glorious news that because Jesus lives, we, too, shall live? Good news is best when it’s shared, when others can rejoice and celebrate with you. At the same time, every one of us wants to see our loved ones raised by Christ, body and soul, to join us and all believers in heaven on the Last Day. So one of the best ways we can celebrate is by simply sharing that glorious, good news with the people we know and love.

There’s something else we can do, too—something that reflects how Paul described Jesus. Paul used the picture of the firstfruits offering. Back then, God’s people expressed their confidence that their gracious Lord would continue to enrich their lives. We can do the same as we begin our celebration of the Year of Jubilee. As those Old Testament believers brought their firstfruits to the Lord with confidence, we, too, can bring a special, firstfruits offering to our God to reflect the joy we have in *the* First-fruit, Jesus. In this way, we can further the celebration of the risen Christ as the good news of the resurrection is able to be spread even more.

We certainly do want to celebrate, because not only has Jesus risen from the dead and promises to raise us too, but as God himself, Christ reigns forever. Paul writes, **“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.”**

How differently you and I look at life, including the end of life, because Jesus lives! Death is no longer the end of everything. Even if we die, we can be sure our bodies won’t stay in the grave long, because the first thing our Lord will do when he returns on the Last Day will be to “awaken” all those who fell “asleep” trusting in him. When we are raised, **“then the end will come”**—the end of the world in which we live and the end of life here on earth as we now know it. Our Lord will put an end to all rule and authority and power, and instead there will only be the rule of Christ the King. Then he will hand over to the Father his rule of grace, which will include all who are his through faith in him.

What a blessed day, though, that will be, when every eye will see that by his resurrection, Christ the King reigns forever! Christ’s return on the Last Day will be the culmination of Easter, the goal to which Easter continually points us, and the final revelation of Jesus as our reigning Lord. That day we will look up and see our returning Lord and King as we sang before, **“Saints, behold! The sight is glorious—see the man of sorrows now, from the fight returned victorious! ... Crown him!”**

It will truly be glorious when Jesus returns in his full majesty and shows us that **“salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ has come”**. On that day, the multitudes of heaven will gather around the throne of Christ the King and together sing in joyful praise, **“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”**

...But you know what the best part of that Day will be? Your voices and mine will be among those loudly singing that joyful song. No heart will know more joy that Day than ours. No voice will sing with greater delight than ours. So let that song of celebration and joy begin this Christ the King Sunday, and let it never stop until our King returns, when we will sing with all the hosts of heaven, **“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever! Amen.”**