

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 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.** ²³ **But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.** ²⁴ **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.** ²⁷ **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.** (NIV 84)

Theme: Christ the Lord Reigns!

1. He has won the victory
2. He will rule over all things

1 Corinthians 15 is known as “The Great Resurrection Chapter.” In it Paul lays out a detailed argument for the resurrection of the dead. For centuries at the death of loved ones, Christians have found great comfort in this chapter, **Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?** Millions of people hear the words of this chapter every Easter. **The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.** But today isn’t Easter. We’re not at a funeral. Today is the last Sunday of the Church Year—Christ the King Sunday. So why talk about 1 Corinthians 15 today? Because Christ’s resurrection is closely connected to Christ’s reign. If Good Friday was the end of the story, Christ wouldn’t be a king, we wouldn’t be here today, and we would have no hope of eternal life. But today we see that Christ the Lord reigns. He has won the victory for us and he will rule over all things.

In verse 20 Paul calls Jesus, **the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** Giving a firstfruits offering meant that they would take the

first part of the harvest—the firstfruits, and offer them up as a sacrifice to God. When the Israelites offered a firstfruit sacrifice they were confessing that the whole harvest belonged to God—that he had given them this gift in the first place, they were merely giving it back to him. When they gave to God the first part of their harvest they were also confessing their belief that God would bless them with more—that they would have other fruit to harvest later.

That last point is the one that Paul makes with Jesus.. He is the firstfruits of those who have died. Jesus is the first one to have ever died, risen, and stay risen. There have been others who have been raised from the dead—the prophets, Elijah and Elisha both raised someone from the dead. During his ministry Jesus raised three people from the dead. The Apostles also raised a few from the dead. But the case is the same with all of them—they are all dead. They really were dead, until they were made alive again. But eventually all of them died. Their bodies were all buried.

And that is what makes Christ different. He died and he was raised from the dead—just like the others. But the difference is that he is still alive. He didn’t die again. His body was never again laid in the tomb. He is the firstfruits. He is the guarantee that there will be others to come.

And that’s good news for us. You see, we are descendants of Adam. And as his descendants we have inherited his sinful nature. We were born into sin and as enemies of God. And with sin comes death. So through Adam every single one of us is dying. And there is nothing that any of us can do about it. We are all on our way to the grave. But remember that Christ is the firstfruits of those who have died. He rose from the dead and so we know that we’ll rise from the dead too. We will follow him in the resurrection. And unlike the others, we won’t die again. When we are raised from the dead on the Last Day we will stay alive. We’ll have a perfect life—free from sin, forever in heaven. Paul makes this point in the first part of our text, **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.**

Christ is able to do this because he has won the victory over our enemies. First he defeated sin. On the cross he took our sins upon

himself. He suffered their eternal punishment and paid the price we ought to have paid. And then transferred his perfect life to us—giving us credit for his obedience. The price we ought to have paid was paid for by Christ. Peter points this out: **He bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.**

And Christ defeated Satan. The devil thought that he had won when Christ died and was buried in the tomb. But when Christ defeated rose from the dead he crushed Satan's head. We don't have to worry about the devil, through Christ he holds no power over us. He can do no real damage to us because he has been soundly defeated by Christ.

And then there is death. Sure, we know that Christ defeated death. Since Christ removed our sins death no longer stings. We know that when we die we will be in paradise with Christ. That our death is the beginning of eternal death.

Christ really did win the ultimate victory for us. But his victory is not yet complete—so it may seem as if he hasn't won anything at all. Christ may have paid for the condemnation of all our sins, but there is still sin in this world and it's effects. The devil may have been defeated, yet he still romances the earth looking for us to devour. And because sin is still in this world, so is death. It's sting may have been removed, the fact is, unless the Lord returns first, our souls will all be separated from our bodies as they rot and decay in the ground. So Christ may have already won the victory; but his victory is not yet complete—and won't be until after the Last Day when he will rule forever.

In the meantime Christ rules from his throne up in heaven. He rules over his entire creation. He watches over it and takes care of it. Paul makes this point in Ephesians 1, **(God) raised (Christ) from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.**

So Christ doesn't just rule over this world, he also rules over his Church. Remember how he told Pilate, **My kingdom is not of this world?** In Luke 17 he says, **The kingdom of God does not come**

with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you. The kingdom of Christ is his reign within us. That means he rules in our hearts through faith in him. And that means his reign comes to us through the gospel. Through his Word and sacraments is how Christ rules over us.

Eventually, however Christ will come again, in his full divine glory and sit on his heavenly throne to judge all people—both the living and the dead. It will be then that all our enemies will be defeated once and for all. Sin—gone. Satan will be bound by chains in hell. And without sin in heaven there will be no death—we will not be able to sin or die. The dead rising from their graves and being united with their souls in heaven means that death, the last enemy, is destroyed. Then at the end of that final day, Christ's role as our king changes. Paul elaborates, **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.** Christ will hand over his kingdom to the Father. And remember that Christ's kingdom is his rule in our hearts through faith. So Christ will hand over his believers—the people of his kingdom to the Father so that they may live with him—body and soul forever in heaven.

Make no mistake about it. Christ's rule won't end on the last day. Gabriel's message to Mary still stands, **he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.** Christ will reign forever, but he does so in subjection to the Father. This doesn't surprise us since it is the Father who sent the Son and who made all things under him in the first place.

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. Christ isn't less than the Father. Remember who he said, **I and the Father are one.** When Christ gives his authority over to the Father and subjects himself to him; God becomes all-in-all, three-in-one. The Father as the head; the Son, Christ the King—the firstfruits of the dead, and the Holy Spirit reigning as One in heaven with us forever.

And none of that matters with Christ's resurrection. But since he rose from the dead he is able to rule as the King of kings in the hearts of all

Christians and over his creation. Since he rose we know that we to will rise and our bodies will become glorious like his glorious body. And then along with the Father and the Holy Spirit Christ our Lord Reigns. Let us rejoice that by his grace we are part of his kingdom. Amen.