

The Resurrection of Jesus and the Death of Death

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Introduction – From the time of the first Adam down to the present, the saints of God have been gathered to their fathers. They have fallen asleep; their bodies returning to the dust. There is no escaping this; everyone here will experience death. Jesus included. Jesus descended into death just as everyone had and does. But after a brief time in the grave, He defeated death and came to life again. In doing so as the head of the new humanity, He became the firstfruits of all who are fallen asleep in Him. But this passage teaches so much more. Rising from the dead and ascending to His throne in heaven, Christ began His victorious reign which continues until all His enemies are placed under His feet in submission, except for death. Then Christ will return and in the general resurrection, death itself will die.

First Death/First Resurrection (vv20-22) – Verse 20 is Paul's positive statement of the good news. Jesus triumphed over death in His resurrection. The only reason we have need for this good news is, of course, because of the bad news. *"For in Adam all die"* v22 must be believed in order for *"even so in Christ all shall be made alive."* Adam and his people all experienced the first death because of his fall as our covenant head. That is why everyone under Adam is conceived in a state of sin. By nature, we hate God and His supreme and absolute authority over every aspect of our being, and, in Adam, we are all condemned before God. The last phrase (v22b) is not teaching universal salvation because the covenant headships are parallel to one another, not equivalent. All men die because they are in Adam, and on the same principle, everyone who is in Christ will be made alive.

Firstfruits – The resurrection came in the middle of history through Jesus Christ. And this is a promised firstfruits of a great harvest to come. He was a pledge, a representative of the whole. That is why death no longer has any sting even though we still die (1 Cor 15:55). That is why we already are raised with Christ and sit with Him at His throne (Eph 2:4-6). But there is more to come.

Reigning Now/Coming Then (vv23-26) – These verses explain how and in what order those who are in Christ shall be made alive. The basis of the resurrection is Christ Himself. He is the head. On that basis, those who belong to Christ shall be raised from the dead as well at His coming (*"parousia"* – His royal arrival - v23). But what is happening in the meantime until the resurrection? These verses make clear: Jesus Christ is ruling over the earth, subduing His enemies, power by power. The end (His royal arrival on the Last Day) comes when He *"puts an end to all rule and all authority and power"* (v24). And this is because *"He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet"* (v25). This verse alludes to Psalm 110, the most widely quoted Psalm in the New Testament. There we see Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father, ruling by His mighty scepter over His enemies (110:1-3, see also Psalm 2:6-12). Jesus is God's anointed King, already installed as the world's true Lord.

Death: The Last Enemy – In some views of Christ's reign, human history goes along, mostly from bad to worse, until a great rapture interrupts it all and brings an end to death. But vv25-26 teaches that Jesus is reigning now to overcome all His enemies and will defeat death last, after all His enemies have been put down, at His coming and the resurrection of the dead.

"This means that our task, prior to the Second Coming, is through the gospel to be casting down imaginations, to be casting down every high thing that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. The lion will lie down with the lamb, children will play with cobras, tornados will be diverted from their courses, and Congress will start doing good things. A man considered by his neighbors as accursed will die when he is one hundred. And after all this, with so many wonderful things accomplished, and the earth being as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, God will give the signal for the final trump, and death will be destroyed. Death and Hades will be thrown in the lake of fire" – Wilson

Everything Put Right (vv27-28) – These verses quote from Psalm 8 which describes how man was exalted to be the ruler of all things and was placed there by God. Jesus is that Man, and in Him, we reign with Him over the created order to the glory of God – and all things given back to God, *"that God may be all in all."* Implicit in these verses is the proclamation that every wrong ever committed, every event that occurred as a

result of the fall, every corruption of every good thing God ever created, will be put to right, like the perfect end to a complex story. All of it will be vindicated one way or another through the perfect Man, Jesus Christ, His reign, and the final resurrection (Rom 8:37-39).

Resurrection Implications – Christ was raised from the dead because death is an enemy. Death is the last weapon of the tyrant and the point of the resurrection is to declare that death has been defeated. Therefore, you will be raised from the dead on the last day into a resurrected and glorified world – if you are in Christ. But you are only in Christ if you have been crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20). Have you participated in His death that you might know that you will participate in His glorious resurrection?

If so, your body will one day be made like His, just as He promised. No more sin, no more death, no more sorrow. As you eagerly wait for such a promise, let it spur you on to worship Him, to love and good works, with great expectation – *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”* (Phil 2:20-21).

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