

Christ the Firstfruits – 1 Cor 15:20

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.

The Text - *But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

Christ is Risen – In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is not setting about to prove the resurrection. He is instead attempting to show the truth and importance of our future resurrection based on the well-founded truth of Jesus' resurrection. Some were preaching that there is no resurrection of the dead (v12), but if that were the case then preaching the gospel is empty (14), we are stuck in our sins (v17) and these so-called Christian lives are a stupid waste of time – we are to be most pitied (v19). But Christ is risen, he says (v20).

Witnesses to the Resurrection – Paul had begun by explaining that the resurrection was a key point of the gospel (15:3-8) and that there were multiple witnesses in his day who could attest to their eye-witness of the resurrected Christ. There are a number of witnesses, there are a number of different citings. The witnesses are credible, upright and faithful people who had nothing to gain by holding to such a position unless it was true. Spurgeon said, *“Does it not strike you that very many events of the greatest importance recorded in history and commonly believed could not in the nature of things have been witnessed by one-tenth as many as the resurrection of Christ?...We have more and better evidence for this fact than for anything else which is written in history, either sacred or profane.”*

Arguing from the Resurrection – Since Christ is risen, our preaching and our faith are not in vain and all that is declared about Christ is true. The *divinity* of Christ is declared by the resurrection; it would not be unreasonable to doubt His deity if He had not risen (Rom 1:4). Christ's *sovereignty* depends on His resurrection (Rom 14:9). Our *justification* comes forth from His resurrection (Rom 4:25). Our *regeneration* depends upon His resurrection (1 Pet 1:3). Finally, our *bodily resurrection* rests in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:11). Hence, here Paul says that Jesus has become *“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”*

Sleeping... – The text give us a view of death very common in Scripture but not always so well accepted among us. “Fallen asleep” is a word which sometimes really does mean “sleep” but often is used to speak of someone who has died. This is not simply to be less morbid or to avoid the “d” word. When a believer dies, his soul is immediately brought into the presence of Jesus (1 Cor 5:8, Luke 23:43). His body is no longer active and, left in the grave, will decompose. And yet we are to understand that the resurrection one day will be, for the body, much like waking up from a deep sleep. And that means that bodily death is like a Sabbath rest. Not only that – it is a blessing to have died in Jesus, and this means it is a blessing to both body and soul (Rev14:13, Psalm 116:15).

...And Sowing – All suffering (including the experience of death) have been transformed by Jesus (Rom 5:3-5). No longer are these events in our lives punishment for sin. But God has precious purposes that He works in our lives as we go through every affliction. And so, death is the ultimate and final bodily suffering that brings us into conformity with Christ. And that means that our death is not unto death but a death leading to life, bodily life, resurrection life, upon an earth that will also be resurrected (Rom 8:20-25). What does this mean? Your dead body is a seed to be planted in the ground. What will it bring forth? The glory of that resurrected body and perfected life will be as starkly different to your body and life now as the seed is to the glory of a flower or a giant oak.

The Firstfruits – The resurrection came in the middle of history through Jesus Christ. And this is a promised firstfruits of a great resurrection 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.

You Will Always Be on Earth – As Christians, we do not place our hope in the immortality of the soul, but in the resurrection of the body. Heaven is the resting place for our souls until the resurrection when Jesus comes here – to earth. Earth is the resting place for our bodies until the resurrection when Jesus comes here – to earth. We love creation because God made it and declared it good. We love creation because He promised to redeem and resurrect it all on the final day. We love creation because we remain of the dust until we are remade a spiritual body (not a ghost, but a resurrected body by the power of the Spirit). We love creation because we are creation-stuff and we have been given the responsibility to govern all creation. And we will, under the headship of the One Who was first resurrected; the Man, the God-Man, Jesus.