

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

1 Corinthians 15 has a nickname. We call it “the great resurrection chapter.” The apostle Paul devotes all 58 verses in this chapter to that one subject, the resurrection. And we know why. Many people in Corinth had trouble with the whole idea—not just Jesus’ resurrection, but with resurrections in general. I can imagine someone from Corinth saying: “Dead people just don’t come back to life. When you’re dead, you’re dead, and that’s it! So this Jesus person is still dead. It’s a nice idea to think that people who die can come back to life. We wish it were true so our loved ones could be with us again. But it just doesn’t happen.”

It’s hard to argue with that, based on what we experience. How many reports of resurrections taking place have you heard in the last ten years? Not even the grocery store tabloids and the pop-up advertisements on the internet write headlines about resurrections. They peddle a lot of unbelievable stuff, but—come on!—they have their “principles” to uphold. A story about someone returning to life after two sundowns would be “over the top” even for them.

Frankly it would be over the top for us too. “Did you hear what happened at Lakewood Cemetery last week? You remember how sick Pat Schemerlein has been. Died a week ago Saturday and got buried at Lakewood on Tuesday. But you can’t keep someone like that down. Came back

to life and rose from the grave on Thursday!” I doubt any of you believe a word of this. Resurrection right now is a ridiculous notion.

Except for one fact. **OUR LORD JESUS IS RISEN AND REIGNS!**

In the verses that precede our text, Paul lays out “the awful alternative to Easter.” Consider the consequences of “no resurrection.” If no one ever rises from the dead, then Christ wasn’t raised either. If Jesus is still in his tomb, then when we proclaim him Savior, it’s a worthless message. Even worse, we’re actually lying when we say Jesus rose. And then our faith has no basis in fact. But it gets worse. If Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, then all those sins you and I keep committing still cling to us and must be punished. There goes our hope for a happy afterlife. And our loved ones who have already died, they have to suffer the consequences of their sins forever, which is what we have to look forward to too.

What an awful alternative to Easter! But if Jesus didn’t rise, we have to quit kidding ourselves, and drop all this nonsense about “hope and joy,” and stop deceiving ourselves like the people who belong to cults. Observable data tell us people don’t rise from the dead.

But **OUR LORD JESUS IS RISEN.** He was literally dead and buried, but now he is actually alive **AND REIGNS!**

Paul doesn’t wink and say, “Trust me on

this one, folks.” No, he lists a number of people who saw the risen Savior with their own eyes: Peter, the other apostles, James, 500 believers at one time, and finally Paul himself. Then there’s all the women who went to the tomb on Easter morning, saw Jesus, and touched him. These aren’t people who just wanted to believe so much that they were talked into a false outlook. Some of them had refused to believe. But then they actually saw Jesus alive. So they didn’t have to rely on faith, like you and I. They had proof. Many of those 500 Christians were still alive at the time Paul was writing. Any skeptics could go and question those people themselves. It’s indisputable. We have a risen, living Savior!

But we don’t always live in the joy of our Lord’s resurrection, do we? Many of us have wondered: Is the Bible the ultimate truth? Is ‘going to church to hear God’s Word’ worthwhile, when we don’t see many dramatic improvements in ourselves or others? Even the staunchest of believers can lose sight of what’s important: Jesus raised, sins forgiven, heaven promised, peace now. Katie Luther helped her husband out of a deep sadness. Do you know the story? One day she dressed all in black and went around the house crying inconsolably. When Martin Luther heard her, he rushed to his dear wife and asked, “Katie, what’s wrong.” “It’s my Lord,” Katie sobbed, “He... He... he’s dead!” “That’s non-sense!” Martin retorted. “Our Lord

isn’t dead. He’s risen and reigning.” “Why, then,” Katie asked, “have you been moping around these last days as if Jesus were dead? I thought surely our Lord had died, judging from the way you were acting.” I hope we all have a friend like Katie Luther who can rebuke us in such an uplifting way, restoring godliness to our perspective.

The fact that Jesus is alive makes a difference in our life, our outlook, our worldview, our striving for excellence now, our hopes for the future. And if it doesn’t make a difference, then either we can’t see the connection, or we’ve decided that the connection isn’t important and we should live as if Jesus’ resurrection is nothing more than something we hear about at church.

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* Firstfruits. For many years your pastors and teachers and grandparents have been teaching you to give the Lord firstfruits offerings. Carve off the first portion of your income for the Lord, a generous percentage, and joyfully live on the large leftovers. But do you know where the firstfruits practice comes from? God told his people long ago that when they harvested the first sheaf (bunch) of grain, they were to bring it to the Lord and present it as a special offering.

“The first sheaf? Take time away from harvesting the field to transport the first

sheaf to the Lord? What if it rains before I get my whole crop out of the field? Doesn't it make more sense for me to get all my grain into my barn and then give God the very last grain I process?" Well, yes, if you are the most important. But really God is the most important because he is the one who made the crops grow. When you give the Lord the firstfruits, the first of your grain (or livestock or income), you are saying, "Thank you, Lord, for your generosity. I trust you. Many other sheaves will follow this first one. They will be for me and my household. But this first one is for you." That's the origin of firstfruits. Giving God the firstfruits is a good practice for us when we harvest direct deposit dollars from our boss or our investments.

Let's see how firstfruits apply to Jesus. Paul says, "*Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man [Adam], the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man [Jesus]. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive again.*" Get it? Jesus is only the firstfruit. You and I are the rest of the fruits. (I'll bet you've never been so happy to be called a fruit.) As Christ was raised, so we believers will be raised, or to use Paul's word, we will be awakened from "sleep." That's all death is for us who are in Christ—a kind of sleep. This is why so many Christians don't "rage, rage against the dying of the light" (Dylan Thomas).

We just go to sleep in Jesus. And after a brief "nap," Jesus will awaken us to life everlasting. His resurrection guarantees this: he is just the firstfruits of those who fall asleep.

When Paul talks about falling asleep, he's not trying to sugar coat our future. That's why he also uses the word "death." He's not about to soften the consequences of our sins, like we often do today. Some people find it difficult to use words like "sin" and "death" and "hell." "Hey, nobody wants to hear you talk like that. Drop the F-bomb if you want, with some G-D missiles, but don't get all macabre on me." Lots of people no longer talk about "rebellious against God" or "violating his holy will." That's too harsh. No, no, so-n-so is "disturbed" or "has problems relating to others" or "has made some bad choices" or "had a lapse in judgment." Thank God for the Bible speaking clearly with words like "sin" and "responsibility" and "death" and "hell" and "eternal torment away from God." We are not afraid of such terms because our Lord has already faced the consequences of our sins. He died for us, and then he rose. So we, who started dying the moment we took our first breath, have had our immortality restored by Jesus' rising from the dead. The only reason we Christians put a lid on our coffins is to keep the stink in and the animals out. When Jesus rose victoriously on Easter morning, he made coffin lids and coffins a mere temporary necessity.

How do you celebrate Jesus' resurrection and yours? How do you fight the road rage, the gluttony, the sadness, the greed, the bickering? Don't try this at home, children, but Luther used to write sacred graffiti around his house. When he had days of doubt or discouragement, when questions and concerns crept into his cranium, Luther would write "*Vivit! Vivit! Vivit!*" in large letters on his table and on the walls of his room. That's Latin for "He lives! He lives! He lives!" This truth helps us regain the right perspective on life. We have a **living** Lord. So the longest our problems can last is till we die—unless Jesus comes back first. Either way we will be with the Lord—no more problems. In the meantime, we can live to honor God in all our choices, rejoice in all our work, eagerly help those who need a favor, and show love even to those who wrong us.

But there's something else we can do. We can make sure people get to hear this good news about Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection to eternal life. Isn't that why we keep praying, "Thy kingdom come"? Our attitude is: "Use me, Lord. Put people into my path who need to hear the good news. Then give me the words to say and a heart full of love for them. And since missionaries go all over the world in my place, help me bring my firstfruits offerings regularly to help pay the expenses of those missionaries and our local staff." And if, after all that, we want to help plant 100 new mission churches in ten years, we

can, because we're still alive.

Oh, we accept the fact that one day our loved ones will place our cold, lifeless body or ashes in some grave. This doesn't bother many of us. Our bodies will not be in the grave long. Remember Jesus is only the firstfruit. We're the rest of the fruits. As Paul puts it: *...each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.* In other words, when our Lord returns, first he will awaken all those who fell asleep trusting in him. According to other Bible verses all the unbelievers will also be raised to face the consequence of pushing Jesus away. *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power.* It won't matter whether the authorities are governments or terrorists or the powers in the spirit world—all dominion will come to an end. There will only be the rule of victorious Lord Jesus, and "*He will deliver the kingdom to God the Father,*" which includes us.

What an awesome day that will be!  
Glorious! Full of victory sounds! I wonder if we'll all break into song. Will we somehow know the words and the melody of a new song that we never learned before? Imagine the joy of seeing Christ the King! Since, by God's grace, we believers will be there, let's live each moment here for Christ the King.  
**HE IS RISEN AND HE REIGNS!**