

## IN CHRIST SHALL ALL BE MADE ALIVE

1 Corinthians 15:20–28

Key Verse: 15:22

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Do you ever wonder what Jesus is doing right now? To some people he may not seem real. People wonder if he really sees or knows what’s going on. The Bible says he does. It tells us our Lord Jesus rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and is now in the Father’s presence, at his own right hand, always interceding for us (Ro8:34; Heb7:25; 9:24). Today’s passage explains, more than anywhere else in the Bible, what our Lord Jesus Christ is doing now, and what he’s going to be doing until the end. He’s making believers *alive*. He’s *reigning* over the world. He’s bringing all kinds of people into the *kingdom*. One day he’ll come again, destroy the last enemy, death, and hand this kingdom over to God the Father. But why does any of this even matter? And in light of it, what should we do? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living words today.

In verses 12–19 Paul taught the necessity of the resurrection. Without it, Christian preaching and faith are empty, we’re lying about God, we’re still in our sins, we’re lost after death, and we’re most pitiful. It’s a bleak picture. Thankfully, it was all hypothetical. Read verse 20. “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” The good news is, Christ’s resurrection is a historical fact. The words “in fact” in Greek are literally “now,” “at this very moment.” Right now, Christ is risen! It’s such good news!

In verse 20 Paul calls Christ “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” He repeats the word “firstfruits” in verse 23. This word, “firstfruits,” is rich in meaning. After a barren, dreary winter, firstfruits are the first agricultural products to appear. They reflect God’s life-giving power and point to much more to come. In the same way, Christ’s resurrection is just a glimpse of what God is going to do for all believers someday. In the Old Testament, God instructed his people, on the day after the Passover Sabbath, to bring a sheaf of barley, called the firstfruits, and present it as a wave offering to the Lord (Lev23:9). Fifty days later, God wanted his people to celebrate the firstfruits with a feast of

thanksgiving. It was called the Feast of Harvest (Ex23:16), the Feast of Weeks (Ex34:22) or “the day of firstfruits” (Nu28:26). In the same way, because Christ our firstfruits is risen, God wants us to really celebrate his grace at Easter.

In the Bible “firstfruits” also refers to what is representative (Ro11:16). New believers are called “firstfruits” (Ro16:5; 1Co16:15; 2Th2:13; Jas1:18; Rev14:4). But here Paul is saying that Christ the firstfruits is representative of a whole new humanity. Look at verses 21–22. “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” Reasonable people find the resurrection hard to believe, so Paul is again using logic to explain that, in view of the whole Bible, the resurrection makes sense. He begins both these verses with the word “For.” Just as Adam, the representative of all sinful humanity, brought sin and death to the world, so Christ, who represents all redeemed and restored humanity, brings new life and resurrection hope to the world. In other words, Christ started a new history. As the firstfruits, he has the power not only to undo, but also to reverse and fully restore all Adam’s negative influence on us. Christ, the firstfruits, is our Head. Colossians 1:18 says, “And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”

The key words here are “in Christ.” Paul is not referring just to the general resurrection of both good and evil people (cf. Da12:2; Jn5:28–29; Ac24:15). He’s describing what happens to those who are truly “in Christ,” those united with Jesus. He’s the vine; we’re the branches, and to truly be “in” Christ means to “abide” in him (Jn15:4–10). Explaining this, Paul writes elsewhere, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal2:20).

Let’s read verse 22 again. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” “Made alive” pertains to both now and the future. So what does it mean *now*? Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live...” (Jn11:25). These words “yet shall he live” literally mean to start breathing. How does this happen? Jesus also said, “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will” (Jn5:21). The Risen Jesus, God the Son, gives life. In Greek, “gives life” is exactly the same word Paul uses here for “made alive.” In Greek this root word

is “zoe.” It sounds like our English exclamation “Zowie!” which means “Amazing!” But how does Christ actually make us “alive” now? Paul explains elsewhere, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Ro8:11). Again, the Greek root is “zoe.” When the Spirit comes to dwell within us, we’re really made alive. Sometimes we feel dead spiritually. But we can be made alive right now, if only we would repent, renew our faith in Jesus and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ac2:38). So let’s pray for this!

Let’s think a bit more about being “made alive.” The Bible says we were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked. We had no power to resist the power of sin and the devil. But God, being rich in mercy, and because of his great love, made us alive with Christ (Eph2:1–5). Now, we can be like that fish that swims against the current, and start living against the strong pull of the world and other spiritually dead people. It’s Christ’s resurrection power that transforms us into new creations (2Co5:17). And it’s his resurrection power that enables us to walk in newness of life (Ro6:4). When we’re made alive in Christ, we experience God’s forgiveness of all our sins (Col2:13). “Made alive” is not just barely having a pulse, barely breathing. Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (Jn10:10b). He calls it *abundant* life. When we’re made alive in Christ, we’re full of light (Jn1:4), full of the knowledge of God (Jn17:3), full of God’s love for one another (1Jn3:14; 4:7). Let’s really pray people may be made alive like this.

Look at verse 22b again. “...so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” In light of what comes before and after this verse (21b,23), “made alive” is not just an experience now. Paul also means that *in the future*, we’ll be raised from the dead. Romans 6:5 says, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” When Jesus comes again, he’s going to raise us from the dead and give us a glorious resurrection body. The Bible repeats this promise of God. 1 Corinthians 6:14 says, “God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.” 2 Corinthians 4:14 says, “...he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us...into his presence” (2Co4:14). In Philippians 3:21 Paul describes it with great expectation, saying, “...who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body...” Later in this chapter Paul is going to say more about our

resurrection bodies. But he first turns to describe what the Risen Christ is doing now, until he comes again (23–28).

What's he doing? Look at verse 24. "Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power." Indirectly this tells us what he's doing. This world is full of the power of sin and death and all kinds of dark powers. For the time being it seems Satan reigns supreme. But the Risen Christ with his resurrection power is quietly and steadily conquering it all and advancing God's kingdom. He once said, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened" (Mt13:33). What is this kingdom? The prophet Daniel described it as a kingdom which shall not pass away (Da7:14), where "the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever" (Da7:18). It's not a nationalistic kingdom, having only one race or people. It's where, "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages," a great multitude of sanctified people will be praising God for his salvation and for Jesus the Lamb of God (Rev7:9–10). Loud voices in heaven will be saying: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev11:15b). In this kingdom, our accuser the devil, who accuses us night and day, will finally be thrown down and destroyed (Rev12:10).

Look at verse 25. "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." This is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 110:1. Ever since his resurrection Christ has been putting his enemies under his feet, and he'll continue doing so until the end. Who are these enemies? They're both evil spiritual powers and people living in rebellion against God. They're tricky folks who think they're above the law. They oppose worship, exalt themselves, and act like they are God (2Th2:3–4). They're empowered by Satan (2Th2:9). But the Bible says the Lord Jesus will kill this lawless one with the breath of his mouth and bring him to nothing by the appearance of his coming (2Th2:8). Because Christ is reigning with his resurrection power, we who love him have nothing to fear from his enemies.

Look at verse 26. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." People may think death is natural. But to God, death is an *enemy*. God never intended human beings to die; he made each of us to dwell in paradise forever with him. But

through the devil's temptation, human beings sinned, and this brought death into the world. So the Bible says "our Savior Jesus Christ abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2Ti1:10). Still, death is a real threat. Our enemy the devil still holds the power of death (Heb2:14), and through it he tries to keep us in slavery to himself. But one day the Risen Christ will destroy death itself (26). At the very end of the Bible it says, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev21:4).

Paul has already written about the end (24). Now he describes the order which the Risen Christ will restore. Look at verse 27a. "For 'God has put all things in subjection under his feet.'" It's a quotation from Psalm 8:6. It's God's will that the Risen Christ bring all his enemies into subjection. And through him, God will leave nothing outside his control (Heb2:8). His resurrection power "enables him even to subject all things to himself (Php3:21b). In verses 27–28 Paul repeats the word "subjection" six times. Basically he's saying that in Christ's kingdom, God is God. God receives all the glory. Why is Paul stressing order so strongly? Actually he wrote this letter to promote order in the Corinthian church (7:35; 14:40). Four times in this letter Paul rebukes the arrogant (4:18,19; 5:2; 13:4). And here he writes that even the Risen Christ, who has "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Mt28:18), will, in the end, humbly subject himself to God the Father. It's so beautiful.

So what does it matter that Christ is our firstfruits? Why should we know that in him we can be made alive right now? Why should we know he's quietly advancing God's kingdom, reigning over his enemies, coming again to destroy death itself, restore creation order and bring all things back to God and his glory? If we don't live with such faith, we're unprepared for the real world, and we'll be deceived and swept away by it. The final result is worse than we think. Let's ask God to help us exercise real resurrection faith in Christ. How? Let's pray fervently this week, for ourselves, for others and for our world, based on resurrection faith. Let's reach out to someone who seems hopeless, with resurrection faith.