

# 1 Corinthians 15:20–22

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[ 0 : 00 ] Scripture is taken from 1 Corinthians 15, verses 20 through 22. As you search for it through your Bibles, those of you who are able, please stand to your feet for the reading of God's word.

1 Corinthians 15, verses 20 through 22. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruit of those who have fallen asleep.

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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. I'm going to get excited.

There's one great reason to be excited this morning. Well, please join me as I pray.

[ 1 : 19 ] Father, we come to your word. It is a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path. And so, Father, would you illumine the road before us this morning?

Would you make much of the Lord Jesus? We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. This past week, I had an image appear on one of my social media feeds.

It was an image etched on top of a stone coffin. And it showed a mom and a child emerging from it. So you can imagine this coffin. It has a giant artistic crack rendered through it. And the mom's hand was reaching out and a little child was crawling from it.

The notation on the piece, this artistic rendering, was that the mom and the child both died in childbirth.

[ 2 : 24 ] It arrested my attention because it was a striking piece. But as I began to reflect on it some more, it's actually quite an absurd image.

A woman and a child breaking out of their tomb. I have never personally witnessed a coffin pushed open from the inside.

I have never seen a corpse sit up once declared dead. Granted, I have no desire to ever see such a thing. These are reserved for movies.

These depictions, they're fictional. Creative renderings of an alternate reality that simply aren't true. Dead things don't come back to life.

Even more so, dead people do not come back to life. Last week we came out of a text that declared death reigns.

[ 3 : 24 ] There is no remedy for it. There is no vaccination for it. There is no immunity to it. There is no return.

Death is the unconquerable foe. The unsatisfied enemy. It attests to our mortality. There is no more factual statement that you can say than all people die.

All people die. And as we come to the text this morning, there is a conclusion of two facts. One factual statement asserts the inevitability of death.

The other, the inevitability of the resurrection. It is the confrontation. It is the confrontation of two realities. And this Easter morning, we will spend our time in these short three verses.

And this Easter morning, we will spend our time in these short three verses. And this Easter morning is to make this clear. The fact of the resurrection guarantees the future of the redeemed.

[ 4 : 38 ] The fact of the resurrection guarantees the future of the redeemed. And I will navigate this text really in two points. The fact of the resurrection and the future of the redeemed.

And I've lifted them straight from the text. You'll see that in verse 20. In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. And regarding the future, in Christ shall all be made alive.

Well, the fact of the resurrection. The assertion of the bodily resurrection of the dead certainly creates skeptics. I can't believe it.

I've never seen it. I can't believe it. I wasn't there. And apparently, that skepticism was at the church of Corinth as well. It would seem that none of the Corinthian Christians witnessed Jesus' resurrection.

Perhaps that's why Paul opens up this chapter by recounting a list of witnesses to the resurrection. You'll see it in chapter 15, verse 5 and following.

[ 5 : 48 ] He says, Jesus has resurrected. And let me tell you, who saw it? Peter saw it. James saw it. The rest of the 12 saw it. And 500 other people saw it.

And in addition, I actually saw it as well. Paul is saying, I'm not delusional in this. There are others who can attest to this fact.

Well, it still produced skeptics. Even more so, one of the skeptical reasons is the finality of death. The claim that it had somehow been overcome is quite an assertion. Therefore, it's unsurprising that there were skeptics. There would be skeptics. And according to chapter 15, verse 12, the objection arises.

Some in the church at Corinth were saying, there is no resurrection from the dead. The unbelievability of the resurrection of the dead had led to the unbelief of the Corinthians.

[ 6 : 53 ] The skeptics among the church began to see the resurrection as fictional, not factual. To them, it was fictional rather than foundational.

Now, Paul in this chapter, I've only selected three verses, he lays out the longest treatment in our Bibles about the resurrection of the dead. What will it look like? How will it happen?

What's the order? How does this all unfold? And I'll leave that to the rest of your Easter reading. But here he defends the resurrection. And he says it can't be disregarded.

It is an essential non-negotiable. The good news of the Christian faith isn't simply Jesus died for our sins. Now, that is great news. But it also includes that he was raised on the third day.

It's not enough for Jesus simply to die as a hero for his people. It's necessary that he was raised back to life and ascended into heaven.

[ 7 : 58 ] Paul is not willing to offer this truncated gospel. Of first importance, he writes, Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day and appeared.

The Corinthians wanted some fictional resurrection. But for Paul, it was factual. It was a bodily resurrection. Not simply, as some contemporaries argue, a resurrection.

Sure, Jesus resurrected in this idealistic way. His teachings live on. His morality lives on. But certainly not his body.

No, Paul would assert. We don't... Jesus doesn't live on in memory. Jesus, the man, lives on. This is what Paul asserts.

Paul himself witnessed the resurrected Jesus. He is able to say that he himself saw the resurrection. He is...

[ 8 : 59 ] To him, it's a fact. And you'll see how this text lays out. We didn't spend our time reading it. But there's a series of if statements. Negative statements. If the resurrection didn't happen, then Christ wasn't raised.

If Christ wasn't raised, Paul would say, my preaching is in vain. And if my preaching is in vain, surely your faith is in vain. And if Christ was not raised, your faith is futile.

You're still dead in your sins. And, of all people, the most to be pitied. And after all these if-negative statements, Paul comes back with this resounding but statement in verse 20.

But in fact. Let me tell you the first true statement after these eight verses. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.

Now, I don't edit the Bible. But if I could edit the Bible, these would be in caps. But in fact, Christ had been raised. It's one of these beautiful portions of the Bible.

[ 10 : 09 ] Often led by this phrase, but now. But now. They're divine exemptions to the ordinary or natural world.

They disrupt how we experience reality. They're foundational gospel truths. So you might hear verses like, no one is justified in the sight of God.

But now, the righteousness of God has been manifest. Or you might hear statements like, the end of all things is death. But now, you have been set free.

And here is one of these giant, grand exceptions. You may not believe the resurrection. But now, I assert to you.

He's resurrected. The grand exception. He descended into hell. And died.

[11:14] Was buried. And on the third day, he rose again. On the third day, he rose again. And it's the declaration of all of Christendom, actually. Whether you're Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, global Protestant.

Every church that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, believe he rose bodily from the dead. Well, what does it even mean?

Why does it matter that Jesus rose from the dead? Well, real quickly, let me just spit out a couple. One, it validates who he is. His identity. He was both God and man.

And through his victory over death, it attests to his divinity and his supremacy. It validates his identity. It vindicates him as righteous. It vindicates him as righteous.

For only death befalls those who are guilty of sin. And the fact that he was not guilty of sin. Death could not hold him.

[12:14] The sinless Savior died for sins he himself did not commit. It validates who he is. It vindicates him as righteous. But it does something more.

It has implications for the future. Namely, for you and I. And today, if you walk home with anything, walk home with this.

The resurrection of Jesus guarantees your resurrection from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees your resurrection from the dead.

The second point, the future of the redeemed. Paul uses this interesting metaphor of firstfruits. You see it in verse 20. Christ has been raised from the dead. The firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Firstfruits are simply the first harvest of a crop of a particular season. Biblically speaking, they're rich in meaning. God's people were given laws where they were to set aside the firstfruits to God.

[13:20] They were to consecrate their firstfruits to God. They were offerings of allegiance, of thanksgiving, attesting to the fact that God's people would harvest what was given by God.

God's people harvested what was given by God, and therefore they ought to give it back to God. It was the first and representative part of the whole harvest that would come later that season.

Jesus being the firstfruit, in one sense, means he's the first of a crop. He's the first to rise from the dead. But it goes further. One writer puts it this way.

He's the first of a kind involving the rest that follow thereafter in destiny. In other words, what happens with the firstfruits necessitates what will happen to the rest.

Christ as the firstfruit is a pledge of a full harvest. Christ's resurrection is a pledge that what follows will be a full harvest of resurrections.

[14:25] Now, I've got to illustrate this. We're coming out of Chicago winter. A couple days ago, it still felt like winter. The barren trees, the lifeless garden plots, the budless shrubs have been dormant, seemingly dead for a few months.

And there you are, on a warm day like today or yesterday. You're walking along, and there you see it. The first shoot that came out of the ground. There's color that's not white or brown.

There's color. And as the first shoot emerges from the ground and it begins to bud, you know, for a fact, that others will follow.

The remainder will follow. And when you see that first blossom, it is indicative that spring is coming. New life is destined to emerge. The first glimpse assures you that the rest will follow suit.

Now, creation deteriorated in the fall and it lays dead as if it were dormant in winter. But it will sprout in the spring and it will be full of life in the summer.

[15:40] That which appears dead is brought back to life. John Calvin, the 16th century French theologian, has a beautiful depiction of this.

He says, death itself shall teem with life. Death itself shall teem with life. We have merely casually fallen asleep, the Bible tells us, to be awakened the next morning by an alarm.

Our alarm. When the Christian dies, we merely await heaven's wake-up call. This is the promise of the Christian life.

This is the significance of Easter. Certainly, we take delight in the fact that death is vanquished and Christ has triumphed. But it is actually for our benefit.

For our benefit. Occasionally, I'll read from a catechism. A catechism is just an old way of helping young people remember stuff.

[ 16 : 45 ] And it's always in a question-answer format. This is from the Heidelberg Catechism, the 45th question. And it reads this. The question is posed in this way. What does the resurrection of Christ profit us?

And the answer, first, by His resurrection, He has overcome death. That He might make us partakers of the righteousness which He has obtained for us by death.

Second, we are also raised up by His power to a new life. And here it is. Third, the resurrection of Christ is to us a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection.

To further explain this, Paul gives us two forestatements. You see it in verses 21 and 22. He wants us to know how this happens.

How this happens. How does it logically proceed this way? Christ has risen, so you too will rise. And Paul pretty much says, let me explain this, how this is applied to you.

[ 17 : 57 ] For as by a man death came, 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.

It's actually two parallel statements strongly related. First, he identifies the human predicament. It's origins in Genesis chapters 1 through 3. Here we're reminded of Adam, who because of his disobedience created these ongoing ripple effects felt even today.

His rejection of the divine word and rebellion against God's ways resulted in his death. The great tragedy is that we not only bear the image of God, but we bear the image of Adam.

We inherited the image of Adam. His very nature. One can say that his disobedience, rebellion, and rejection is hereditary.

[ 19 : 06 ] As a result, death befalls us. Adam's sin had universal consequences and effects. His disobedience is our death sentence.

And our ongoing rebellion leads to our ruin. We share the corporate outcome of Adam. He is our representative.

We all die because of our representative, Adam. And in the same way, Paul now presents an alternate corporate representative, namely Jesus.

Jesus offers a different outcome, namely life. And so here you have Adam and Christ, two representatives of two different groups.

And Paul's argument is this. Your representative determines your fate. What happens to the representative determines the outcome for those in the group.

[ 20 : 03 ] Now that, let me, so the most famous story, actually I can't say that. One of the most well-known stories in the Bible, you'll say, oh, Daniel and the Lion's Den, possibly.

But I'm going to say David and Goliath. You might remember the story. A little David, shepherd boy, is sent out into, to visit his brothers on the battlefield.

And the picture is clear. The army of God, Israel's on one side. The army of the Philistines, the big bad enemy is on the other side.

And the Bible recounts for us, Goliath coming out of the Philistines. And he's taunting the people of God. He's taunting them.

And what he's taunting them about, or what he's summoning them to, is pick a man. Any man. Representative. And what happens to that man happens to the people.

[ 21 : 05 ] And I will represent the Philistines. What happens to me will happen to the Philistines. Choose a man for yourselves. This is how the verses read.

What happens to Goliath would happen to the people. What happens to the challenger, David, would be the fate of the nation. The representative determines the outcome for the group.

And you might say, well, Bing, that's a long time ago. Are there instances of that today? Well, let me illustrate it in this way. And thankfully, there are some law students here that can help correct me if I'm wrong.

But a few years back, I was made aware of a class action lawsuit against the shoe company. Now, I had two pairs of those shoes. And so my co-worker at the time let me know that, hey, there is a class action lawsuit.

And if you go to this website and you input your name and your address, you might be able to join this class.

[ 22 : 18 ] And so I went to the website because I spent a lot of money on these shoes and opted in because the payout was a refund of the shoes. If the single consumer representative won the case, I would also win the case.

And I received two checks in the mail as a result of that lawsuit.

The single consumer representative had won the case. And I was a beneficiary because I simply opted in.

I did nothing. I ordered those two pairs of shoes and went online and filled in my contact information. I benefited and won because the single representative won.

I wasn't physically present for the verdict. I didn't go to court. I can't attest to it. It was simply told to me via a letter and a check. And I received a check that convinced me that the verdict or the pronouncement was official.

[ 23 : 33 ] And this is what Paul is describing for us here. Choose your representative. And I want to be careful here because if you read the text carefully, you might deduce or conclude that in the same way all humanity dies, then does that mean all humanity rises unto salvation.

And lest we reach the conclusion that and equate everyone to be beneficiaries, Paul is very careful to make that distinction. And I'll point it out because it's actually not in our verses.

But there it is in verse 23. The question emerges, wait, wait, wait, how will this actually happen, Paul? Like, what's the timeline, the chronology? Well, he says, to each his own order.

First Christ, the first fruits. Then at his coming. You see that phrase there. Who benefits? Those who opt in. Those who belong to Christ.

And what does it mean to belong to Christ this morning? To belong is simply to be possessed by. To belong to Christ means to be possessed by Christ.

[ 24 : 53 ] Obtained, bought, purchased, secured through his death. We are the redeemed. Those who belong to Christ have willingly given themselves to Christ in faith and are his followers and friends.

As one writer puts it so helpfully. He says, humans are in Adam. By nature. In Christ.

By faith. By default, we are in Adam. You are born into the human race. You are born into Adam.

And you may argue, well, I wasn't in the garden because I surely wouldn't have done that.

And possibly. Therefore, I'm not culpable. That may be true. But if you're honest, you've joined Adam's side.

Your shortcomings are self-evident. I don't need to tell you where you fall short. You fall asleep knowing how you fall short. Your sinful tendencies lead to your very shame.

[ 26 : 04 ] Your heart, the Bible says, naturally bent away from God. The Bible tells us no one by nature is in Christ. Nobody naturally inherits the eternal favor of God.

There's no one good. Not one. You see, the cross of Jesus is the cosmic class action lawsuit. It is the cosmic clash between God and evil.

God and the forces of hell. God and the deceiving serpent, Satan. God and death. By faith, one opts in. This is the language the Bible uses for the Christian life.

When we identify with Jesus, what happens? We are crucified with him. I didn't opt into that. We are buried with him in death.

We are raised to new life. This is the assertion of Christianity. Jesus won, therefore I win.

[ 27 : 06 ] Though I wasn't there for the pronouncement. I didn't see, actually, I guess I saw the empty grave. If you go to Jerusalem these days, you can see an empty grave. But I wasn't there.

I wasn't there for the verdict or the pronouncement when Jesus said it is finished on the cross. But I received the letter and you have the letter as well.

It's communicated to me in this text. The payout is new life. That it's emerging in me now and will be fully realized in my resurrected body.

We rightfully acknowledge this morning that Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. That he was buried and he was raised on the third day in accordance to the scriptures.

And he appeared. And we celebrate it and rightfully so. But did you know that will be the same for you? As certain as you are of death, you can be as certain that you will be made alive.

[ 28 : 21 ] A hundred percent of those who die in Adam go into the ground. A hundred percent of those who die in Christ emerge from the ground.

The fact of Jesus' resurrection guarantees the future of the redeemed. One day, I'll talk to you, but I'll talk to my kids.

I doubt they're listening, but they will have, they will get to bury their dad. And what they'll be able to say is this, Bing died.

He's buried or incinerated right there. But note this, he was raised. He will be raised. And he will appear.

Because what you read in 1 Corinthians 15 is that in the same way Christ died, was buried, rose, and appeared, is your fate as well.

[ 29 : 36 ] That you will die. You will be buried. That you will be made alive. And that you will appear again. Lo and behold, you will have your own Easter.

Well, that would be spectacular. Spectacular. Well, there's more to this chapter.

But you can, you can take that on yourself. Father, we thank you. We thank you that Christ the Lord is risen.

Risen. Risen forever. Exalted on high. Seated and reigning. that death, our unconquerable foe, has been crushed to death.

And so, Father, for us in this room that are dying in Adam, we we we join that class action lawsuit.

[ 30 : 55 ] We opt in. we want to be in the Lord Jesus Christ. That whatever happens to our representative happens to us. And so, Father, for all of us, whether for the first time or the 50,000th time, we pledge ourselves once again to you, knowing that we have a faithful victor who will summon us from our very graves.

Until that day, we await that wake-up call. Go with us this day, we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.