

Christ, Our Firstfruits

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[0 : 00] As you'll see in the screen there, the theme for this evening, Christ, our first fruits. We want to look at this wonderful expression of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We obviously need to understand what we mean by first fruits. That's why we see in the screen there, first fruits first. But then the more considering what Paul tells us here in his letter to the Corinthians, Jesus, the first fruits, particularly in relation to the promise, the promise of Christ as our first fruits, and Jesus as our pioneer, he who was first raised from the dead to everlasting life, Christ, our first fruits.

Just read the particular verses again that we want to focus our hearts on, verse 20, 21 and 22. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits 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 sinned, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Each in his own order. And here's the aspect of pioneer Christ, the first fruits. Then it is coming those who belong to Christ. And as I mentioned this morning, I'm just going to echo again this evening, something I suppose that's very much in my own mind at this time.

[1 : 34] I'm about to complete 12 years of ministry here in Livingston. I know there's still a meeting to take, but very much this is a completion of 12 years.

Maybe 12 years is a particular significant time. I don't know, but certainly, in a sense, I want to sign off this 12 years where we really all ought to begin and all ought to end.

I want to, as it were, sign off this 12 years of service with the Lord Jesus Christ. Because he is Lord, and he is Saviour, and he is the reason for your salvation and my salvation.

And with whom better and what better to mark fully a particular passing of time in ministry than with the Lord Jesus Christ. He's never left me these 12 years.

I've certainly failed him many, many times in these 12 years, but he's never left me. He has shown his steadfast love and faithfulness over these years.

[2 : 45] And he is my Saviour. So I pray your Saviour. And he's to be glorified. And I pray that, yes, the Lord Jesus will be glorified here in Livingston, certainly so long as God gives me strength to continue the work of ministry here.

And in the inevitability of time, the time when God will call me forth to beyond here. I pray that, yes, the gospel will still be proclaimed here.

In the name of the Lord Jesus, continue to be glorified here in West Lothian and particularly through the congregation of Livingston Churches.

Of course, there are many passages we could refer to as when we want to express the joy and the presence, the power, the grace, the love of the Lord Jesus, his work, the gifts that he's given to his church.

But we're going to turn to this passage as part of the passage anyway that we read in this chapter of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, his first letter.

[3 : 58] Because we want to see Jesus. We want to see Jesus in all his grace, his love, his presence, his power, his work, his gifts to those who are his.

Because this passage speaks of Jesus as the first fruits. Then you might ask, well, why are we turning to this particular emphasis of Jesus being first fruits?

What does this passage tell us? What is this passage telling us about the Lord Jesus? Well, we do need to turn, first of all, to the meaning first fruits. First, if you like, first fruits in context.

And those of you who were at the annual congregational meeting on Wednesday, you'll remember that's what we highlighted. Or we were highlighting particular aspects of what first fruit signifies in relation to our giving to the Lord.

We began that meeting with a short address on the importance of our spiritual giving to the Lord. We saw that this emphasis on first fruits, we'll come to the origin of the word in a minute, but first fruits that spoke of our giving of ourselves to the Lord and giving of our resources to the Lord. [5 : 17] And the whole aspect of that giving, that spiritual foundation of our giving, really concerning a heart of sacrifice, a heart of devotion, a devotion to the Lord, and thankfulness to God who's given us all things, given us all that we need for life.

He's given to us, to me and to you, all that we need of his power, of his might, of his grace. And what he's given for our temporal needs, of course, he's given for our spiritual needs. And because of what God has given to us, we're to give back to God. And that emphasis on our giving to God was directed or stemmed from the whole biblical concept of first fruits. Something that we see both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Because as we saw in the original meaning of first fruits, as we noticed in the Old Testament, first fruits spoke and speaks of what's first, what was best.

In the original meaning, what was best from the produce of the land. And what was best to be offered to God and thankfulness and really expectation of future harvests to come.

[6 : 43] So the first fruits, the giving of a measure of the best to the Lord, giving it in sacrifice, giving it in worship to God.

As we said, thankfulness, expectation of future harvest, honoring God. Because God had created all that exists, all of creation.

Everything belongs to God. And so what's first and what's best belongs to God. And to be given back to God. And that obligation to give back to God, to give to him a measure of what God has given to his people.

Well, we see that first of all in Exodus, Exodus 23, 19, where we read, The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God.

And from that we learn, or derive from that command, that all who love God are to give God what's best.

[7 : 54] And then, of course, as we notice on Wednesday evening, that involves you. All who are Christ by faith, all who serve him, all who know him as Lord and Savior, you give back to God.

You give to him your very self. And further stated in the New Testament, when we read of first fruits in relation to believers. We read in James 1, verse 18, that believers are a kind of first fruits of God's creatures.

First fruits. Just as with the Old Testament concept of first fruits being devoted to God. Believers being devoted to God. Special to God. Especially God's.

Chosen people. Chosen by God. Chosen to love him. Chosen to serve him. Chosen to glorify him. Now, we will come to bring all this to the Lord Jesus Christ, but we've still got to grasp first fruits in the, as it were, the original sense.

Believers, even first fruits, devoted to God, giving of self what God has blessed. First fruits were to be set apart for God.

[9 : 07] Believers are set apart. Holy to God, a holy people. Not through any merit of our own, but because of the merits of the Lord Jesus. And you give to him in response to all that the Savior has given to you.

Because he's given you his righteousness when he died on the cross for you, when he bore your sins on that cross in Calvary. First fruits, frankly, were offered annually.

Offered with the annual sacrifice. And you can say this, that believers are part of the great harvest of God. And you who know him as Lord, as Savior, you're a testimony of that harvest.

And there's the promise of a much greater future, a glorious gathering of the Lord's people in that great harvest of the world when Jesus returns.

And the dead in Christ will rise. And all who are his with him forever. In the new heavens and the new earth. And it's that connection between the first fruits of the harvest.

[10 : 21] That annual remembering of God's faithfulness. What was expressed in the giving of the first fruits to God. It's that connection with the first fruits that we read of in the Old Testament.

And the Lord Jesus Christ. Because that's what we read there in 1 Corinthians 15 of Jesus. Jesus being the first fruits. In fact, mentioned twice in that short passage that we read.

Because we have to see in Jesus, as it were, the fuller expression of the biblical concept of first fruits. And that connection that ties in all that we've been seeing and seeing of the Old Testament

first fruits.

Bringing it to the Lord Jesus Christ. The fulfillment of first fruits. Because if all scripture points to the Lord Jesus. Then what we've already seen in the Old Testament regarding first fruits.

Takes us to the Lord Jesus. What we've read of believers as being first fruits. Takes us to the Lord Jesus. Because that's what exactly we saw there in 1 Corinthians 15.

[11 : 32] Jesus, the first fruits. I suppose we have to say that this is maybe not the most common or certainly a very usual way of speaking of Jesus.

Because of course when we think of Jesus, when we refer to our Savior, well we can refer to him in different ways. We speak of Jesus as Lord, as Savior, as Redeemer, as Elder Brother, as the Suffering Servant.

But we don't speak of Jesus very often as first fruits. But we must. We have to. I mean, it's scriptural for a start. And it's so important to realize what we're saying when we're speaking of Jesus as first fruits.

What it means for the sake of the Lord's people. The great scope that this word first fruits tells us. The scope of Jesus' love. The scope of Jesus' work.

The scope of Jesus' grace for his people. It's included in this word and expression of Jesus as first fruits. And we've read this particular section in 1 Corinthians 15.

[12 : 45] This section that tells of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And how his resurrection guarantees the resurrection of all who are in Christ.

All who have slept in him, who have died in him. Before the Lord Jesus returns. And it's the emphasis that Paul gives us here in this passage.

How Jesus' resurrection guarantees the resurrection of believers. We see that in context of Jesus, the first fruits.

And even if we tie in what we were thinking of this morning in our morning service. Because in our morning service, you remember, we focused on the subject of time.

Time under heaven. Time lived under the sovereignty of God. Time lived in his presence. Under his control. This side of eternity.

[13 : 41] But we've got to see the fuller picture. We've got to see us. In fact, this was mentioned again this morning. That one day, time as we know it will end.

And Jesus returns. And his being the first fruits, as Paul tells us here. The first fruits of those who've fallen asleep. And we have to see that in connection with the end of time.

With the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. When Jesus, having risen from the dead, has ascended to heaven. And one day will return from heaven to earth. And bring into his glorious kingdom all.

All who are his. So, what do we see then? In Christ being the first fruits, as Paul tells us here. The first fruits of those who've fallen asleep.

Well, we come to see that the Lord Jesus is the guarantee of your resurrection. The resurrection on that last day. And that really tells us a promise.

[14 : 49] See again verses 19 to 20. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.

The first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. So, Paul, remember he's writing this particular chapter to tell of the resurrection of believers in that last day.

And he wants, Paul wants his readers to be in absolutely no doubt. That because the Lord Jesus has been raised from the dead, raised on that third day after his death.

Then all who are in Christ. All who are in Christ. Who have died in Christ. All will rise to newness of life in that last day. And so, Paul writes of that sure hope that every believer in Christ has of his resurrection, her resurrection.

When the Lord Jesus returns. On Friday morning, that truth came to me very, very spectacularly, I might say.

[15 : 54] I was attending a webinar hosted by an organization called Release International. It's an organization that's involved in the, I suppose, alerting ourselves to the trials of the persecuted church.

And there were different speakers who spoke about different parts of the world of the persecuted church. And one particular indigenous believer. One very wise, godly man.

This man spoke of a young martyr. A martyr who died age 25. This young man who was about to be executed for his Christian faith.

And that young man, before his death, he quoted the words we've just read. 1 Corinthians 15, verse 19. And he announced, just before he died, he announced that his hope in Christ, it wasn't only for his short life.

It was for all eternity. And he had that assurance that he'll rise. He'll rise and be with Christ forever. And as that much older, godly man spoke these very words.

[17:11] The very point that he spoke these words. My other computer screen. It so happened as I was preparing for this evening. These words were there. That young East African martyr.

He had the same sure hope of eternal life that Paul had. And I pray that you have. And it's what Paul is expressing here. The sure hope of eternal life in the Lord Jesus.

And Paul has written this. He's writing this. To assure his readers. To assure you. To assure me. To assure all of us. Of that certainty.

The certainty. Of that hope. The hope. Centred. Resurrection. The promise of resurrection.

The Lord Jesus. And Paul wants to express that sure hope. By using this reference of first fruits. Of Jesus. As first fruits.

[18:14] Then again. Why is Paul speaking of Jesus. As first fruits. In relation to resurrection. This is where we have to go back. To what we're thinking of.

On Wednesday evening. And in our readings from Leviticus 23. If you remember. We were looking at the Jewish feast. Of weeks. The harvest thanksgiving. And at that harvest thanksgiving.

That happened once a year. The first sheaf of grain. Was waved by a priest. Waved before the Lord. It was a symbol of the harvest to come. And that first sheaf.

Was known as the first fruits. And it symbolized. The guarantee. Of a good harvest to come. That sheaf was waved. On the day after the Jewish Sabbath.

In other words. Our first day of the week. The day that Jesus rose from the dead. You see. Paul is using first fruits here. When he's referring to the Lord Jesus.

[19:12] Because of course Jesus rose. On that first day after the Jewish Sabbath. That first day of the week. And Jesus as our first fruits.

Guarantees the harvest. To come the harvest of resurrected souls. On that last day. And your hope. The hope of all who are in Christ. That hope of resurrection.

It's guaranteed. Because Jesus has already risen. His. We might put it like this. His resurrection body. Has been waved before us.

As a sign. That all who are in Christ. Will rise from the grave. To that. That newness of life. In him. And so.

You know. Whenever even we talk of resurrection. Let's not just think of resurrection. Once a year at Easter time. Let's continue to remember the resurrection. Of the Lord Jesus. So when you're thinking of resurrection.

[20:10] And giving glory to God. For the resurrection of Jesus. You're also at the same time. You're affirming. That you who are in Christ. You also.

Will rise to everlasting life. And so to speak of Jesus. As the first fruits of those. Who've fallen asleep. Gives you that. Or re-emphasizes.

That sure hope. That you have. That death isn't the end. And that your life in Christ. That life in Christ. Is a certainty. Because Jesus died.

And Jesus rose again from the dead. And as he died for you. He rose for you. And his rising. Is that guarantee. That your.

Life in Christ. Is no mere. Short-lived. Blessing. Your life in Christ. As an eternal blessing. That's never going to end. Because of Jesus.

[21:07] The first fruits. But we can also say this. That with Jesus being described. As the first fruits. It tells. Of the promise. That all believers have.

Of resurrection. You see the first fruits. Remember in the Old Testament. The first fruits were presented. To God annually. Right. And they were presented. In faith.

Faith that God would provide. For subsequent harvests. And the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus our first fruits. The resurrection of Jesus. Gives you that.

Sure promise. Of that final. Once for all sacrifice. When all the sheaves. Will be brought into the kingdom. And then. Be no more harvest of souls.

Because the gathering. Will be complete. Christ. And I ask you then. Will you be amongst. That final gathering. Of the Lord's people. Will you be amongst.

[22 : 05] As it were. Of the sheaves. Having been gathered in. And knowing the blessing. Of the presence. Of our Savior eternally. Christ. I promise.

Then. Secondly. In relation to Jesus. The first fruits. Christ. Our pioneer. The first fruits. The first fruits. Because. Paul just doesn't mention.

Christ. The Lord Jesus. First fruits. Once. He mentions him. Twice in fact. In this passage. When he speaks of. As it were. The order of resurrection. Verse 23.

But each. In his own time. Or in order. Christ. The first fruits. Then at his coming. All. Who belong. To Christ. Christ. See what Paul's.

Been saying here. In this. Next part. Of the passage. I mean. Paul's already established. That. Well. The resurrection of believers. Is guaranteed. It's assured. It's absolutely promised.

[23 : 02] Because. Because of Jesus. The first fruits. Jesus. Has risen from the dead. He's gone before. But Paul wants to. Really. To confirm this. This amazing truth.

And he does it. By an analogy. If we were to have read. Verse 21. And 22. Paul spoke of. Let's read. As by man.

As by a man. By Adam. Came death. By a man. Has also come. The resurrection. Of the dead. For as in Adam. All die. So also in Christ. Shall all be made alive.

And so. Paul's been comparing. Adam. The first man. He's been comparing. Adam. With Jesus. Just as death. Came through one man. Death came through Adam. Death through our.

Representative man. Adam. And therefore. We're all. We all die. So the resurrection. Of the dead. Comes through one man. Comes through the second Adam. Comes through a representative man.

[24 : 00] The Lord Jesus. All die. Because we all share. In the sinfulness of Adam. All die. Because of the fallen. Or the context. Of original sin.

But with Jesus. As a representative. Man. He who's been raised. Raised to life. All who are in Christ. Will be raised to life.

For as in Adam. All die. Also in Christ. All be made alive. And as Paul tells us. When Adam fell. When Adam sinned. The process of death.

Began. But with the Lord Jesus. Having been risen. That process of death. That process. Has been overturned. Jesus has triumphed. Over death.

Yes. Believers. Will still die. Yes. Jesus has triumphed. Over death. Death still is present. But it follows.

[24 : 56] That believers. Who do die in the Lord. Will be raised. To newness of life. Because death. Can't hold believers. Forever. If Jesus has conquered death. By his resurrection.

So Paul's focusing. As we said. On the resurrection. Of believers. Of believers in Christ. The resurrection. Of believers. Will happen. In those.

Who have. Been in Adam. And who know eternal life. In Christ. You have that. Assurance. Of your resurrection. And with the resurrection.

Of all who are in Christ. Affirm. Then Paul affirms. The supremacy. Of the Lord Jesus. As our pioneer. Because Paul speaks. Of an order. An order of resurrection.

Each in his own order. Christ the first fruits. Then at his coming. Those who belong to Christ. Each in his own order. Each. As it were. In his own term.

[25 : 53] Paul's making it. Absolutely clear. Of the unity. That believers have. In the Lord Jesus. Even that unity. In Christ's resurrection. And the resurrection.

Of Jesus. And your resurrection. Absolutely. Absolutely. Interconnected. But at the same time. There's a distinction. There's a distinction.

And priority. Christ first. And then believers. A priority. If you like. In time. As well as a priority. In rank. And this is where.

This whole matter of. Jesus as first fruits. Reappears. The Lord Jesus. The first fruits. The first. The first. And then when he comes. When he returns to earth.

Then those who are his. Those. Who are his. Will rise. So Jesus. He has the preeminence. This is his resurrection.

[26 : 50] That makes possible. Your resurrection. He has to have the priority. He has to have the glory. He's been first. To be raised.

To eternal life. And so the event. Of resurrection. The event of. Even the resurrection. Of the dead. That began. With the Lord Jesus.

His resurrection. And all who are in Christ. Will follow. Follow on. From Christ's resurrection. And that's going to culminate.
When Jesus returns. Jesus. Our first fruits. It's his resurrection. That. That we affirm. And confess. And. Well.
And see in context. With that promise. The promise of. Of your resurrection. To eternal life. Because Jesus. Has gone before. Remember.
[27 : 42] First fruits. The first. The best. Devoted to God. Given sacrificially. In this all. To Jesus. He is the first. He is the best.
He offered himself. As the. As the sin offering. For the sake of those. Who would. Follow him. In resurrection. What about you?
Will you follow. The Lord Jesus. Will you follow. The one. Who promises. Eternal life. To all. Who trust in him. Grasp. That promise.
Believe it. Look to him. Trust in him. And follow him. And know that Jesus. Is the first fruits. For your sake. And for the glory.
Of his name. Amen. Let us pray. Our heavenly father. As we. Have been brought. To see. The wonder.
[28 : 38] The truth. The glory. Of Jesus. The first fruits. He. Our pioneer. He who has given us. The promise. Of everlasting life. Through his resurrection.
From the dead. We pray. Lord. That all who hear. All who hear. The name of Jesus. Will know that. That Jesus is. The first fruits.
The first. The best. The one offered. To you. The one given. In sacrifice. The one who is. Our promise. Our sure promise.
Lord bless. We pray. Your word. Forgive anything. That's been said. Amiss. Anything. That's been. Amiss. From the truth. Of your word. But Lord bless.
And continue. With us. As we. Continue. In praise. Before your name. Lord. We pray. These things. In Jesus name. Amen.