

The Resurrection in God's Redemptive Plan

Christ the Firstfruits

The Harvest Has Begun

1 Corinthians 15:20-23

As the sun rose this morning, we were reminded that God often uses the dawning of a new day to picture the beginning of something greater. Darkness gives way to light... and what seemed final in the night is revealed differently in the morning.

That is exactly what the resurrection of Jesus Christ represents in God's redemptive plan.

In an earlier message in this series on redemption, we saw that death entered the world by one man, Adam, and that all who are in Adam share in that death. But we also saw the glorious truth that life comes through another Man — the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible doesn't stop there. It now takes us one step further — not just showing that Christ gives life, but showing that His resurrection is the beginning of something far greater than a single event.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept (v. 20).

The resurrection, then, is not just something we can rejoice in — it is a harvest we are to anticipate.

When Christ rose from the dead, He did not rise as an isolated miracle. He rose as the firstfruits — the first portion of a coming harvest that guarantees more is yet to follow.

This morning, as we consider these verses, we are not simply looking back at an empty tomb — we are looking forward to a promised resurrection.

I. THE DECLARATION OF THE RESURRECTION (v. 20A)

“But now is Christ risen from the dead...”

A. A present reality

1. The Bible doesn't say here that “Christ rose” — it says, “Christ is risen.” The resurrection isn't simply only something that has happened in the past — it is something that remains true.
2. In other words, He is not in the grave; He is not among the dead; He is alive now.

Luke 24:6

⁶ He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,

3. This is the foundation of everything that follows.

B. A divine turning point

“But now...”

1. The Apostle is marking a contrast and a transition — death came through Adam; the grave has held every generation since Adam; and the curse has marked all of creation.
2. “But now...” something has changed

The resurrection of Christ is the moment where the reign of death is interrupted; the power of the grave is challenged; and God declares that the curse will not have the final word.

Acts 2:24

²⁴ Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

C. A declared victory

1. There is no argument for the resurrection here — it is declared.
2. The reason is because it is established truth (see vv. 5–8).

D. A living Savior

This is what makes Christianity different from every other belief system.

1. Every other religious leader lived, taught, died, and remains in the grave.
2. But Jesus Christ died, was buried, rose again, and lives forevermore.

Revelation 1:18

¹⁸ I *am* he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

- Because Christ is risen, the Bible tells us He has become something very specific — “the firstfruits of them that slept.” Which means His resurrection was not the end — it was the beginning.

II. THE DESIGNATION AS FIRSTFRUITS (VS. 20B)

A. A Scriptural picture that is rooted in God’s design

1. The word “firstfruits” would have been a familiar term to Paul’s readers.
2. In the Old Testament, when the harvest began, the people were to bring the first portion of the crop and offer it to the Lord.

Leviticus 23:10–11

¹⁰ Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: ¹¹ And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.

B. A representative portion — the same as the harvest

1. One thing that may seem like an obvious statement but holds significance is that the harvest was to be of the same kind. In other words, if it was a wheat harvest then the firstfruits were to be wheat; if it was a barley harvest then the firstfruits were to be of barley.
2. The meaning of this principle is that the firstfruits were a sample of what was to come.
3. The resurrection of Christ was not something different from ours — it was the same kind of resurrection that all believers will experience: a bodily one.

Philippians 3:21

²¹ Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

4. Christ rose as the pattern of what we will be.

C. A guaranteed promise — there is more is coming

1. When the firstfruits were offered, it was not a

question whether more harvest would follow. The firstfruits were the guarantee of the full harvest.

- a) The field had already begun to yield.
 - b) The rest was certain.
2. When the Bible states that Christ is the firstfruits, it is declaring that His resurrection guarantees ours.

Romans 8:11

¹¹ But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

1 Thessalonians 4:14

¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

3. Because Christ is risen, the life we have in Christ (v. 22) is certain and secured.

D. An accepted offering that is received by the Father (Lev. 23:11)

- 1. The firstfruits were presented “to be accepted for you.” That means:
 - a) The offering was received;
 - b) The harvest was acknowledged;
 - c) The rest would follow under that acceptance.
- 2. When Christ rose from the dead, it was the Father’s declaration that:

- a) The sacrifice for sin was accepted;
- b) The payment was sufficient;
- c) Redemption was complete.

Romans 4:25

²⁵ Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

- Christ's resurrection did not just demonstrate power — it is proof of acceptance.

E. A comforting reality — “them that slept” (v. 20)

John 11:25

²⁵ Jesus said unto her, **I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:**

III. THE DISTINCTION OF THE ORDER (v. 23)

The Bible makes it clear that this harvest will not happen randomly or all at once. There is a divine order to it.

“But every man in his own order...”

- Christ the firstfruits
- And afterward... they that are Christ's at His coming.

A. A structured resurrection

“But every man in his own order”

1. The word “order” (τάγμα) carries the idea of arrangement, sequence, proper rank or turn.
2. This shows that the resurrection is divinely ordered.

B. A singular beginning — “Christ the firstfruits”

1. This means He is first in time, rank, and significance.
2. Others were raised before Christ, but they were raised back into the same life they had before. Christ rose into a life over which death can never reign again.
3. Christ is the first in the order of final resurrection victory.

Romans 6:9

⁹ Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

C. A specific people — “they that are Christ’s”

1. Not all will be raised the same way and not all will share in this resurrection unto life.
2. The key issue is: Do you belong to Christ?

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

D. A set moment — “at His coming”

The harvest that began with Christ will be completed at a specific moment in time (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

IV. THE DAWN OF THE HARVEST

A. A new beginning — not the end of the story

1. When Jesus rose from the dead, it did not begin

a new work of redemption — that work was already finished at the cross. But it did mark the beginning of the power and promise of that finished work being revealed.

2. The resurrection is where the victory of the cross begins to be openly displayed.

John 14:19

¹⁹ Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

B. A living hope rooted in a living Savior

The believer's hope is not based on teaching or philosophy. It's based on a living Person.

1 Peter 1:3

³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

C. A coming harvest — it' not yet complete

Right now, we live between the firstfruits and the full harvest. That means the story is not finished.

Romans 8:23

²³ And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body.

D. A certain victory — death will not win (v. 26)

Because Christ rose, death is defeated, the grave is temporary, and the future is secure.

E. A present invitation

The harvest spoken of is not just an event — it is a people: “They that are Christ’s...”

So the question is, Do you belong to the risen Christ?

- Those in Adam remain in death.
- Those in Christ share in resurrection.

Conclusion:

Before the sun fully rises, there is a moment when the first light breaks across the horizon.

And when that light appears, no one wonders if the sun is coming.

The day has already begun.

The rest is certain.

That is what the resurrection of Christ is.

It is the first light of a coming day when death will be gone, and life will be fully realized for all who are His.

And as the sun rose today, it reminds us that the harvest has already begun... And because Christ is risen — the rest is sure to follow.