

God's Kingdom Will Be All in All

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 6:1–8

Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1–28; Ephesians 1:15–23

1 Corinthians 15:20–28

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

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Key Text

When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

—1 Corinthians 15:28

The Righteous Reign of God

Unit 3: God's Eternal Reign

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the roles of Adam, Jesus, and God the Father.
2. Explain why death is an enemy.
3. State why he or she looks forward to resurrection and why.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Unveiling the Masterpiece
- B. Lesson Context

I. Guaranteed Victory (1 Corinthians 15:20–22)

- A. Firstfruits (v. 20)
- B. Reversal (vv. 21–22)

II. Plan for Victory (1 Corinthians 15:23–26)

- A. Assured Sequence (v. 23)
A “What,” Not a “When”
- B. Enemy Defeated (vv. 24–26)
No Compromise!

III. Total Victory (1 Corinthians 15:27–28)

- A. All but One (v. 27)
- B. All in All (v. 28)

Conclusion

- A. The Promise of Resurrection
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Damascus	Du- <i>mass</i> -kus.
Deuteronomy	Due-ter- <i>ahn</i> -uh-me.
Gethsemane	Geth- <i>sem</i> -uh-nee (<i>g</i> as in <i>get</i>).
Thessalonians	<i>Thess</i> -uh-lo-nee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).

Introduction

A. Unveiling the Masterpiece

Few artists share their creative processes. They paint or sculpt or compose or write in private. Only when their work is first shown, at an unveiling or a performance, does the audience witness what the artist has created. Even then, what is often unveiled is only the masterpiece itself, not the process that brought it into being.

The universe is God’s creative masterpiece, and humanity is its focus ([Genesis 1:26–27](#)). The processes of creation are slowly being discovered via many tools such as space telescopes, microscopes, and advanced computers. But it is the masterpiece itself that speaks loudest ([Psalm 19:1–6](#)).

But we humans have derailed God’s intentions for his masterpiece ([Romans 1:18–23](#)). The story of God’s response to human rebellion is the story of the Bible. In that response, God re-creates the world and re-creates humanity to be what he has always intended.

B. Lesson Context

Our text comes from the next-to-last section of Paul’s first letter to

the Corinthians. It could almost be said that Paul was saving the most important part of his letter for last: his teaching about the resurrection.

We should clarify at the outset what we mean by the word *resurrection*. Some students take that word to refer primarily to the immediate life after death: when someone who belongs to Jesus dies, that person's spirit remains alive in the Lord's presence. To be in the presence of the Lord after death is an important biblical idea, affirmed by Paul himself (2 [Corinthians 5:1, 6](#); [Philippians 1:20–24](#)). The Lord is faithful: he will never abandon his people, even in death. But this is not the meaning of *resurrection*.

Life in Heaven as disembodied spirits is not the final status of the Lord's people. From the outset, humans were intended to be a combination of body and spirit. As the Creator of everything that is seen and unseen, God's intent is to reclaim his entire creation (see [Romans 8:22–23](#)). This means that when Christ returns to complete God's saving work, God will raise the dead so that they are alive as a unity of body and spirit. They will be in fellowship with those who are still alive at Christ's second coming (1 [Thessalonians 4:13–18](#)). This final act in God's plan will mark the ultimate victory of God.

For reasons that are uncertain, some members of the church of Corinth had begun to dismiss the idea that God will raise the dead. In light of Paul's emphasis on the church's "puffed up" pride (see [lesson 12](#)), it may be that some found the idea of God's raising dead bodies to be distasteful or bizarre. This view would have been compatible with pagan Greek philosophy, which viewed the body as a prison from which one's spirit desired to escape; the Greek play on words for this belief was *sōma sēma* ("the body, a tomb"; compare [Acts 17:32](#)). Another error is to equate resurrection with reincarnation, the latter being part of a never-

ending cycle of reward and punishment.

Paul argued that God does indeed raise the dead because God raised Christ from the dead. He recounted to the Corinthians the gospel as they first heard it: focused on Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, all "according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Then he recounted the many who saw Jesus after his resurrection, alive in his body that had been dead and entombed (15:5–7). Paul considered himself as the last of these witnesses (15:8), reminding readers that the Lord Jesus appeared to him in bodily form on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3–9). It is Jesus' resurrection, Paul says, that demonstrates not only that God *can* raise the dead but that he *will* raise the dead.

I. Guaranteed Victory

(1 Corinthians 15:20–22)

A. Firstfruits (v. 20)

20. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Having discussed the overwhelming testimony of witnesses to Christ's resurrection (see [Lesson Context](#)), Paul began to apply that historical event to the question at hand: Does God raise the dead? Christ's resurrection proved that God can and has. But more than that, Paul says, it guarantees that he will do so in the future.

Visual for [Lesson 13](#). *Display this visual as you ask the discussion questions associated with [1 Corinthians 15:25](#).*

Paul uses the term *firstfruits* to describe this idea. For ancient Israel, the day of firstfruits (also known as the Festival of Weeks) involved a sacrifice of the produce of the land. The firstfruits were brought at the beginning of the harvest, expressing that all that was harvested came from God and was dedicated to God ([Leviticus 23:15–21](#); [Numbers 28:26–31](#); [Deuteronomy 26:1–10](#)). With this offering, the faithful pledged to God not just this one offering but the entirety of their harvest.

Regarding resurrection, however, God is the one who has offered the firstfruits. He did so by making a promise to his people that what he has

begun with Christ's resurrection, he will complete with theirs. (See more on this role reversal below.)

Prior to the resurrection of Jesus, most Jews believed that God would indeed raise his people from the dead ([Daniel 12:2](#); [John 11:24](#); contrast [Mark 12:18](#)). That event would mark the end of one era and the beginning of another. In so doing, God would right the injustices of the present age and welcome all his people from every period of history to enjoy the fullness of his blessings.

Jesus' resurrection modified this expectation for Jesus' followers. They came to realize that by raising Jesus, God was taking the promises commonly associated with "the end" and pulling them, in part, back to the middle, so to speak. Paul's readers were already enjoying the blessings of the age to come through their forgiveness in Christ. Further blessings were the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit and their fellowship as God's people.

But all that is still not the end! God has more for his people: what Christ's resurrection did to give us a down payment is the guarantee of full payment to come ([2 Corinthians 1:21–22](#); [5:5](#); [Ephesians 1:13–14](#)). Because Christ is raised, the Christian's faith has hope for the future, hope that is more than wishful thinking. Even when faith seems futile, Christ's resurrection tells us that God is not finished. We have much to look forward to.

B. Reversal (vv. [21–22](#))

21. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

Paul places Christ's resurrection in the setting of the entire biblical story, from its very beginning. God intended to sustain people's lives as

they depended on him ([Genesis 2:9](#)). But rebellion severed that relationship and separated humans from God’s sustaining power ([3:22–24](#); [Romans 5:12](#)). In this way humanity brought *death* upon itself, both the loss of physical life and the ruin of God’s goodness in our lives.

Resurrection, however, is a reversal of all this. Those who turn from rebellion to faith, submitting to God’s rule in his kingdom, are promised the king’s life-giving provision. Someone first brought the death that all received in their rebellion, but someone else has brought life. That someone is Jesus of Nazareth, whom God raised from *the dead*.

What Do You Think?

How does the resurrection of Christ encourage you regarding death?

Digging Deeper

How will you answer another believer who may be worried and fearful regarding death?

22. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

The phrase *in Adam all die* brings up an issue of “fairness”: Why is it fair for me to die because of what Adam did without my consent? Paul’s response negates such a question because what *Christ* has done has canceled the result of Adam’s sin. Death is reversed in that *all will be made alive*.

We should note that the two uses of the word *all* are absolute; neither use is limited to a specific group. All humanity is in view in both usages. Christ’s death and resurrection has canceled any eternal punishment that might be projected from Adam onto everyone else. The forthcoming bodily resurrection applies to everyone! This fact is not, however, to be equated with the false doctrine of universal salvation/universalism;

people will still be held accountable for their own personal sins. Paul lays this out in greater detail in [Romans 5:12–21](#) (compare [Daniel 12:2](#)).

II. Plan for Victory ([1 Corinthians 15:23–26](#))

A. Assured Sequence (v. 23)

23a. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits;

Paul offers a sequence of events to show how God’s plan unfolds. The basis of this sequence is the fact that God the Father raised *Christ* on the third day after his crucifixion. Again, the mention of *firstfruits* brings to mind the fact that the whole harvest belongs to God. (See again the issue of role reversal, above.)

23b. then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

The word *then* establishes the next event in the sequence. In this text, the phrase *those who belong to him* could refer to (1) the dead in Christ who are raised *when he comes* or (2) those still alive when Christ returns or (3) both. A more detailed sequence in that regard is found in [1 Thessalonians 4:13–18](#) and [2 Thessalonians 1:5–10](#); [2:1–12](#), but that detail is not important to Paul’s purposes here.

Christ’s return to earth will be from Heaven, where he will have reigned at God’s right hand since the ascension ([Acts 1:9–11](#); [2:32–36](#); [7:55–56](#); [Ephesians 1:20](#)). The crucified Christ was not just restored to life by his resurrection. He has been exalted to rule. When he returns, he comes as king to make his rule full and final over all creation.

We should pause to stress that although Paul has sketched a sequence, he has not even hinted at a time line. Many readers of this commentary will remember the failed prediction of the booklet *88 Rea-*

sons *Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. All attempts to establish a time line regarding the return of Christ are bound to fail ([Matthew 24:36, 42–44](#); [Acts 1:7](#)). As one commentator has said regarding Christ’s return, “We’re on the welcoming committee, not the planning committee.”

A “What,” Not a “When”

Our group was studying the book of Daniel. Our leader was an avid follower of several Christian “prophecy experts” who proclaimed with assurance that the “soon return” of Jesus was just around the corner. Parroting those views, our leader boldly affirmed that the “signs of the times” strongly indicate Christ’s imminent return.

I sat quietly for a time, and then I suggested that various biblical passages do indeed assure us of the Lord’s return, but they give us no time line as to when it will happen. I referred to [Matthew 24:36–42](#); [Acts 1:6–8](#); and others.

Some of my friends—who seem to have spent more time listening to “prophetic” preachers than studying the Bible—had difficulty with my responses. Even so, Paul and Jesus remind us that it’s far more important for Christians to tell the world that Jesus is coming again than it is for us to speculate about when and how it will happen.

How do you ensure that you stay focused on *the what* rather than *the when*?

—C. R. B.

B. Enemy Defeated (vv. 24–26)

24. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and

power.

Paul now explains what the sequence of divine actions will accomplish. *The end* refers to the end of this present age, in which sin and evil seem to prevail. Notice how the New Testament contrasts the current era with the one to come ([Matthew 12:32](#); [Mark 10:29–31](#); [1 Timothy 6:19](#); [Titus 2:11–13](#)). Christ’s ability to destroy *all dominion, authority and power* certainly includes the powers of the unseen spiritual world that empower earthly rebellions against God.

[Ephesians 1:19–21](#) is a particularly important passage on this topic:

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Christ’s work will be utterly complete. Its completion is guaranteed by the great act already accomplished: his resurrection from the dead. With his return and the renewal of creation ([2 Peter 3:10](#); [Revelation 21:1](#)), God’s will shall indeed be done in full on earth as it is in Heaven ([Matthew 6:10](#)).

Christ’s return is not something for the faithful to fear. It means resurrection life! It means the defeat of evil in all its manifestations. It means the end of suffering. It means joy. It means peace. We have a foretaste of all that now since the baptism of believers signals a spiritual resurrection from the dead ([Romans 6:1–14](#); [Colossians 2:11–13](#)).

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to someone who sensationalizes and evokes fear in believers regarding the Bible’s message of Christ’s return?

Digging Deeper

How does [Revelation 19:11–21](#) inform your response?

25. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

To support his point, Paul drew on [Psalm 110:1](#). This verse is quoted or alluded to some 18 times in the New Testament (here; [Matthew 22:44](#); [26:64](#); [Mark 12:36](#); [14:62](#); [16:19](#); [Luke 20:42–43](#); [22:69](#); [Acts 2:34–35](#); [Romans 8:34](#); [Ephesians 1:20](#); [Colossians 3:1](#); [Hebrews 1:3](#), [13](#); [8:1](#); [10:12](#), [13](#); [12:2](#)).

The *he* is Christ, the risen one who reigns on the throne following his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. His rule is focused on defeating *all his enemies*—evil in all its forms. In the meantime, his subjects join him in his current work of overcoming evil as it coexists with good (see [Matthew 13:24–30](#), [37–43](#)). But as we do so, we know that we will see the complete defeat of evil only when Christ returns as king.

What Do You Think?

What new steps will you take to join Christ's work of overcoming evil in the world?

Digging Deeper

How do [2 Corinthians 6:6–7](#); [10:3–5](#); and [Ephesians 6:10–17](#) inform those steps?

26. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

God's victory at Christ's return is comprehensive. It leaves no enemies standing. *Death* itself is among those enemies and is *the last enemy* to be defeated. God pronounced death as the punishment for sin ([Gene-](#)

sis 2:17; Romans 6:23). But with sin’s punishment paid for on the cross, God’s holy nature is satisfied. This expression reminds us of how thoroughly God loves and supports his people (8:31–39).

The victory of God means the end of death. God destroys death by raising his people from the dead, uniting their spirits with resurrected bodies, and bringing them into eternal, unbroken fellowship with God and with one another (see 2 Timothy 1:9–10; Revelation 21:4).

No Compromise!

World War I was called “the war to end all wars.” It wasn’t, as the advent of World War II demonstrated. That war’s end was hoped to “make the world safe for democracy.” It didn’t, as the ensuing Cold War and its “iron curtain” showed. Major regional conflicts continue to this day.

Wars sometimes end in a negotiated peace, sometimes in unconditional surrender. Neither outcome applies to our spiritual war against the forces of darkness. What is promised, rather, is the total destruction of sin and its deadly consequences when Christ returns. What spiritual guardrails can you erect to ensure that you do not attempt any kind of compromise with the enemy until that return?

—C. R. B.

III. Total Victory (1 Corinthians 15:27–28)

A. All but One (v. 27)

27. For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says

that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.

Paul’s reference to [Psalm 110:1](#) continues. In that passage, God promises to defeat the enemies of his anointed one. In so doing, those enemies end up being trodden underfoot. This will be justified punishment for those enemies who have dared attempt to do the very same thing to the Son of God ([Hebrews 10:29](#))!

The defeat of the enemies means that *everything* is subject to God’s king, the Christ, with but one exception: God the Father, the one who brings the enemies *under* the king’s authority. God the Father and God the Son effectively share reign over the new creation that is fully subject to the divine authority of the triune God ([Colossians 2:9–10](#)).

B. All in All (v. 28)

28. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

Paul takes a step beyond [Psalm 110:1](#) to describe the completion of God’s plan. First, God the Father subjects *everything* to his anointed one, the Christ, his *Son*. When that grand plan is complete, the Son in turn willingly subjects himself to the Father, placing himself and all that is subjected to the Son *under* the Father’s authority. In this way, Paul says, *God* becomes *all in all*, the ruler of all, the victor over all.

It is important to recognize here that Christ willingly subjects himself to the Father. There is no hint in what Paul says that the Son is lesser than, or inferior to, the Father. In Christ “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” ([Colossians 2:9](#)). Paul also wrote that even though Christ was fully equal with God, Christ refused to use that equality for

his own advantage. Instead, he willingly became a servant to do the will of the Father, a will that was also his. Christ was then exalted to the highest place by the Father ([Philippians 2:6–11](#)).

We see the willing subjection of the Son to the Father in the story of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane ([Matthew 26:36–42](#)). We should always remember that we submit to the Christ, who himself submitted to God the Father. This reveals that submission is the true way of life. So it is fitting that the last act of the divine plan is that the Son submits himself and all creation to God the Father. The decisive act of salvation was in the Son's submission, and so the story comes to its climax.

What Do You Think?

How does Jesus' submission to God the Father remind you that submission to God is an act of worship?

Digging Deeper

How will you remove any perceived roadblocks that prevent you from following Jesus' example in this regard?

Conclusion

A. The Promise of Resurrection

Because we mortal humans live so close to death, a Christian's mind often goes to the promise of God that death is followed by life with God in Heaven. That promise is real, true, important, and a real comfort as we consider our mortality.

But today's passage reminds us that there is even more to look forward to. As one writer put it, life after death is followed by "life after life after death." It will be a life that makes us again a body-spirit unity, as we

are fitted for a new existence. Resurrection from the dead is integral to the end of history to come. Without resurrection, the “all things” over which God rules would leave out the most precious elements of God’s creation: his people. But raised from the dead, God’s people are made whole. We shall be brought together in living fellowship, and made new for a never-ending life in the new heavens and earth that God has prepared for us.

That life to come will bring us together with all of God’s people from across the ages. It will be a life in which we inhabit the new heavens and earth, able to do the things in creation for which we were ourselves created. We can only imagine what God has in store for us—and wonder at his wisdom and love that has made it all possible.

We should not forget that the world we live in now and the bodies that are currently ours are temporary, to be replaced by the permanent. That truth should sanctify our every action. This is what inspires hope even in the worst of trials. This is what God has promised us, now and eternally.

What Do You Think?

How has your perspective on the resurrection and life after death changed in light of today’s study?

Digging Deeper

How will your response to human ethical issues be informed by Scripture’s teaching on Christ’s return and the promised resurrection of believers?

B. Prayer

Great God, your ways are far above our ways. Your promises to us are

more than we can imagine. May we live in the light of your promised kingdom. We look forward to seeing the promise of resurrection fulfilled. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen!

C. Thought to Remember

God's final victory will make us eternally whole.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Ask learners to raise a hand if they agree with any of the following statements:

- 1—Authority and submission to authority are necessary for a properly functioning society.
- 2—It's easier for people to *have* authority than *submit* to authority.
- 3—I would rather *have* a boss than *be* the boss.
- 4—Jesus presents us with the best example of submitting to authority.
- 5—All authority is temporary.

Pause after each statement to allow learners a chance to explain why they agree or disagree with the statement.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Define Authority?” exercise

from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs or small groups to complete as indicated. After calling time, have volunteers share their responses with the class.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “Determining a proper response to authority is a problem for some people. Today’s Scripture shows how this problem is resolved for followers of Jesus.”

Into the Word

Distribute a handout (you create) that contains the following statements. Do not include the numbers in parentheses.

- 1—Christ is raised from the dead. (2)
- 2—God’s people are raised from the dead. (4)
- 3—Through Adam, death enters the world. (1)
- 4—Christ destroys all earthly rule, authority, and power. (3)
- 5—Death itself is destroyed. (5)
- 6—Through Christ’s submission, his authority is seen forever. (6)

Put learners into pairs and ask them to read [1 Corinthians 15:20–28](#), then arrange the statements in correct order, reflecting the order that they have happened or will happen. (The numbers in parenthesis show the correct order of the statements.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Main Characters” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

After calling time under either activity, ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—What are the roles of Adam, Jesus, and God the Father as described in [1 Corinthians 15:20–28](#)? 2—How is God’s authority demonstrated and explained in this passage?

Into Life

Ask students to gather into five small groups. Give each of the groups a slip of paper containing one of the following statements:

- “I saw how my mother suffered during the last stages of her disease, and frankly, I don’t want to go through that. I have to admit I’m afraid to die.”
- “Death is a blessing. To sink into silent oblivion, with no more worries. With as much trouble and pain as I’m experiencing now, I’m eager to die.”
- “I’m my own person, and I do what I want! I’m focused on my career and I’m preparing to enjoy my retirement years. I’m going to make that happen, and God won’t have anything to do with it.”
- “Two years ago, my brother had a heart attack, and my neighbor told me that he was praying. My brother recovered, so I’m willing to believe that God had something to do with it.”
- “My young daughter died unexpectedly. I can’t believe in a God who would allow the kind of suffering that my family has experienced.”

Ask the groups to prepare a response to their prompt, based on today’s Scripture. Encourage groups to discuss how the promise of resurrection informs the situation. Allow groups time to talk before calling on them to report back to the whole class. End class by asking volunteers to explain why they look forward to the resurrection.