

Christ is Risen! Many Good Things Will Follow

1 Corinthians 15:19-26 • 2021-04-04 • Easter Sunday



Have you ever noticed how we are sometimes oblivious to the signs that tell us there is more to come? Take for example the tiny little ant that is running across your countertop. The observant and rational person would say “Time to prepare and get some ant poison.” While the foolish and inattentive person—as I’ve been guilty of doing—would just say, “Die ant!” and quickly squish it. “There. That’ll teach him to try and eat my pile of spilled sticky stuff.” And you might think that you solved the problem if you’ve ever done that. “Me one. Ant Zero!” But you know where it goes from there. You can’t see it but there is a chemical trail that the whole colony reads as, “Awesome sticky mess. Under the counter and behind the couch. Come and get it. Send the whole colony for this one.” Soon you’re made to realize what you missed. “Where did all these ants come from?” Where there is one, there will be thousands more coming soon. There are many indicators in life that tell us more things are to follow. Some Christians in ancient Corinth had failed to see the ramifications for what would follow in the future. They belonged to Christ. Big things were about to follow. What indicators are there for us of what is going to come for us as believers? Today we consider 1 Corinthians chapter 15 to see how “Jesus is risen; many good things will follow.”

The greatest indicator of things to come is found in the Christian faith. It is in fact, the most significant event in all of history. It is what our faith centers on and what we proclaim: Christ has risen from the dead. The same Jesus who was mocked, beaten, flogged, crucified, pierced, and died and was buried—that same Jesus was raised back to life. No Christian can lose sight of that important truth. Years ago, when reading this chapter, I had mistaken the problem that the Corinthian Christians were facing. When you read that chapter it almost appears as if they are thinking maybe Jesus didn’t rise from the dead. But the problem is different. It wasn’t that they were denying the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. That fact they don’t seem to contest. As Paul writes this chapter, he isn’t defending Christ as having risen. Instead, he is helping the Corinthians to understand the implications for us of his resurrection to life. Because Christ rose, many good things will follow for believers.

But it seems that the Corinthian believers had lost sight of the significance of that most important event in history. That’s because they experienced the significance of what we all experience: what happened through Adam. This is what Paul means when he reminds us, “*on account of one man (Adam) came death.*” He alludes back to that time when in paradise Adam listened to Eve’s conversation with the serpent, the devil. And Adam did not defend God’s Word. He just stood idle. Then Adam also consented to the deception and rebelled against God by eating from the fruit. But God had warned about this fruit, “in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” The consequence of that single act of disobedience was death. You might wonder, “Adam didn’t die the day he ate it.” But look. The moment he disobeyed, he lost peace with God. He wanted to hide from God in fear and shame. As soon as he ate it, he began to blame God for his troubles. As soon as he disobeyed, he was dead—spiritually separated from the Lord God. He was cast out from the garden and never allowed to return. And he was told that death now hung over him. “Dust you are and to dust you will return.” Adam may have lived close to a thousand, but he felt his joints ache, his head bow, and his lungs lose their strength. After hundreds of years of toil, his breath ended, and he died.

What followed this single act of disobedience was catastrophic and lasting. All who were born of Eve and Adam shared in their terrible fate. The ramification of one man’s sin was the death of an entire race. Like a single ant leading the colony to a bait of poison, all Adam’s offspring were destined and doomed to die and follow after him from the same poison. And we all must follow that irresistible path that leads us to our death. Born of Adam, belonging to Adam, we are slated to join him in the grave. That’s the painful reality which Paul echoes with the words, “in Adam all die.”

That’s apparently as far as the Corinthian Christians could see. Sure, they saw the exception as Jesus rose to life, never to face death again. But everyone else just died and stayed dead. We also experience death like this. There have been a few members of our congregation who were under hospice care this past year. A few people connected with our congregation are under hospice care right now. Basically, they know that what they are facing is an incurable ill that must result in the end in death. The only thing to do is manage the pain and it’s only a matter of time. But aren’t all of us really consigned to the same? If hospice care is to make the patient as comfortable as possible until they die, aren’t we all putting ourselves on extended hospice care each day of our lives? All of us know that it is only a matter of time before our hands give out, our lungs stop, our heart ceases to beat, our bodies lay limp and lifeless, and we join the smelly decay that has consumed every man ...**except one.**

Paul now wants us to understand the full ramifications of that one man who rose from death. “*For since death came by a man, the resurrection of the dead also is going to come by a man. For as in Adam they all die, so also in Christ they all will be made alive.*” Christ’s resurrection was not only the biggest exception to death—it was the beginning of a great change against death! Many good things are going to follow!

When Jesus appeared alive to his disciples, they saw a man who they knew was once very much dead. John saw the blood flow from his pierced dead body. Joseph and Nicodemus and the woman, the chief priests and the soldiers who guarded the tomb all saw him placed in the tomb –knew he was dead. But there was no escaping the change as the tomb was empty and he appeared to so many with convincing proof that he was alive. When he appeared alive, they saw an indication of what was to follow for all who belong to him. This is a sign of great things to follow: *“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (died).”*

The risen Christ is called a *“firstfruit.”* In the Scriptures the Israelites were commanded to remember the Lord with thanksgiving when they entered into the rich land of Canaan. So, the Lord gave them direction to offer up a thanksgiving to the Lord with their harvest. There are all kinds of firstfruit harvests mentioned, ranging from wine to bread to cattle and flocks. It was done sometimes by waving the first heads of grain as an offering to the Lord. This first bit of produce or crop on a tree was something that really said much more than, “thanks to the Lord of the harvest.” It also said, “I trust that this means more harvest will follow. This is a sign of the good that is to come.” Jesus is the firstfruit of the resurrection to life. He is not only the greatest and first to rise and never again die, he is the one who leads the way as a sure promise of more to follow him. Remember what he told us? *“Because I live, you also will live.”* His resurrection means that we also will share in the resurrection to life.

He calls those who will follow him literally “those who have fallen asleep.” Some translations phrase it “those who have died” but it really means much more. It means those who have died in faith in Jesus. Like one who lays down for the night, they will wake again.

We hear the order of things to come. Christ, then us! *“Christ as the firstfruits and then Christ’s people, at his coming.”* Though all the dead will be raised it is those who belong to Christ who will be raised for everlasting life with him at his second coming. The same Christ who rose to life and ascended into heaven will come back to judge the world. And you know that you belong to him. Through baptism you have been clothed with Christ. The Scriptures declare that all who are clothed with Christ are sons and daughters of God through faith. You have been changed from those who merely belong to Adam and death to those who belong to Christ and life. And you don’t belong to him because you earned that position. You belong to him because he bought you from death. He paid the price that you and I deserve. He paid for all the sins of all Adam’s offspring. And through faith in Jesus, you now belong to the God who brought you new birth and a new status. He put his name on you, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” in baptism. The picture in revelation is that we have a seal written on us. And your name belongs in his record of the book of life.

But it doesn’t just end there. The ramifications of Christ the firstfruit from the dead goes even further than just giving us new resurrected life.

When you squish an ant, it is sure to be followed by more pests that come with it. When you try to heal a sick person and restore them, another sickness or the same sickness can come back to haunt them. When to attack the entire colony then you get rid of the source of the problem. But of course, it is only a matter of time before another colony, or another ant species will take its place. Jesus didn’t just come in like someone putting in ant poison to kill the colony; he exterminated the entire species. Every enemy will be gone, even death!

Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has done away with every other ruler and every other authority and power. For he must reign “until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” Death is the last enemy to be done away with. (1 Co 15:24–26) With his resurrection comes his full authority and power over all our enemies. Sin has lost its power and curse. The devil cannot harm us. And he has even removed death from the picture. “Death is forever dead.” In the eternal kingdom of Christ, we will never again have to fear death. There will be no more dying and no more possibility of ever dying again.

Not everyone gets excited about it, but you know what’s coming when it is fall and the temperature gets colder. When I lived in Minnesota you could tell it was fall because you’d hear the geese flying overhead, heading south. And there is always a little melancholy in the person who dreads winter when they see the first leaf begin to drop from the trees – Fall has begun. They know that after that first leaf many more will follow until the trees are bare. That reminds us of what has come to all from the one man, Adam. Darker days, coldness, and dry barren lands.

But what we are seeing today is what is ours through the one man, Christ. I don’t know who doesn’t get excited in the high desert when spring appears –unless you are one of those who likes to ski at Flagstaff in the winter. Recall that feeling when you see the first dandelion on the corner of the building bathing in the sunlight. Whether you like them as weeds or flowers you know warm weather is on its way. And when you hear the first spring birds breaking the ice with their songs. And when the buds of the bulbs begin to appear, and the first green takes hold –you know more will follow. Christ is risen. The firstfruit of all who have died, the one whom all who fall asleep in Christ Jesus will follow. Many good things will follow his resurrection, our resurrection, our eternal peace, and an end to sin and death forever.