

# Christ, the First Fruits of New Creation, 2 of 4

by Michael Flowers

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*Michael Flowers explores the profound implications of Christ's resurrection as the first fruits of new creation and its significance for believers' future resurrection.*

**Duration:** 26:21

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 15:12

**Topics:** "New Creation"

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## Description

In this sermon, Paul discusses the importance of recognizing that it is not our will, but the will of the Father that should guide us. He emphasizes that the evil influences in the world target humanity because God became man, and therefore, the forces of hell are directed against the church. Paul also mentions the future resurrection of the dead and the judgment of Christ, highlighting that judgment in Christ is a good thing as it brings justice where there has been injustice. He concludes by emphasizing the significance of believing in the resurrection of the dead and the narrative of the church living towards the end in the presence of Jesus Christ.

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## Transcript

Let's stand and pray for me this morning. We get to talk about the resurrection of Christ in the epistle of First Corinthians 15. This is an amazing passage about the undoing of death.

Amen. Thank you, Father. We proclaim your life over us today.

Life eternal. Life everlasting. The life of God.

Over us today, Lord, and within us as we breathe you in. As you breathe into the mouths of the disciples. Make us alive again and again and again.

Blow into our dry bones, our wet bones this morning. And make us alive in Christ Jesus from glory to glory. Amen.

May be seated. I was a bit too eager in assigning this text today. That is verses 12 through 34.

If you've spent a little time in First Corinthians 15, I think I was a bit too eager. So we'll see how far we can get with this today. Because there will be a telos, there will be an end, as Paul is talking about, then the end shall come.

It's going to happen in my sermon, too, today. So come, Lord Jesus, quickly, right? So I don't even have to preach this. Amen.

That would be great. Someday when preaching shall cease and knowledge shall cease. Yeah, right.

Yeah, Tom is really happy about that. Oh, happy day. The day that he took my pastor away.

I told you to pray for me. You never know what's going to come out. I tell you, I'm feeling a little ornery this morning.

Well, this is the third Sunday of Easter time. And as I said, we're working through the whole chapter of First Corinthians 15. And this is our second stab.

Last week, Paul frames the week of his passion, the death and resurrection of Christ as of first importance. Looked at that last week. And then he formulates what sounds like an early creed in those first 11 verses handed down to him from the apostolic tradition.

Since what I received, I handed on, I traditioned is the word I traditioned to you. Right. And so today we're moving from creed to consequences, consequences of discounting the resurrection of the dead, i.e. the future resurrection of the body.

And also the consequences of believing in the resurrection of the dead. And this is Paul's beginning argument. Now, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? Paul is exposing the inconsistency of their position.

You see, they're not denying that Christ was raised from the dead. They're denying that there is a future resurrection of the dead. And Paul is putting these two things together and he's saying it's inconsistent to separate these two and believe in one without the other.

They affirm that Christ is risen in the past, and yet they deny that Christians will rise again as he did in the future. And it could be their Greek background, thinking of the body as evil. You know, the ultimate in a platonic world would be to escape the body and rise up into the spirit realm.

Or it could be just a Jewish influence from the Sadducees who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. We don't know. They fail to see the connection, the communion between Christ and his visible body.

The church saying if there's no future resurrection of the dead. Then Christ has not been raised because Christ cannot be separated from all humanity. Because he is the new humanity.

And brothers and sisters, whether people believe or not, all shall be raised. He will come in glory to judge the living and the dead. Right.

And so as Origen used to teach, church father, early church father, he saw that resurrection as a corporate resurrection at the end. That all shall rise from the grave and be judged accordingly. Not individual people in a resurrection, but all of us coming up out of the graves at once.

It's an awesome picture, isn't it? And so if there's no future resurrection, then Christ has not been raised because there's an inseparable unity between Christ and his body. We are his body. Christ has been raised.

We shall be raised. Paul is arguing. And then if Christ has not been raised, however.

The gospel mission, the whole gospel mission from our message and their receptivity, he's saying, is all a sham. It's all in vain. The word means empty.

Everything's empty. My preaching is empty or faith is empty. I've misrepresented the father.

I've misrepresented God because Paul is saying, I said that God raised him from the dead. And then he said, if that is true, we are of all people most to be pitied. But verse 20 is one of those climactic phrases, but you say this is huge.

Verse 20, but Paul resounds from his own personal encounter with the risen Lord. But in fact. He's saying, you know, up against all their arguments and questions, but in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.

And here's a new idea that we didn't get in the first 11 verses, the first fruits. Here's the connection. All right, I am the vine, Jesus is the vine, we are the branches, we are connected, we are in communion with Jesus.

And Jesus is the first fruits. He's the first fruits of those who have. And this is the view of death in the Christian life of those who have fallen asleep.

It's a beautiful image. And that's the literal translation. Those who have fallen asleep.

You know what's going to wake us up? The sound of that trumpet, the sound of that shofar, perhaps, you know, could be Miles Davis, but I doubt it. If we pray for the dead, we'll pray for Miles, right? Don't tune me out now, don't tune me out. Yeah, that angelic trumpet player is coming and all shall rise at the same time.

He will come in glory to judge the living and the dead and judgment in Christ is a good thing. Creation is going to be clapping its hands at the judgment of Christ. All throughout the Psalms, it's a it's a good thing.

Because God is so good to come and bring justice where injustice has reigned. That's a good thing. It's a kind of justice that we've never experienced or seen, just like his love.

These are human concepts, really love and justice and all of this. It's beyond our comprehension, really. So we're just grappling to understand the undoing of death and the undoing of sin and the undoing of this present evil age.

Because we're all a part of that. And so his resurrection is not merely a wondrous event. That confirms his special status before God, but rather it is the beginning of a much greater harvest.

Christ, the first fruits from among those who have fallen asleep. This was a crucial point that some of the Corinthians had failed to understand. They did not see that there was a direct connection between Christ's resurrection and their own future fate.

And then we turn to verses 21 through 22. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead also has come through a human being for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. Now, Paul is turning from metaphor to what we call typology.

Paul juxtaposes Adam and Christ as the two individuals whose lives have had the greatest impact. Whose lives have had the greatest impact on the entire human race, Adam, Christ, think about that sin had its beginnings with Adam and because of him, the human family enters the world estranged, separated, cut off and destined to die. This universal undoing of sin and death, salvation comes to us through Christ, whose triumph over sin reverses the damage done by Adam and gives us the hope that even our mortal bodies, our physical bodies will be resurrected.

Decomposed flesh in the ground. How could this happen? It's not a pretty picture until we hear the trumpet sound and that decomposed flesh comes back together miraculously by the power of the Holy Spirit at the second advent of Jesus Christ. And we are all raised from the dead.

This is Christianity. It's not the kind of Christianity that's taught in many seminaries, but this is Christianity. All die in Adam.

All shall be made alive. So is this speaking of a universal salvation? All die in Adam. All shall be made alive in Christ.

Contextually, emphatically, no. Why? Because verse twenty three goes on to say that each in his own order, Christ, the first fruits, then at his coming, at his advent, those who. Belong to Christ, those who belong to Christ.

And after that, verse twenty four, then comes the end. This is the narrative of the church. We are living towards the end now in the presence of the future.

Jesus Christ is the presence of the future in our midst. I will be with you always, even until the end of the age, the presence of the future. Then comes the end.

The end shall come. What is the end? The tyrannical reign of sin and death. This present evil age that we looked at in Galatians one last summer, from which we've been already delivered in Christ's own sharing his shared experience of death and resurrection in him.

We are presently being delivered from this present evil age. And then shall come the end when the present evil age will be swallowed up, the final defeat of death at the general resurrection will constitute a collapse of all resistance to Christ's power and bring us to the end. When he hands over the kingdom of the father, the kingdom of God, the father, after he has destroyed every rule, every authority and every power that's talking about what's going on right now, post ascension.

We're not waiting for Jesus to be Lord. We're not waiting for his enemies to be trampled under his feet. Psalm 110, the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament.

This is a powerful narrative. We must have this narrative living in between the first and the second advent amid countless uncertainties. We live in the presence of a certain and we live in the presence of a certain end and we're living towards that end.

We live by faith, we live by faith in this story of Alpha and Omega. And we're in between Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Paul in this passage is unmasking the powers, the rule, the archaic and the Greek, the authority, the exousia and the power, the dunamis.

He's unmasking these demonic forces. These of the unseen realm take shape in the earthly realms of power and politics, thus concrete political implications. He's speaking to Rome and its supposed sovereignty.

Here, Paul describes not a dualism of dark and light, but he's describing opposition. He's describing opposition to the coming reign of Christ on earth as it is in heaven. In this present moment, Christ is making all of his enemies a footstool for his feet.

And so at his death, the power of forces hostile to authentic human flourishing at his death, those forces have been broken in the passion of Jesus Christ. The power of forces hostile to authentic human flourishing have been broken, but but they had not been definitively crushed. The evil influences operative in the world act on those who are physically alive.

We say that again, the evil influences who are operative in the world, which Paul calls a wrestling match in Ephesians six. We wrestle not with one another, flesh and blood, but we wrestle with principalities and powers in heavenly places. This warfare is going on in heaven and it's going on on earth.

And there's an until factor in this. He must reign until he has put every enemy under his feet. Jesus has chosen to do this in this way.

On the cross, he said, I could call 10,000 legions of angels and just end this right now. That's not the father's plan. And so he is acting according to the father's plan.

He's in subjection to the father. Paul is going to talk about this. So it's not his will.

It's the father's will. Always right. He settled that in the Garden of Gethsemane.

I don't want to do this, but not my will. Yours be done. And so the evil influences operative in the world act on those who are physically alive.

We're the targets. These forces hate humanity because God has become man. That's why they hate humanity.

God has become a human being. And therefore, all of the forces of hell are being leveled against his church. And the gates of hell will not prevail.

The evil influences operative in the world act on those who are physically alive. I just keep saying that. These must be destroyed first.

Verse 24. But death with a capital D personified. Death personified.

The spirit of death speaks about scripture. Is the master of those who have died. And so his turn necessarily comes next in verse 26.

The final enemy, death, will be destroyed. Verse 26. When the definitive victory has been won.

When the words of Psalm 8, 7 and Psalm 110. The Lord says to my Lord. Set at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

That's a contention of power right there. Who's in charge? Who's going to rule us? Who's going to rule the world? Who's going to be over creation? And who's going to marry us throughout all eternity? Jesus

Christ, our bridegroom. Until these two Psalms, Psalm 8 and Psalm 110 have been fulfilled.

When that happens, then Christ will present his kingdom to the father. Verse 24. And he will remit into God's hands the authority given him to carry out his mission.

Christ will remit into the father's hands the authority given him to carry out his mission. Verse 28. And so this subordination, it seems, of Christ.

Precisely as son, as a human being. Who is glorified now. Is in total accord with the stress on his humanity.

In verse 21. And so the assertion of Christ's lordship is a frontal challenge on imperial Rome for Paul. Corinth, a Roman colony, would be filled with statues and temples dedicated to Roman rulers.

Paul's words serve as one more summons to a conversion of the imagination. He's calling us to have a conversion in our imaginations now. Because we do not yet see all things.

But if that is all we see, we are most to be pitied. Because the resurrection is definitive reality. Jesus is resurrection.

He says, I am resurrection and life. It's just not an event. It's a person.

And we have come to be united in this person. Not just an event. Not just an event in the past, in history.

That's over with. There is no past. There's only now in Christ.

Now is the time. Now, not past, not future. There is no future for us.

Now is the only thing we have. And now is being collapsed into Jesus himself. Who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

We live in Christ, not time. Fix your eyes on the eternal. Not the things that are seen, Paul was saying.

He lived in resurrection life. It's not just the hope of a resurrection. It's going to be living in resurrection.

Which is the life of God. And the life of the kingdom. This is the gospel.

This is where we're headed. And this is where we're rooted and grounded even now, brothers and sisters. So resurrection of the dead is a subversive belief.

Because it declares that God alone is sovereign over the created world. The personification of death is characteristic of Paul's understanding of salvation. As a great narrative drama.

In which the protagonist Jesus Christ delivers God's people. From bondage to sin and death. Through his obedience and going to death on a cross.

Romans 5, 12, Philippians 2, 5. That's this interpretation of death. As one of the defeated eschatological enemies. Is in turn justified by appeal again to Psalm 8 and Psalm 110.

I would beg you to read those Psalms this week. And get them deep within your spirit. When you come under spiritual warfare.

Which is quite often, I hope. I hope, right? If we're not bugging him. Then you know there's something wrong.

Think it not strange. Brothers and sisters. The apostles say, right? Peter.

That these fiery trials are coming upon you. Don't think that's strange. You're living the Christian life.

You're the threat. You contain resurrection in life. And it's through learning how to die daily as Paul says.

I die daily. That's what it means to be a human being. Brothers and sisters.

Living for yourself is not the way to be human. Only giving your life away. As Jesus gave his away.

Is the way to be fully alive. Is the way in the path to resurrection in life. The way up is down.

Brothers and sisters. And it's a good downer. My pastor preached an awesome downer today.

The cross of Jesus Christ. He became a servant. Even death on a cross.

Then God highly exalted him. Not before. Right? And as surely as we are alive in his death.

We are alive in his resurrection. His exaltation. His ascension.

We are seated in heavenly places now. In Christ. In the resurrection and the life.

And that's a good place to stop. Let's pray that into us just a little bit. Before we stand up and recite the Apostles Creed.

Because even the Apostles Creed is going to declare this. We believe in the resurrection of the. That means.

We believe in the resurrection of a decomposed corpse. Not when you go to a funeral home under pink lights. And you say.

Oh, don't they look so good? No, that's not. That's not it. The light.

Light from light. True God from true God. Will raise us up in our decomposition state.

Amen. So death becomes a doorway. Brothers and sisters into life.

Death becomes a servant. To the resurrection and life. Let's stand together.

Holy Spirit, come and anoint the gospel words spoken today. Those that you choose to anoint. Help us pick out the.

The meat from the bones and really, really grab a hold of your life. Lord, as it's been preached today, let this be a sacrament. A sacramental experience of receiving you.

The word of God. And Lord, as we prepare our hearts to go to the table, we partake of you. Oh, body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Thank you, Lord. We give you all the glory and the praise. For raising us up with you.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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