

November 23, 2008
Christ the King

“Our King Controls Everything”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28

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 his own 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.

In Romans 14 the Apostle Paul tells us that Jesus, our King of kings and Lord of lords is in total control of everything in our lives: “If we live we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die we belong to the Lord.” Think about this for a moment. Every hour and every minute of life on this earth you belong to the Lord. And when you die and enter into the next life the Lord cannot wait to show you the place he has prepared for us. You have the best of both worlds because your life is controlled by the Lord.

The Christians living in Corinth were having some doubts about Jesus being in total control of their lives, especially in the future after they died. Some were raising questions about how a dead body that decays in the grave could possibly be raised to life again. They even had doubts about Jesus bodily rising from the dead after his crucifixion. That is why Paul begins this great resurrection chapter by saying, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, and that he appeared to Peter and to the Twelve.”

A Christian woman from Russia told the story of how she grew up with the fear of dying because of what her mother once told her. At about the age of eight she asked her agnostic mother what would happen to her after she died. The mother told her crudely and coarsely that her body would be eaten by worms. She grew up with this terrible fear of death because she did not know that Jesus takes control of our lives and raises us up again after we die. Later she became a Christian and then confessed that because of Jesus’ resurrection she was no longer afraid of being eaten by worms after she died.

Our King who takes control of our lives after we die, also takes control of our lives while we live here on this earth. In Psalm 46 the Lord says, “Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.” Martin Luther once said, “Joy comes with knowing that the King in his castle and the flag is flying full mast.” Jesus

is not just a shepherd, but the good Shepherd who meticulously governs and controls your life, as we sing in the hymn, "I am Jesus little Lamb, ever glad at heart I am. For my Shepherd gently guides me, Know my need and well supplies me. Loves me every day the same. Even calls me by my name."

He controls what happens to us after we die

When it comes to dying, it such a blessing to know that Jesus our King and Shepherd is in control of our lives and promises to raise us back to life again after we die. Paul uses the picture of the first fruits to teach us that our bodily resurrection is a sure thing. "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." The Old Testament people were required by law to give the first and the best of the harvest to the Lord. The Lord promised if they did this that they would be richly blessed with an even more abundant harvest. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees that he will someday raise us to life again just as giving the first fruits to the Lord in the Old Testament guaranteed that more fruit was coming in the future.

Paul repeats this thought for emphasis. "But each in his own turn; Christ the firsts fruits; then when he comes those who belong to him." Because his resurrection was good, it guarantees that our resurrection from the dead will also be good on the last day because we belong to him. This past year we harvested our first Concord grapes from a grape vine planted in our back yard. The grapes were very good, but there is no guarantee that we will have a good crop next year even though the vine is starting to take over the fence on the side yard. Hold up vine. That is not the case with Jesus. Because the first fruit of his resurrection was perfect, our resurrection will be perfect on the last day.

Jesus resurrection that guarantees our resurrection is further illustrated from the comparison between Adam and Jesus "For since death came through a man, the resurrection from the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive." Through Adam's sin we lost control of our ability to keep ourselves from dying. Romans 6 says that wages of sin is death. We get paid with death because of our sin that was brought into lives through Adam. You can eat right, exercise properly, and even take vitamins but you cannot avoid dying. Adam brought death into the world. You cannot take control of your life and avoid dying. But in Jesus' resurrection we have the real hope and confidence and certainty of being raised to life again. Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." He doesn't say, "I may give them eternal life." No, he says, "I give them eternal life and they shall never perish."

He controls what happens while we live

The Shepherd who promises you eternal life also promises to not let anything snatch you out of his hand. It has often been said that you may not know what the future holds for you, but you do know who holds the future. A few months ago I read a prediction by Steve Forbes that oil could drop to \$40 a barrel. I laughed out loud when I read that prediction-\$145 dollar a barrel for oil dropping to \$40. Who ever thought the stock market and real estate market could dip as low as it has lately? We don't know what the future holds but we know who holds the future.

We are told, "Then the end will come when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power." Jesus told Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were so my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But my kingdom is from another place." He builds his kingdom here on this earth by the power of his Word and the glory of his name. He does not use brute force, or financial power, or even feel good motivational messages to draw people into his kingdom. He brings people into his kingdom by opening their eyes to see that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the world's sin. He leads a whole arm of people to sing songs such as we just sung, "Oh Lamb of God, sweet lamb of God I love the Holy Lamb of God Oh wash me in His precious Blood My Jesus Christ the Lamb of God." He builds his kingdom by sending out people into all the world armed with Holy Bibles and lives humbled to proclaim the gospel message to every person on the face of this earth.

When the end comes Jesus will hand over the kingdom to his Father. He will present us as his beloved Bride, the church, without spot or stain, in all her glory to his Heavenly Father. Our King Jesus will open the curtain to allow us to see the glory that he shared with his Father from all eternity. As he prayed so fervently the night before he died, "O Father I want those who are with me to see the glory I had with you before the world began." In his commentary on this great chapter of the Bible and specifically these verses, Martin Luther said of this time when Jesus will deliver the kingdom to his Father. "You will always be strong and vigorous, healthy and happy, also brighter and more beautiful than the sun and moon, so that all the garments and the gold bedecking a king or emperor will be sheer dirt in comparison with us when are illumined by but a divine glance."

What comfort and peace we also have in these words of Paul that Jesus will place all of our enemies under his feet. "For he must reign until he has put his enemies under his feet." Look at Jesus your King of kings and Lord of lords putting his foot on the neck of your enemies. I like what Martin Luther said about the six enemies that face us every day of our lives. We battle against our sinful flesh that produces all sorts of evil thoughts and desires that are bad enough to shame hell itself. Every day we face the devil who puts weird and strange ideas into your head and heart. We struggle with the world and how it tries to shape us into its mold just as you might place dough into a mold to make into a ginger bread man. The beautiful Law of God in his Ten Commandments becomes our enemy when we daily face our inability to do the good we want to do and avoid the evil we should not be doing. We struggle with our conscience that joins the devil in accusing us day and night before God's throne. We also struggle with the reality that we are getting older and some day we are going to die. Jesus will destroy these enemies and the last one to be destroyed his death. Can't you hear the magnificent strains of the Hallelujah Chorus singing out the hope that is ours, "And he shall reign forever and ever?"

Speaking of the Revelation, how can we ever exhaust the comfort that comes with reading in Revelation 20 that says Jesus will live and reign for a thousand years? The Revelation uses numbers to paint pictures. The number 10 is the number of fullness and completeness. 1000 is 10x10x10. It is the Lord's way of assuring us that he will reign in our lives, here and now, in total control with absolutely everything under his feet- 24/7.

I realize that I have no control of rescuing myself. I need Jesus. The judgment is coming. There is no way to bail myself out of the mess I have made of my life. I have lost control. I am helpless. I need Jesus. This past week the Big Three auto makers went to Washington

with the hope they could receive bail out money to keep their companies from going under during this current financial crisis. They did not come with a good plan that showed they were in control of the situation. From all eternity our heavenly Father developed a good plan, a perfect plan, to have Jesus rescue us. Jesus carried out the plan meticulously and perfectly. The Father showed that he accepted Jesus' ransom payment by raising him from the dead. When Jesus returns the Father will once again put his stamp of approval on the perfect job Jesus did of taking care of us and protecting us. Then Jesus will subject himself to the glory of the Father, "God will be all in all." What a joy it is to know that Jesus is in control of everything, especially your life and mine. Amen.