

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Last Sunday in the Church Year, November 24, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 339:1-5, 132:1, 341, 351, 244.

Lessons: Psalm 110, Ephesians 1:15-23, Matthew 25:31-46.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:20–28.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Isn't this an Easter message? Doesn't this whole chapter of First Corinthians 15 talk about the resurrection of Jesus? So why are we looking at this passage now?

This is the end of the church year. The church year calendar is not a calendar used by everyone, but if you look at the calendars on your wall, you will see that we are coming near to end of the typical year.

The message of this sermon is certainly timely, and here is why: There is nothing more important to a Christian than the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We celebrate Christmas in about one month as an important milestone in God's sending a Savior to earth for mankind. The Resurrection is another essential milestone in the facts and history of our salvation.

This Sunday of the church year, the last Sunday of the church year, has also been called "Christ the King Sunday". In that way it recognizes Jesus Christ as the "King of kings" and "Lord of lords."

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we also see his assuming again the full role of king over all things. Forty days after his resurrection he ascended into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. After his humility he again took up his crown and throne in heaven.

God here, through the Apostle Paul, is painting a picture of Jesus Christ ascending his throne in heaven, assuming all power over all things. Dear child of God, please recognize that

CHRIST IS YOUR KING FOREVER!

- 1. In his resurrection, Christ shows his power and victory.**
- 2. What does this mean for you today?**

The Apostle is telling us that the end will come for all mankind on earth when Jesus Christ has completed his battles. He has destroyed his enemies. He will hand over the complete spoils of his victory, the prize, all the conquered spirits and peoples to his heavenly Father. Our text says "***Then the end will come, when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.***

The destruction of this earth will finally happen after Christ "***has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.***"

When Christ told his disciples "***All power [all authority], is given unto me in heaven and in earth***" (Matthew 28:18) those were not empty, meaningless words. Not only does Jesus reign supreme over all things on earth, but he will rule forever from his throne in heaven, for he is now sitting at the right hand of his Father in heaven.

"For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." Even now Christ rules, he must rule, he must reign, until all his enemies have been conquered. But that has happened already, for Christ conquered death when he rose from the dead. The psalmist tells us: ***You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.***" (Psalm 8:6, NIV84)

We have here the picture of the conquering hero. This picture is one of the complete submission of a conquered enemy after he has been beaten. Even secular history books speak of people who have been conquered

in battle, and especially the rulers of those conquered peoples, bowing down to, and submitting to the victorious king who has beaten them. History books even have examples of the victorious king placing his foot on the conquered enemy.

Psalm 110, our Old Testament lesson today, gives us a picture of such a time. That psalm was written by David, who was a great king himself. He wrote ***“The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’ The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies.”*** (Psalm 110:1–2, NIV84) David is telling us about the Lord God, the supreme ruler, speaking to his only-begotten Son, whom David called his own Lord and master, ***“my Lord.”*** The supreme Lord Jehovah is telling Jesus Christ to sit at his right hand, which is a position of supreme power and authority, until Jehovah makes the enemies of the Savior a footstool on which he can rest his feet.

Paul repeats that picture here after it has been completed and Christ has ascended into heaven. We also read in Ephesians: ***“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”*** (Ephesians 1:22-23, NIV84)

Our text says ***“Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.”***

Remember why Jesus rose from the dead. Satan thought he had won the victory when Jesus died. Adam and Eve ate from the tree of which God had commanded them not to eat. God had said ***“you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”*** (Genesis 2:17, NIV84) If Jesus had not died, all mankind would suffer the ultimate death God warned Adam about in the perfect, sinless Garden of Eden. Jesus had to rise from the dead to restore life, spiritual life, eternal life to mankind. Thus Paul can write ***“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”***

Humans must die physically. Jesus, true man, by His resurrection has broken the power of death, and he, who was also true God, has become the first human over which death has no more power. Paul writes in Romans ***“For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.”*** (Romans 6:9, NIV84)

Just as in Adam, in that one man representing the entire world of men, all men die, so also in Christ, in the promised Messiah, all will be made alive. In Christ all will be made alive who belong to Christ by faith in Him. Christ is the first-fruits of the Resurrection, and then those who belong to Christ will enjoy the resurrection at his second coming.

For any human on earth, the last thing that happens is dying. That’s the end of life on earth. For every person who does not believe in Jesus Christ that is the end except for an unending suffering and punishment in hell for sin. People may hope and think that there is some kind of “better life” when they die, but the only way that will happen for them is if they believe that Jesus Christ died for their sins and rose again for their justification. That is faith. And without faith, there is nothing but damnation and hell after death.

But Christ conquered death. And in so doing, he conquered Satan, who will receive nothing but eternal fire, unending suffering and pain in eternity.

Yes, ***“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”*** Now Christ was not literally the first person to be brought back to life in the Scriptures. Prophets and apostles had been given the power from God to bring people back to life. But if Christ had not been raised from the dead, then no human would ever have been able to come back to life. And such examples in Scripture were done to show the immense, unlimited power of God, and to witness to the words of eternal life that God gives us in the Scriptures. But all those people had to die an earthly death again.

So Christ is called ***“the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”***

He was the first dead person to lay aside all mortality and to assume a spiritual body which would not be subject to death throughout all eternity. And so also those who died an earthly death in Christ in the hope of eternal life will also arise from the dead.

“Death came through a man.” Because Adam sinned and disobeyed God, death came to all men. Even those people who were brought back to life in the Bible eventually died, or they would be alive today!

But it is also true that ***“the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.”*** That man is Christ Jesus, who came to earth for that specific purpose. ***“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”***

That will happen to each of us individually on the day of Christ’s great judgement, the last day. Christ is the first fruits, the first to totally, eternally, once and for all come back to life to live forever. Then, when Christ comes back to earth at an unknown day and time, ***“those who belong to him”*** will come back to life to live with him forever in heaven. Those who belong to Christ by faith will enter into that same glorious state of eternal life when he returns on the last day.

At that time the complete kingship of Jesus Christ will be revealed to all who ever lived.

He is plainly ruling as king over everything just as Scripture tells us. Paul reminds Timothy and us about ***“God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever.”*** (1 Timothy 6:15–16, NIV84) The book of Revelation also assures us that ***“The Lamb [and that is a picture of Jesus Christ, the lamb of God] will overcome [his enemies] because he is Lord of lords and King of kings.”*** (Revelation 17:14, NIV84)

It is because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we can have any hope at all. Every believer has life in and through Christ. Christ has conquered, has beaten death. He is the victorious ruler, the king over death.

We can rejoice when we see that death is destroyed. Then the end will come. Christ will hand over the kingdom to his Father. This will happen after he has destroyed his enemies, destroyed all power that ever fought against him.

His return for the final judgment means the conclusion of the world’s history, when Christ delivers up the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has put down and abolished every ruler and every authority and every power.

Christ is now the King in the Kingdom of Power and in the Kingdom of Grace.

Every human must experience physical death, temporal death. The only exception will be those who are still alive when the Lord Jesus comes suddenly to judge the living and the dead.

A few verses later after our sermon text we read that ***“We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:51–58, NIV84)

May this beautiful picture of the resurrection of our King of kings and Lord of lords comfort and assure us of the eternal life he brings! Amen.