

The Firstfruits of Christ our King

✦ ...all made alive... (vv.20-23)

✦ ...all power destroyed... (vv.23-24)

✦ ...that God may be all in all... (vv.25-28)

In the name of Jesus, the Lord's Christ, our King, dearly redeemed believers:

One of my great memories travelling back and forth from our WELS ministerial schools in the Midwest home to Central Oregon was the ride over the Cascade Mountains. Sometimes I had to take the bus past spectacular views of Mount Hood. Inside the bus what I heard could be shocking. One man made it known to all that he moved out to Oregon to get away from organized religion. Lots of company there. The Pacific Northwest is still 80-90% unchurched. To this day, they think they have escaped.

So did the ancient Greeks. Sure they had their pantheon of Zeus who they thought lived high atop Mount Olympus with hundreds of gods and demigods. But usually the Greeks hoped their gods would stay away and not cause trouble. Greek cities had temples, like Athens where Paul found THE ALTAR TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. This idolatry distressed Paul. So you know what he did? He preached! ***“What you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.”*** (Acts 17:23) Without someone preaching to us, we could not know CHRIST THE KING, or celebrate **The Firstfruits of Christ our King.**

✦ ...all made alive... (vv.20-23)

Many Americans and Europeans reject **Christ our King.** Churches where Paul preached were turned into mosques. While western religions reject the Bible, Sharia Law and the *Quran* fill the vacuum.

While our first grandson was recovering in Minneapolis Children's Hospital, I asked a Muslim security guard a simple question. Why does the *Quran* say that Jesus is the lesser prophet, yet according to the *Quran*, Jesus went alive to heaven, but Mohammed's grave is in Mecca? His answer? “It's all a matter of interpretation.” And yet, in all the world's religions only Christianity has an empty tomb.

The God of the Bible gives us His interpretation through His holy Apostle Paul. Paul was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to write to the Corinthians: ***“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.”***

Firstfruits were very familiar, especially to ancient farmers. When the first crops came in for the Israelites, God commanded them to bring the first sheaf of grain or cluster of grapes to the LORD. A gift of ***firstfruits*** is still a great way for believers to confess: *I trust that God gave me this. I thank Him with my firstfruits. I trust that He will give me more than enough to be generous like my heavenly Father.*

We are tempted to keep the first and best and thus to rob God. We all inherited the death of Adam's sin and prove it by our selfish lies and lives. But Jesus is the promised Seed of the woman. He crushed the serpent's head when He died and rose from the dead. Gentiles like Lydia at Philippi received new life in ***“the first resurrection”*** (Revelation 20:6). In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Lydia and her whole household were baptized, all ages together, like the jailer at Philippi in Acts 16: ***“He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.”*** (Acts 16:34 NIV84) But when the Lord's Apostle here says, ***“As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive,”*** he must be talking about the resurrection on the Last Day. **Christ our King** says, ***“A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”*** (John 5:28f NIV84) **All will be made alive...and...**

✦ **...all power destroyed... (vv.23-24)**

Jesus says through another apostle, John in Revelation: *“Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’”* (6:15–17 NIV84) Can you see it? **All power will be destroyed.**

All the ancient prophets of God and all the apostles in one way or another predicted that Day. Speaking to the Christians in Corinth, Paul gives more details in **The Firstfruits of Christ our King**. Israelite kings were also called shepherds because they were responsible for both the physical and the spiritual wellbeing of God’s people. When Israel’s kings failed by their wickedness and sin, the LORD made a promise through Ezekiel in our Old Testament Lesson. Jesus who is Great David’s Greater Son, would come and *“make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live...in safety”* under *“showers of blessing....You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD.”* (34:23-26,31 NIV84) No power can overcome Him.

Christ proved that in our Gospel Lesson (Matthew 27:27-31). He allowed the soldiers of Roman governor Pontius Pilate to mock Him, beat Him, spit on Him, and finally take Him away to crucify Him. God’s own Son let earthly powers do their worst in order to show God’s best when He said, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* (Luke 23:34) Christ suffered for us. Since He has risen from the dead, the next time around will be so much different: *“Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.”*

✦ **...that God may be all in all... (vv.25-28)**

“For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” Tyrants through the ages have tried to use death to enforce their will on others. Recent history has unleashed the wrath of men like Stalin, Hitler and Mao Zedong. Death caught up with all of them. And yet, in the case of Mao, his legacy lives on to help the faith he tried to destroy. He wanted China literate with a simplified language and transportation system to spread Communism through his little red book. Today the Gospel spreads through that simplified language to places where missionaries used to take months to reach on pack mules. And no one reads Mao’s little red book.

John saw the Last Day in Revelation: *“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.”* But for all who trust in Jesus the Lord Himself *“will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* (Revelation 20:14; 21:4 NIV84) God has a goal: **that God may be all in all.**

People everywhere want a home, but millions are displaced. From the Yellow Crane Mountain in Wuhan, China, 2005, we saw swaths of old buildings torn down in that city of nearly 4 million. Government apartments were going up. Not far away ancient villages gave way to the Three Gorges Dam. But **Christ our King** says, *“As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children – with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.”* (Psalm 103:15-18 NIV84)

All because then and now and for all eternity, **Christ our King** is willing **that God be all in all**. The LORD promised the Virgin Mary that her son Jesus would *“reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”* (Luke 1:31-33) In full and joyful submission, *“the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.”* In perfect equality and unity the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – will reign in that happy home of light. God guaranteed it when He gave **The Firstfruits of Christ our King**. And like one, long, eternal payday, we will enjoy that harvest of souls and salvation for all eternity. Come quickly, **O Christ our King!** Amen.