

The Last Enemy Is Destroyed

In the Name of Christ the King, dear fellow subjects of His kingdom:

The other day I passed a mechanic with a squeegee. This signals a new season of war – man versus the elements, sand and slush versus your clean garage floor. Happy the mechanic with a hose in one hand and a good squeegee in the other.

God's grace on our country makes this about as close as most Americans ever get to war. Others have fought and died to secure our freedom to worship God according to our conscience. Meanwhile, none of us can see the spiritual war raging around us day by day. Satan never sleeps as he lulls sin-dead souls with easy lives for those already in his control by unbelief and misery for anyone escaping his kingdom of death into the glorious light of God's kingdom. But Christ is our Champion, our Escape. Christ is our King. And when all the wars of this world – physical and spiritual – are finally finished, we will see this great and marvelous promise fully and completely fulfilled: **The Last Enemy Is Destroyed.**

The Lord's Apostle Paul battled dangerous opinions in the congregation at Corinth, the worst here where some were saying, "***There is no resurrection of the dead.***" (15:12) Paul pictured how pathetic we would be if we were suffering loss and persecution under the cross of Christ for nothing. Without Jesus' resurrection from the dead that first Easter, loss of friends and family for Christ would make us pitiful beyond belief. Everything hangs on the resurrection. So we keep proclaiming Christ-crucified and risen on all the "little Easters," these Sunday services with God's Word as fresh and invigorating today as ever.

But now Paul asserts the fact as clearly and forcefully as he can: "***Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.***" Jesus proved Easter when He pulled Paul out of his former way of life as Saul the persecutor of Christians. How could Saul go on raging against Jesus as an imposter, when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, struck him blind, then forgave and baptized him? Jesus made Paul His missionary to us Gentiles. Like the rest of the apostles, Paul would prove the truth by fearlessly proclaiming Christ's resurrection even in the face of death.

This word "***firstfruits***" is so comforting, especially if you are facing terminal illness for yourself or someone you love. God told the ancient Israelites to offer the first grain or grapes as a ***firstfruit*** offering. They recognized God as the Giver just as when we write the first check to God in thanks for a job. With God's ancient people we too confess that God will give us more as needed for our bills, etc. In that grave outside Jerusalem the first dead person was planted who would get up again by His own power. Jesus broke "the ban of death" as "the first one of a new mankind over which death has no more power, Rom. 6,9."¹ The harvest will rise out of all the graves all over the world when Jesus comes again in glory with all His holy angels. "His own will rise from their graves and will be caught up to meet him in the skies."² Then our life will reach its full potential as God has planned. Desire will be satisfied instead of disappointed. All God's promises to our faith will be fully realized in glorified bodies fit for everlasting joy in God's heaven. We need to pray through life's limitations, until we go "where prayer is unnecessary, and all is happiness, purity of life and one eternal song of thanks and praise to God."³

We were all undone when Adam fell into sin. The whole human race sank with him into death and terror at God, blaming each other. Shattered was our relationship with our Creator and His creation.

¹ Kretzmann, Paul E. *Popular Commentary Of The Bible*. St. Louis, Missouri: CPH, 1924. NT Vol. II, p.163.

² Toppe, C. (1987). *1 Corinthians*. The People's Bible (147). Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House.

³ *Sermons of Martin Luther*. John N. Lenker, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, re-printed 1988, Vol. VIII, p. 340.

Gone was that perfect love between man and woman in the Garden paradise of Eden. But the fact that Jesus rose from the dead as the “*firstfruits*” means we too shall rise with Him to reign in glory. ***“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.”*** Don’t let the dismal cold drown out your joy in Jesus.

Then the end will come.... This goal appears in Jesus’ Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:20. Jesus promises literally to be with us *all the days until the gathered goal of the ages.* (πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος) On the Last Day Christ the King will bring everything swirling together, all the lines of power, every current of opinion, each little life lived for God by faith or by unbelief against God. All will be gathered together in Christ on Judgment Day. All will rise in the general resurrection from the dead (John 5:28f) and every human being will be judged according to his deeds. Works can only be good by faith (Hebrews 11:6) and thus give evidence of faith (James 2:18). The lack of good works is evidence that faith does not exist. (Matthew 25:34-46) ***“For the sake of the elect,”*** Jesus says, these last ***“days will be shortened.”*** (Matthew 24:22) Like a vortex drawing water down a drain, God’s power is bringing everything to its final ***end*** (συντελείας) at His own time, for His eternal purpose.

And here’s a window into the mystery of our best and truest Friend, Jesus who is both true God and true Man. In one eternal, divine essence as God, Jesus will ***hand over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 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. 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.***

Jesus will not give up His ruling rights as God. Prophecy after prophecy (Daniel 2:44; 7:14) echoed Isaiah 9:7 – ***“Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”*** Through Gabriel the LORD promised the Virgin Mary: ***“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”*** (Luke 1:31-33) Jesus who deserves equal honor as God with the Father (John 5:18) and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:4) will literally “*give beside*” to the Father everything Christ has conquered as Lord and Savior. Not “handing over” and letting go, but perfect rule in unity of essence, side by side eternally.

The other day I passed a mechanic with a squeegee – a new season of war for your garage. Dear Christian, you can no more keep from sinning than you can stop those “road boogers” from dropping off your fenders. But you can’t just leave them. Water puddles can freeze the door to the floor. Sins pile up in lumps like cancer; mountains of guilt ruin your life. But you believe that Jesus died, don’t you? And you believe Jesus died for sinners, don’t you? You believe that you are one of those sinners, yes? Then why don’t you stop worrying and trust that Jesus died for you? A mechanic with hose and squeegee can clean the floor and fix your car. Trust the dear Holy Spirit to cleanse your soul and heal your heart.

God’s mercy washes away our sins like sand from the garage floor. It’s not that our sins are so small, but that God’s mercy is so great. It’s not that our sins will ever stop this side of heaven. It’s just that God’s mercy is so determined never to give up on you. Never will He stop washing you. Never will God stop sweeping your sins away like slush before the broom of His grace. Never – until sin is gone and death – ***The Last Enemy Is Destroyed.*** Just watch. Pray! And when the warm springtime sun shines again, God’s grace will cause flowers to bloom from all that dirt and sand, so great is His love for those who fear Him. Battles big or small, you win them all in Christ the King. Amen.