

1 Cor. 15:20-28 "First-Fruits of the Sleepers"

For the Children: There is a saying often used to predict the weather: "Red sky at night, shepherd's delight; red sky in morning, shepherd's warning." This saying is also in the Bible (Mt. 16:2-3). Some things are so closely connected, that if you see the first, you expect the second. So it is with Jesus resurrection. He has risen from the dead. It must follow that our souls will go to be with Him when we die; that we will get our bodies back when He returns; that He will remove Satan, sin and death from this world; and that He will then hand His completed Kingdom back to God. This is a delight to His people and a warning to His enemies. **Questions:** Why does Jesus' resurrection guarantee that we will be raised? Why is Jesus called "First-Fruits"? Why might God have left a fairly long time between Jesus' first coming and second coming?

Introduction:

First Point: The Order of the Harvest

- 1) A Non-Random Process: Death may seem to many to be a matter of chance. However, as v. 23 shows, God has an orderly plan for life and death. "Order" means a special arrangement made by someone who is in charge.
- 2) The Order of Life and Death: God's arrangement is that first the Lord Jesus would live and die and be raised from the dead. He would then ascend to heaven. Many believers will live in this world before He returns. When they die, their souls go to be with the Lord. But they do not get their bodies back until His return. The "First-fruits" analogy reinforces this order. In the OT, the first and best part of the harvest was offered to God as a token of the fact that the whole lot belonged to Him. The parallel is that Christ is the first to be resurrected, as a token that the rest of His brethren will follow.
- 3) Then Comes the End: Christ has already defeated Satan, sin and death – in principle. However, the final removal of their influence only comes after Christ returns and gives back to the elect their glorified bodies. This will mark the complete subjection of all His enemies. The completed kingdom will then be handed back to the Father, so that God will be all-in-all. That will be a great and glorious finale!

Second Point: The Reasons for the Order

- 1) Fulfillment of Prophecy: One reason that the order has to be this way is that there are particular OT prophecies that must be fulfilled. For example, Ps. 110:1 states that all Christ's enemies must be subdued under His feet. Ps. 8:6 is similar, though it also alludes to the fact that the Christ must undo Adam's failure to rule the world for God's glory. These OT passages are quoted/alluded to in vss. 25 and 27.
- 2) The Second Adam: The way that Christ undoes Adam's failure is by coming as the Second Adam (v. 45). Just as Adam's failure was imputed to all – since he was the head and representative of humanity – so Christ's victory is imputed to all in Him (all the elect) – because He is our Head and Representative. That is why the apostle can say that if the dead are not raised, the Head cannot have been raised (vss. 12-16). It is also why he calls Christ the "First-fruits" – for He represents the rest of the harvest, and they must follow. It explains the comparison between Adam and Christ in vss. 21-22 as well.
- 3) The Long Gap: From our point of view, the time is long between Christ's victory on the cross and His return for the "grand finale." However, the harvest (the elect) must be gathered in from every generation. By spreading the elect through all generations, God ensures that the testimony to these truths is always present. This gap also teaches God's people to look with faith at the outworking of Christ's victory. It is, after all, more blessed to believe without seeing.

Conclusion:

