



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

“The Last Adam and His Kingdom, part I”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, it's 7:30. Let's open our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks again for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the blessings of life through him, for the spiritual blessings that are ours by virtue of his incarnation, his death, and resurrection. We thank Thee for the promises with regard to the future, his coming again, his kingdom, and the ages of eternity that lie in the future. How blessed is the church of Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee for the word of God that is given to us to be a lamp and a light for our steps while we live in this world.

We thank Thee for the comfort of the Holy Spirit who constantly is with us, who is with us according to the promises of our Lord himself to the apostles in the upper room forever. And we rejoice in that, we rejoice in all that it means to be in Christ to have such a mediator and such a representative. The riches of the believers in Jesus Christ are truly infinite. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon us as we study the word tonight. May the Holy Spirit be our teacher, ultimately.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Well, today is January the 4th, 1995, in case some of you have lost track of where we are. It's the day that the 104th Congress is meeting. And I am not going to

leave you with any Scriptural message particularly, but to remind you of the wise dictum of Will Rogers who said, “When congress is in session, no American is safe.” [Laughter] So that’s the age that we face now for a few months or so or a couple of years perhaps that this congress is in session. It’s helpful to remember that these are all passing things and that we needn’t get too excited about them if our trust really is in the provision made through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Well, we have been studying the earlier part of 1 Corinthians 15, looking at verse 1 through verse 19. And the apostle, as we know if you have been here, has been emphasizing two or three things. He’s been emphasizing the necessity and the historicity of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, its necessity for faith and salvation, and its historicity. In fact, he has told us that this is part of the gospel by which we are saved if we hold fast.

Now, I didn’t lay a lot of stress on this, but it actually is something that we ought to stress that the apostle states here with reference to the gospel and with reference to resurrection as a part of it that it is part of the saving ministry of Jesus Christ. “The gospel,” he says, “by which also ye are saved, if you hold fast that which you believed not in vain.”

Now, I did mention this, which needs to be mentioned I think over and over again. That when the apostle says that we are saved through the gospel and then mentions the death, burial, and resurrection, and then tells us in the first chapter of this epistle that he was happy that he did not baptize generally the Corinthians or any others in his ministry, he said in the case of the Corinthians he did baptize a couple of people, but so far as he was concerned he was glad that he hadn’t baptized any but them. Now, a man who says he preaches the gospel, as he says to them, the gospel that I have preached to you, and does not say that baptism is a necessity in his ministry surely stands then behind the statement that it’s not necessary to be baptized in order to be saved. He

preached the gospel he said, but he said also he was happy he had not baptized but two or three people. So that is very important and we need bear that in mind.

Now, he has been emphasizing in this chapter particularly, though, the resurrection. He goes on to say in verse 3,

“I delivered to you first of all that which I received. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and he was seen by Cephas then of the twelve and about well over five hundred brethren, and then by others and the apostles, last of all seen by me also as one born out of due time.”

So there is a great deal of stress here on the resurrection and evidently among the Corinthians there were those who were part of the body who had doubts about the resurrection. In verse 12 remember he said, “How do some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead?” So he is concerned that they would be straight, they would become straight on the resurrection. The resurrection, therefore, is one of those important events in our Lord’s life. It’s part of the gospel. It’s extremely important that we know what the Scriptures say about it and also that we believe it. Now, you know of course, the idea of the resurrection has been under attack since the days that it occurred.

Machen once made a statement that has impressed a number of people. He said these words. He said, “You say my friend that you have never seen a man who rose from the dead after he has been laid really in the tomb; quite right, neither have I. You and I have never seen a man who rose from the dead. That is true. But what of it? You and I have never seen a man who rose from the dead, but then you and I have never seen a man like Jesus. Don’t you see my friends what we are trying to establish is not the resurrection of any ordinary man, nor the resurrection of a man about whom we know nothing, but the resurrection of Jesus. It’s unlikely that any ordinary man should rise. But

it’s unlikely that this man should not rise. It may be said of this man that it was impossible that he should not beholden of death.” It was impossible that he “should” beholden of death as I have in my notes. It’s not I don’t have that slipped in, beholden of death.

This is kind of interesting because what we have today in Charismatic teaching is claims of people who are rising from the dead. That’s rather interesting. Usually it’s somebody in Africa or somewhere else where it would be quite a task for us to go and find out about it.

Now, many years ago in *Time* magazine, in fact it was September the 8th, 1958, I have it in my notes this specific quote from *Time* magazine. This is the way it reads. “Abracadabra, Abracadabra, in Bandirma, Turkey, as seven of his relatives fainted, one hundred and eight-year-old Haci Mustafa stepped out of his grave toward the end of his funeral rites, denounced his family for trying to ‘bury me before my time,’ walked out of the cemetery. I started to say, seminary. [Laughter] Well, you see it’s so easy for someone to say, well, was Bob Tilton over there praying, was Benny Hinn, or the other fellows? This thing happens all the time. I was amused by this.

This is the *Dallas Morning News*, November the 26th, 1994, “Woman Falsely Declared Dead.” Did you read that article? Now, if Mr. Tilton had been praying in the vicinity, we’d have another claim, or Benny or Jackie Deere or one of those who like to say the resurrection is something that we are seeing today.

“Morgue Attendant Notices Breathing on way to Funeral Home.” “Paramedics in Albany County, Coroner Phillip Fury, found no heartbeat, no pulse, no breath or other sign of life, and the coroner declared the individual” -- her name is given in just a moment -- Mildred C. Clark, declared her officially dead. So they zipped Mildred C. Clark, 86 years old, into a body bag. They should know not to do that. She was only 86. So they put her in a body bag, took her to the morgue at the Albany Medical Center Hospital, and left her in a room where corpses are kept at 40 degrees pending autopsies or funerals. About

ninety minutes later, the chief morgue attendant went to transfer her to a funeral home. He was wheeling her out of the cooler, interesting name, isn’t it, wheeling her out of the cooler when he noticed movement in the body bag. Actually, a rising of the bag, said Gregory McGery, a spokesman for the medical center. He also detected a faint breathing sound. At first, he assumed it was just air escaping from the bag, but then he noticed a rhythm to it. Well, no need to go on to read the rest of it. The coroner, an elected official, who is an insurance agent, not a doctor, was calling it a miracle. And health officials, mindful that a [indistinct]premature burial had narrowly been averted were debating whether Albany ought to have a full-fledged medical examiner.

Well, I think probably they ought to have. But I think you can see it is very easy for people to say, yes there are resurrections that occur in these days. And particularly if someone is there who has certain spiritual views like the Charismatics and believes that the resurrection is something we see all the time providing we pray about it.

James Denny, one of the finest of the Scottish theologians, once said, “Every Sunday that comes around is a new argument for the resurrection. The decisive event in the inauguration of the new religion took place on that day and events so decisive ensure that it displaced the Sabbath.” So we worship on the first day of the week, and every time the first day of the week comes around, it’s a fresh testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if there are Jewish Christians, and there are literally thousands of Jewish Christians in this country, when they themselves go to the Christian church on the first day of the week and worship instead of the seventh, that’s fresh testimony too to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Paul has been stressing the necessity, and he stressed the historicity of the resurrection but he also stresses the importance of affirming that. And the way he does it is by talking about the consequences of a denial of the resurrection. In verse 12, he says, “Now if Christ be preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among

you say there is not resurrection of the dead?” And in verse 14, “And if Christ is not risen then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.”

Now, we expounded that a couple of nights ago in our studies by making the claim that when that term is used, he means that we are believing in something that is historically untrue. So if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty, it’s not true -- that is, the resurrection is not true -- our faith is empty because we have placed our faith in something that has not happened. A

And then further in verse 17, he had said, “And if Christ is not risen your faith is futile. You are still in your sins.” We pointed out the fact that the Greek term *kenos* and the Greek term *mataios*, two different terms are used here, the one having to do with the emptiness of our faith, if there is no objective basis for it, and the second adjective having to do with the futility of an event or claim.

For example, if we believe in the resurrection and it is not occurred then our faith is futile in the sense that our faith does not do for us what we thought it would do. In other words, the end, the purpose is not realized. That’s what he means when he says in verse 17, “Your faith is futile.” It’s empty in the sense it doesn’t do what it is supposed to do. So he stressed then the consequences of the denial of the resurrection.

And then in verse 20 through 28, the passage we looked at in our last study, the apostle stressed that the resurrection is the seal of the certainty of our victory over death, of course, his victory and of our victory too because of our relationship to him. We pointed out it set in motion the consummating events our resurrection, the defeat of death, and the kingdom of the Son of God. It’s a marvelous passage. You know, in fact, this 15th chapter is one of the great chapters in the Pauline literature. One of the older commentators calls this specific section 1 Corinthians 15 and right here in the heart of it, a passage of epic grandeur. That’s a marvelous way to express it. It certainly is rich in theological importance.

And we are living -- as you know, I often comment on this. I know this is really a burden to you to have to listen to it again. But what I want is for you to think about it when you don’t want to think about it. That is, I want you to wake up at night, you can’t sleep, and what you hear first is, “Theology is important.” I would love to have you do that. I mean, I would like to say it so much that that’s what you would just do when you are not really thinking. It would come into your mind, “Theology is important. Christian theology is important.”

This is one of the great theological chapters in Pauline literature. It sounds a lot like Romans 5, which is another one Paul’s greatest. Well, this one is rich in theological importance. And I keep saying this because many of my friends who say much the same thing, at times, say things that are not in harmony with it. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Ashkelon, lest the uncircumcised Philistines of the emotional preachers hear this in *Table Talk*. *Table Talk* is the monthly magazine of Ligonier ministries. Many of you get it. How many of you get *Table Talk*, by the way? See there are some, there are some wise people in this congregation. It’s a very good little magazine. It’s very -- it’s not deep. It’s -- as we will see it’s not real deep. It could be a lot deeper. But it’s a good magazine and the men who write in it are generally good men. The last two issues have had an interesting statement from Francis Krauss of Sheldonville, Massachusetts, and she is praising the Ligonier conferences of last year. One of them was here in Dallas. There is going to be one in Arlington in April, I believe.

And though, this is what she says -- and this is put in the magazine about people who love theology. This would be one thing I would have ex-ed out if I was the editor. No, no, not this. Listen to what she said about Ligonier in advertising. Not just a lot of doctrine and theology but practical to our everyday living. Nothing could be worse. Theology is the most practical thing in all the world. Christ died for our sins, was buried, rose again. That’s theology. How practical is that? Why, that is the ground of your eternal destiny. That’s how practical it is.

So I’m not going to apologize for it. This is a strongly theological section and we are just going to look at three verses tonight because we are going to labor, labor the point over the next verses from verse 20 through verse 28.

But now I’d like to read verse 20 through 28. We’ll do tonight 20, 21, and 22. The apostle writes -- now you see he has been talking about those who deny the resurrection or have doubt about it. There are some among you who say there is no resurrection of the dead. Well, he argues from the consequences, if it’s true that he’s not been raised from the dead, then your faith is vain, empty. You are still in your sins. Now, he wants to go positive and so he says in verse 20, “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Now, the first thing that he talks about in verse 20 is the fact and the figure of Christ’s resurrection, but now, as over against what we’ve been talking about those who have doubts about it, and what doubt really lands you in, no assurance of the forgiveness of your sins, a faith, that is faith in something that hasn’t really happened.

Now, Christ is risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. This, but now, is what we would call a logical, but now. Frequently this term has a temporal sense. As a matter of fact you could say it’s both. But now, as the case stands, as the facts stand, Christ is risen from the dead. And so he is going to introduce now what someone has called the cry of deliverance after the nightmare of the abyss of no resurrection. Notice, Christ has been raised from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Firstfruits? Well, we’ll talk about that in a moment because any person who read the Old Testament, any Jewish man, he would have known precisely what Paul was talking about because they celebrated the Feast of Firstfruits. And those Gentiles, who were familiar with the Old Testament festivals and no

doubt the Christians, would have understood immediately what Paul is saying when he says that Christ has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Now, that gives me a thrill that he’s the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep and in a moment you will see why. First of all, then under this fact and figure, let’s just underline the fact -- this is a response to verse 14 and verse 17. Verse 14, “If Christ is not risen -- if he’s not risen, my preaching is empty, your faith is empty.” Verse 17, “If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” But now, but now, as over against these ifs and the consequences of no resurrection, but now positively the fact of the resurrection is set forth by the inspired apostle. Christ is risen from the dead.

But then having spoken of the fact, he uses the expression which is a reference to an Old Testament feast. Using it as a figure, he says he has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Now, Paul is thinking, obviously, as he does in more than one place of the Feast of Firstfruits. The feast of the Passover had more than one significance. Of course, as everyone knows, it commemorated the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt, but it also was a great harvest festival, and a few days after that the Feast of Firstfruits occurred. It was at that time that the barley harvest, as a rule, came to its perfections and the fruit, that is the grains of barley, were gathered in. The law of the Old Testament says this, “Ye shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest unto the priest and he shall wave the sheaf before Jehovah to be accepted for you. On the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it,” Leviticus chapter 23 in the description of the Feast of the Firstfruits.

The law laid it down that some sheaves of barley must be reaped from the common field, which incidentally had to be a typical field, a common field. It couldn’t come from a special field but had to come from a common field because it was designed to represent the nation as a whole. And so a few of the sheaves of the barley grain were cut down, they were brought to the temple, and there it was threshed with soft cane, so as not to bruise it. It was then parched over the fire in a perforated pan so that every

grain was touched by the fire. It was then exposed to the wind so the chaff was blown away. It was then ground in the barley mill and the flour of it was offered to the Lord God. That is the firstfruits. It is very significant to note that not until after the sheaf of barley was waved before the Lord could the new barley be bought and sold in the shops and bread be made from the new flour. In other words, the firstfruits had to be brought in, had to be waved before the Lord, and then it was possible to make the bread and sell it and for the children of Israel to eat it.

What did that signify? Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Well, if our figure is to be a guide for us, what it means is that when the firstfruits of the barley harvest are weighed before the Lord, that that signifies that just as in the barley harvest that there must be before the reaping of all the grain, a special sheaf that must be offered before the Lord. And when Paul calls the resurrection the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, what he is telling us is that Jesus Christ’s work in resurrection is the earnest of our resurrection. Because when the sheaf of the barley harvest was cut, brought in before the temple and the other things were done with it, and it was waved before the Lord, that was, first of all, an indication that the barley harvest is ripe. And now this having been waved before the Lord is the earnest of more in the field. So it was a celebration that was designed ultimately to represent our Lord Jesus Christ and his work. The sheaf brought in, waved before the Lord, the earnest that there was a harvest in the field that would be harvested.

Secondly, not only was it an earnest of the harvest that would come, but the sheaf was also like that that was in the field. In other words, it was cut down in the common field, brought in just like all the other sheaves out in the field, and it was waved before the Lord in celebration of the fact that they had a harvest, and further, that the sheaf and the harvest to be harvested were the same. So the resurrection, if it’s the firstfruits, is an earnest of the resurrection of others, and it also is an indication that the others in the field

share the same life that the firstfruits share. Do you get the point? An earnest and a sample.

Now, Paul says he is the firstfruits of the ones who have fallen asleep. Now, that verb is the verb we’ve talked about more than once back in chapter 11, here last time or the time before. *Koimao* is the Greek word. It’s the word that is used for Christian’s death. Not the only word, but it is never used of a non-Christians death, *koimao*, to fall asleep. And I mentioned to you at the time, it’s so beautiful to say of a Christian, he fell asleep. He didn’t really die like other people. He fell asleep. Why? Well, because, when we sleep, we’re resting, aren’t we? Some people thrash around when they are asleep. But most of us, when we are sleeping, we are resting. And also, not only are we resting, we are alive. We are breathing, aren’t we? And not only are we breathing and resting, but we are going to awake. It’s not sleep if we don’t awake.

All three of those things are so beautifully said about Christians when they die. They rest, they are alive, they are in the presence of the Lord, and they are going to awake. They are going to have a resurrection body promised to them by the Scriptures. This is what we Christians have, my Christians friends, this is part of what Paul is talking about when Christ came from the dead, that was the earnest of the harvest. We are the harvest. We are grain. We are one of the grains. Not only that, but there is a similarity. We are in Christ. We are united to Him. We have the life of Christ. Don’t we? Come on, don’t we? Don’t we have the life of Christ? Look, if you have the life of Christ, that’s the life that overcomes death, because that is precisely what his life did. It overcame death. That’s why he says I am the resurrection and the life. “He that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live. And he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” Go right into the presence of the Lord. You can see from this, of course, the sense of solidarity and union is emphasized by this festival, the community of nature that we share with our Lord, the earnest, the sample.

Helmut Thielicke, the German theologian, who wrote so many interesting things in his writings, says, “One might reduce the gospel to the simple formula that at the very deepest level Jesus Christ unites the destiny of men with his own” -- that’s precisely what this expression, firstfruits of those who’ve fallen asleep. Firstfruits have been weighed before the Lord, the third day after our Lord was crucified, he rose from the dead. The firstfruits has been waved before the Lord, and now the whole harvest is being gathered, nineteen hundred years of gathering the harvest, all the grains, all the sheaves coming in ultimately into the temple of the presence of God. And God’s promises marvelously fulfilled. And we are going to take part in it, those of us who may die before the Lord comes. We are sheaves, too. We are going to enjoy the fullness of what it means to be, as the apostle says, part of that firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Now, that’s marvelous text, but in verse 21 the apostle is going to give us some reasoning that pertains to it because you will notice that verse 21 and verse 22, both of them begin with a “for” probably in explanation. For, since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. This is in a sense a more precise explanation of verse 20. This is why he’s the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep because by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead.

Now, anyone who reads the apostle Paul knows that this particular passage is very similar to the passage in Romans chapter 5. I am just going to read a few verses. You don’t have to look over there, some of you may have trouble finding Romans. So just wanted to see if you were awake. Verse 12 Paul says in the 5th chapter of Romans these words, I’ll just read a few verses.

“Therefore, just as through one man, sin entered the world and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because all sin, for until the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression

of Adam, who is a type of him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense, for if by the one man’s offense many died (Notice sin leading to death.) Much more, the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ abounded to many.”

Well, we needn’t read more. The apostle goes on through verse 21 speaking about things that pertain to that. But the parallel is obvious in Romans chapter 5, verse 12 through verse 21, Paul talks about sin, how the sin of the one man led to eternal life.

Now, here using still the figure of Adam and Christ, he talks about death and what death leads to. If sin of Adam, through the marvelous plan of salvation, leads to life for those who are the chosen ones, here in this passage it’s the death of our Lord that leads to the resurrection of those who are in Christ.

Now, people don’t really respond to this too favorably, you know. The idea of one man’s act affecting all men, we despise that. Don’t we naturally? Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, everybody died. Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, and I’m born condemned. What’s fair about that? What’s fair about that? Of course, we don’t mind occasionally saying, Christ rose from the dead and all in him have eternal life, you know the identification there. That’s what you expect, God should favor us. The idea that God should deal with two men -- now some of you may remember -- I doubt that many will remember it actually. Preachers don’t have any confidence in the memory of their congregations. But about five or seven or eight years ago, I preached an entire message on the subject of representation. One of my friends took the message to Philadelphia, had one of the faculty members of Westminster Seminary who believes in representation listened to the tape. And a professor of church history there said, “I’ve never heard a sermon on that topic.” So why should I expect you to remember something like that? But anyway, I did preach on that point.

What I am leading up to is what Luther said about this. Luther had the marvelous faculty of making memorable statements. And Luther says, “The idea of damning the

whole world because one man bit into an apple” -- Isn’t that something? The idea of God damning the whole world because one man bit into an apple. “Equally,” he said, “the idea of taking a lot of men to heaven because one man died on the cross.” It’s so ridiculous to the natural man until you study the Scriptures and pay attention to them. And then you say, oh, the marvelous grace of God that he worked out such a marvelous plan that one man’s life and death, his death, can be the means for the salvation of a mighty multitude. That’s the way God deals with men.

Charnock made a statement about that that is so true. He said -- it is useful to remember these words. He said, “How bold and foolish is it for a mortal creature to censure the counsels and actions of an eternal God or be too curious in his inquisitions.” How foolish it is for finite people, and you are finite, I know you. You are finite. You are finite. This is a subject far beyond any of you. And in case -- I don’t have to say this because you’ve already said it about me. It’s far beyond me. Of course it is. We are talking about divine thought. The doctrine, the truth of the eternal Trinity, what is the real truth spiritually, and the facts of the word of God set it forth so plainly.

Now, there is a difference between Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. I don’t know whether it is worth it to even mention it, but in the passage in Romans the emphasis is on the one, the one man, the case of the one man item, the one-man Christ. In our passage, the emphasis is a little different. Here the emphasis is upon man, man, notice what the text says verse 21, “For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead.”

In other words, it is for man to repair the damage done by man, as someone has put it. We have sinned against God. We have sinned against the councils of the eternal. It’s necessary for a man to repair what man has been guilty of doing, and that’s why a man came. The God-man, Jesus Christ, came to stand for men, and on Calvary’s cross bore the judgment, do men an infinite judgment, and made it possible for men who sinned in Adam to come to life and ultimately to resurrection. It’s a great passage, isn’t it?

This is a great passage. I wish I had written it, but I didn’t. I wish I understood everything about it. I honestly have to say I haven’t understood everything about it.

But now I want to spend the rest of the time very briefly on what is meant by verse 22, which says, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” Does this, for example, teach that everybody is going to be saved? It says, does it not, in Christ all shall be made alive. Perhaps those who teach that everybody is going to ultimately be saved are correct. Here is the text. The last clause, “So in Christ all shall be made alive.” If I were a universalist and I was trying to find a text, this is what I’d find, this little clause right here. “In Christ all shall be made alive.”

Well, obviously you know there have been different interpretations taken of this passage. The two “alls” are a problem. So let me just suggest three interpretations that have been put on it. You ought to know it. You ought to know theology. It’s practical. It’s practical. Some believe that this does teach universal salvation. That’s very popular in the professing Christian church today. You go into our theological seminaries, Princeton Theological Seminary, various other seminaries, you’ll find universalism is very, very common. Everybody is going to be ultimately saved. If you ask for details, oh well, I’m not sure about details but it’s just I cannot conceive of God condemning all men or any men to eternal judgment.

John Stott an evangelical, Phillip Hughes an evangelical from Westminster Theological Seminary. They are not the only ones, others and some secret believers in our theological seminaries. The two “alls” are emphasized but notice the two “alls” are limited by two prepositional phrases. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

James Moffett was one of the finest of the Scottish New Testament scholars of a couple of generations back, the earlier part of the 20th Century, the Moffett translation is a marvelous translation still and still useful. He was an unusual man, and he has an interesting comment. He said, “It’s only by isolating the words ‘all shall be made alive in

Christ’ that they can be referred to a general resurrection as though this was Paul’s equivalent for that Pharisaic tenet. But such an interpretation implies a vaguer sense in Christ than the apostle normally suggests besides missing the fact that to be made alive is more than to be resuscitated.

“What Paul appears to argue is that the new order of being with its fullness with divine life starts from the risen Lord.” And then he makes this little illustration which I thought was so interesting. Margaret Fuller -- I never studied transcendentalism, but Margaret Fuller was an American transcendentalist. And he says that she, in the last century, the Nineteenth, once remarked that Handel was worthy to speak of Christ. The great chorus, “Since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead / for as in Adam all die even so in Christ shall be made alive.” You remember that in Handel’s Messiah, that particular part of the Messiah, and she adds these words to it, “If understood in the large sense of every man his own Savior (every man his own savior?) and Jesus only representative of the way all must walk to accomplish our destiny is indeed a worthy gospel.” Worthy gospel? That I should save myself by living like Christ. He condemns me everyday. He condemns me when I am not doing anything, when I am sitting in my chair at home and thinking. The life of Christ the purity, the glory, the greatness of the life of the Son of God condemns me. If that’s the gospel, I am lost. Universal salvation? No.

Well, some evangelicals who wouldn’t accept Universalism believe the text does teach, Moffett refers to this, universal resurrection. Now, that’s a true doctrine. Everybody is going to be resurrected. Some are going to be resurrected unto damnation. Some are going to be resurrected unto salvation or into life. The texts of Scripture make that plain, John chapter 5, verse 28 and 29, for example, makes that plain. But does this text have to do with universal resurrection? Notice again the “alls” are limited by the prepositional phrases, as in Adam all dies, even so in Christ all shall be made alive, in Christ.

Now, we know that the unsaved are going to be resurrected. They are going to be resurrected, given a body in which they are to suffer eternal judgment. That is a biblical doctrine. But this is in Christ all shall be made alive. Who could ever think of a person outside of Christ being part of the firstfruits of our Lord’s resurrection? The firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep as our Lord, the firstfruits of those have fallen asleep in eternal death? No, no, not at all. It’s impossible for him to be the firstfruits of unbelievers. Furthermore, the term that is used here, shall be made alive, is a term that is never used of the wicked in the New Testament. John the apostle uses it in chapter 5 of his gospel and chapter 6. They are not to be made alive. Moffett was correct when he said that -- to get the words that he uses precisely, were that to be made alive is more than to be resuscitated, to be made alive is to be truly made alive with light.

So what our Lord is talking about, through the Apostle Paul, is much more than resuscitation. To be made alive in Christ is to possess true spiritual life. But furthermore, and perhaps even more significant, this passage is not a passage about unbelievers. This passage is primarily a passage about believers right from the beginning throughout. So it’s not universal resurrection. It’s not universal salvation.

What Paul is talking about is universal resurrection in Christ, the universal resurrection of believers. So as in Adam, all men die, all have died in Adam. Death passed to all men, but in Christ all who are in Christ is the point, shall be made alive, shall be resurrected, are part of those who have fallen asleep in Christ.

So the text teaches not universal resurrection, not universal salvation, it teaches universal resurrection in Christ. So we look forward to resurrection. Ah, you see -- I’ve mentioned this so often I don’t have to mention it now except just to remind you, you have a living illustration of what death does to a person, just look, look ahead, look. But we are all headed for resurrection. We are part of what he calls those who may fall asleep, but we are going to be resurrected and given a body liken to his own glorious body.

So what he’s saying simply is death in all cases is grounded in Adam, and life, true life, in all cases in Jesus Christ. Thus Christ’s resurrection necessitates the resurrection and life of all who are in him as believers.

Now, a natural question that one would ask at this point is, well, I’m willing to accept that. As a believing man, I am willing to accept the idea that because of what Jesus Christ has done, I look forward to the resurrection, but Paul will tell us something about the order of these resurrections that Scripture does talk about. You have Christ’s resurrection. You have the resurrection of believers. And then the remaining events that lie before us, but what about the order of these events? Well, Paul, in the next paragraph, will turn to the order of the resurrection events, and if I’m still here, one of the living and not one of the sleeping, we will look in our next study at the verses beginning with verse 23.

This is a marvelous passage. What it is is good theology. It’s the most practical thing in the world because it’s the most comforting thing in the world. It touches all of the experiences of our life. You can even find a comfort in it as April the 15th draws near. For all of the experiences of life, that’s what it’s designed to do. It’s designed to comfort us. It’s designed to stir us up. It’s designed to make us more faithful, help us to be more faithful in our Christian life and our witness our testimony. It’s designed to give us courage with our friends, our families for whom we are concerned and to whom we wish to speak a word that the Spirit of God might have used. May God enable us to do that?

Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for this marvelous word from the apostle, first written to the Corinthians, so many centuries ago, still so applicable to us today so many thousand miles away from the city of Corinth. We thank Thee, Lord. We pray that the hope of the resurrection may be something that we keep before us constantly. And, Lord, give us the courage to live in such a way that Jesus Christ is exalted in our lives truly.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“The Last Adam and His Kingdom, part I” by S. Lewis Johnson
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