

Proposition: When it comes to understanding what Jesus is doing in the world, there are two things we know for sure according to 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

- I. We know what Christ did at His first coming (20-24).
 - A. He died and was raised from the dead (20).
 - B. He reversed the curse (21-24).
- II. We know what Christ will do at His second coming (25-28).
 - A. Christ will reign (25a).
 - B. Christ will reclaim the world (25b-26).
 1. He will eliminate all kingdom rivals (25a).
 2. He will destroy the last rival, death (26).
 - C. Christ will relinquish the kingdom (27-28).
 1. The Father put all things under the Son (27).
 2. The Son will present the kingdom to the Father (28a, 24).
 3. Then even the Son will be subject to the Father (28b).
 4. God will be all in all (28c).

Implications: Because we know this...

1. We can live confidently.
2. We should live soberly.

Have you ever heard of the Central War Room? The Central War Room was Great Britain's headquarters for military decisions during World War II. It was located across from St. James Park in London, in the basement of the Government Offices at Storey's Gate. The structure was reinforced for safety, first with oak and then later with steel strutting. The complex was equipped with a Map Room, Signal and Cypher Rooms, and even some small bedrooms.

It was in the Central War Room that decisions were made that affected (humanly speaking) the fate of a nation, a continent, and even the world. The presence of the Central War Room brought hope to the British people during the difficult days of Nazi attack.

On June 16, 1941, Winston Churchill addressed the nation, as he did many times, from the Central War Room:

"And now the old lion with her lion cubs at her side stands alone against hunters who are armed with deadly weapons and impelled by desperate and destructive rage. Is the tragedy to repeat itself once more? Ah no! This is not the end of the tale. The stars in their courses proclaim the deliverance of mankind. Not so easily shall the onward progress of the peoples be barred. Not so easily shall the lights of freedom die.

"But time is short. Every month that passes adds to the length and to the perils of the journey that will have to be made. United we stand. Divided we fall. Divided, the dark age returns. United, we can save and guide the world."¹

History demonstrates that when things aren't going well, it's good to know someone has a plan, a strategy for making sense of the chaos.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹from Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume 4, Finest Hour*, p. 1110.

Which brings me to a question. What in the world is Jesus doing? We know He's in control. We know that as the sovereign Lord He has a plan. We know that. But then we look around and see what's happening in the world today. And it looks like chaos.

We see ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia. And bloodshed all over. The number of ongoing wars has risen dramatically from ten in 1960 to over fifty in 1994.² Is the world out of control? Just what in the world is Jesus doing?

1 Corinthians 15 tells us. In 1 Corinthians 15, God invites us into "The Central War Room" and shows us the divine plan. He shows us the big picture of what He's doing, of where we're heading.

And realize it or not, the crux of God's plan is linked to an event we celebrated last Sunday, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. His resurrection is the foundation of the whole eternal plan--which is why Paul goes to great lengths to defend the resurrection doctrine in this chapter.

Here's what we'll see this morning. When it comes to understanding what Jesus is doing in the world, there are two things we know for sure according to 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

I. We know what Christ did at His first coming (20-24).

Last week we examined verses 20-24, while our focus today will be verses 25-28. Since verses 20-28 together form a unit of thought, we'll look at the whole package today.

Beloved, we know what Christ did at His first coming. The Scriptures tell us the account. What did Christ do? Number one...

A. He died and was raised from the dead (20). "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Christ died. His death was a real, historical event. But He didn't remain dead. He was raised from the dead. In so doing here's what He did--number two...

B. He reversed the curse (21-24). That's why He came--to reverse the curse. What curse? The curse Adam brought upon the human race when he committed treason in the Garden.

Remember the story from last week? The true story of a King, a kingdom, and two men. If you don't understand the story, you'll never grasp what in the world Jesus is doing.

In the beginning, there was a King. The King was God. In the beginning the King created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). This is *His* world.

On the sixth day of His creative work, God formed a man, Adam, to take care of His world (Gen. 1:26). He created the man in His image and made him His representative to rule over the world.

But the first man rebelled against the King. Adam ate from the tree. He went his own way rather than God's. Instead of seeking first God's kingdom, Adam followed the evil advice of the serpent and sought to establish his own kingdom. It was an act of cosmic rebellion. By his fateful choice, the first man placed the world under the wrath of God the only true King.

The rest of the Bible (from Genesis 3:15 through Revelation 22) is the story of what God is doing to reclaim His kingdom.

²Bryant Myers, *The New Context of World Mission*, p. 20.

□ God sent a second man into the world to reverse the curse which the first man brought upon the world. The second Adam was in fact the Son of God. Jesus came to restore the kingdom to His Father. He came to reverse the curse.

That's what Paul explains in verses 21-24: "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. Then the end will come, when he hands over *the kingdom* to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power."

What in the world is Jesus doing? First, here's what He *did*. He died and was raised from the dead. And what happened to Him will happen to all who are in Him. Why? Because He reversed the curse.

Beloved, what we're talking about is lifechanging. God is in the business of transforming lives--because of what Christ did. Last Sunday evening we had the privilege of seeing four individuals testify through the waters of baptism to the resurrection power of Christ. It's happening around the world, too.

In a recent letter Wendell Kempton, president of the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism, shared about a recent trip to Asia: "In Burma it was my privilege to address the commencement ceremony for 128 graduates of the Chin Baptist Bible College of northwest Burma. In Cambodia we saw our work in a poor suburb of Phnom Penh among people whose children beg money for their families in the bazaars and streets. In Kathmandu, Nepal I preached to a three month old church of about 40 members. We were told an average of six new churches are being started there each month."³

Yes, we know what Christ did at His first coming. Our hope is built on what He did. But there's more...

II. We know what Christ will do at His second coming (25-28).

What will He do? In verses 25-28 Paul lays out for us the sequence of events associated with Christ's return. In a sense, verses 25-28 flesh out verse 24. Verse 24 says that when the end comes, the Son will hand over the kingdom to the Father. But there is a chain of events that must happen *first* before that climactic moment. What's going to happen? We find out in verses 25-28.

Paul uses kingdom language to depict what the Lord will do to reverse the curse. Here's where history is heading. Here's what Christ will do in conjunction with His second coming--three events.

A. Christ will reign (25a). "For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet." Notice the text states He *must* reign. There's certainty in this statement. It's not He *may* reign, but He *must* reign.

Why must He reign? Actually, He already reigns. On His resurrection day, Christ became the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Since that day He has reigned over His people. And that reign *must* continue. *Must* indicates divine purpose. Christ *must* reign until He eliminates once and for all every potential threat to the kingdom of God.--or as the end of verse 25 puts it, "until He has put all His enemies under His feet."

³letter written by Wendell Kempton, 3/15/99

Christ must reign. It is His Father's will that He reign. Indeed, He is reigning right now in the lives of His people. But the day is coming when He will reign over the earth.

My personal conviction is that verse 25 refers primarily to this future reign, to the Millennial Kingdom reign of Christ described in Revelation 20. After Christ judges the world in an event known as the Tribulation (as depicted in Revelation 6-19), Revelation 20:1-6 tells us what will happen next:

"(1-2) And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years... (4) I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and *reigned with Christ* a thousand years... (6) Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years."

What's going to happen at Christ's second coming? He's going to fulfill a chain of events that He began at His resurrection. Event #1, He will reign. Event #2...

B. Christ will reclaim the world (25b-26). "For he must reign *until* [notice the purpose clause] he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

What's Christ going to do when He returns? He will reign. And He will reclaim. That is, He will reclaim the world that's been held captive since Adam. What specifically will Christ do when He reclaims the world? Paul identifies two things in verses 25-26.

1. *He will eliminate all kingdom rivals (25a).* Verse 25 indicates He "will put all his enemies under his feet." Paul doesn't identify the enemies here. In verse 24 he mentions three enemies that Christ will destroy: "all dominion, authority, and power."

The world is plagued by rivals to the kingdom of God. Some we can see. The worst are those we can't see, as Ephesians 6:12 explains, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood [i.e. human opponents], but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Listen, my friend, the day is coming when Jesus Christ will do what we could never do. He will eliminate all kingdom rivals. And in His work to reclaim the world for God, He's going to do something else.

2. *He will destroy the last rival, death (26).* Our English Bible's read, "*The* last enemy is death." In the Greek text there is no definite article. It's simply, "Last enemy is death." The emphasis is only *last*. After Christ reclaims the world, there will never be another rival to the kingdom. Never. Death is the last, and death itself will be destroyed.

Think about it. As long as people die, God's sovereign purposes are not yet fully realized (Gordon Fee, 757). But two thousand years ago Christ's resurrection set in motion a chain of events that will climax ultimately with the death of death!

Do you realize how much effort we expend in our daily lives trying to deal with this last enemy? We eat healthy foods. We exercise. We spend money for vitamins, for doctor's visits, and for hospital stays. We use cosmetics to cover up the obvious. We are aging. We are *dying*.

But take heart! There is a person who did battle with death--and He won! His name is Jesus Christ. And what Jesus Christ did *personally* He will one day do for His people. He will do it on a kingdom scale. He will destroy death.

That's why it's so urgent that you know Him. He's the only way to overcome death. And He offers *you* eternal life today if you will believe in Him.

We *know* what Christ will do. At His second coming He will accomplish a chain of events. One, He will reign. Two, He will reclaim the world for God. Then, #3...

C. Christ will relinquish the kingdom (27-28). What we're told in verses 27-28 is fascinating. It's as if God invites us to join Him in the "Central War Room" and allows us to hear the final chapter of His kingdom reclaiming strategy.

Do you know what's going to happen after Christ reigns for one thousand years, and after He reclaims this world and eliminates all rivals, including death? He's going to relinquish the kingdom.

Did you know that? To whom will Christ relinquish the kingdom? Listen to verses 27-28, "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."

The day is coming when Christ will relinquish the kingdom. That day will be the climax of His kingdom restoration efforts, a restoration involving four steps mentioned here. In step one...

1. *The Father put all things under the Son (27).* "For He [the pronoun isn't defined but clearly refers to God the Father] 'has put everything under his feet.'"

That's a quotation of Psalm 8:6. What's interesting is that in Psalm 8, the words refers to *man*, not Christ. Psalm 8:4 asks, "What is *man* that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" And Psalm 8:5-8 answers the question, "You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea..."

Who's Psalm 8 talking about? It's a psalm that praises God for His work in creating *man*. It's a psalm that marvels that God is mindful of man--but not only mindful of man, but actually made man ruler over creation.

This is amazing. God created man to be His vice regent, and put everything in creation under man's feet. Man was supposed to take care of God's world for God.

But man blew it, didn't he? So God in His grace sent another man, the God-man, to make things right and fulfill the plan. The Father placed all things under the Son so that the Son could restore what man blundered. Do you see?

What's the Son going to do once He's restored the kingdom? Step two...

2. *The Son will present the kingdom to the Father (28a, 24).* Verse 28 begins, "When He has done this." Done what? When He has accomplished the work the Father gave Him to do, the kingdom restoration work, the Son is going to do something. We have to go back to verse 24 to see what it is.

Verse 24 informs us what the Son is going to do at the end of God's redemptive plan, "Then the end will come when he [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father."

Follow the flow. The Father subdued all things to the Son. But in the end, the Son out of His infinite love for His Father will surrender the kingdom to His Father. And that's not all. Step three...

3. *Then even the Son will be subject to the Father (28b).* This is staggering, but it's what verse 28 says, "Then the Son himself will be made subject to Him who put everything under Him."

You say, "I thought God the Father and God the Son were equal." They are. In essence, they are equal. But in function, the Son is subordinate. The verb "will be made subject" is *hupotago* in the Greek. It means "to place or rank under." It's used three times in the Greek text of verse 28. It's also the same word used to depict the wife's role in relationship to her husband in Ephesians 5:24 and Colossians 3:18 (the latter reads, "Wives, *submit* to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord").

Equality does not eliminate roles--not in marriage nor in the Trinity. Listen to what Paul wrote earlier in 1 Corinthians 11:3, "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

Did you realize that though they are equal in nature, the Son is subject to the Father in His role? Perhaps the best commentary on this mind-boggling truth is the gospel of John.

Supplemental material which helps explain 1 Corinthians 15:28...

A Summary of the Relationship between God the Father and God the Son
(from the Gospel of John)

1. They are equal (10:30; 14:9-11).
2. The Son is the only one who has seen the Father (6:46).
3. The Father loves the Son (5:20).
4. The Father has life in Himself and has granted the same to the Son (5:26).
5. The Father gave the Son a work to do (5:36; 10:18; 14:31; 15:10).
6. The Father sent the Son into the world to do this work (5:36; 8:16, 18, 42; 10:36).
7. The Father has given a love gift, a people, to His Son (6:37; 10:29).
8. The Son came to save and lose none of this love gift (6:39; 17:2, 24).
9. The Father's will is that all who look to the Son will have eternal life (6:40; 3:16).
10. No one can come to the Son unless the Father enables him (6:44, 65).
11. The Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son (5:22, 27).
12. The Father glorifies the Son (8:54; 17:5), and the Son glorifies the Father (14:13; 17:4).
13. The Son has returned to the Father (14:2; 16:10, 17, 28).
14. The Son is the only way to the Father (14:6).
15. The Son asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit to be with the love gift until He returns (14:16; 16:7, 13).
16. The Son will return to take the Father's love gift to live with Him forever (14:2-3).

In Jesus' prayer in John 17:1-5, we're given a glimpse of this amazing relationship that exists between the Father and the Son: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life; that they may

know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

Do you see how this relates to 1 Corinthians 15:28? The Father granted the Son authority over all people (John 17:2; in 1 Cor. 15 terminology, the Father "put all things under the Son."). And what did the Son do in response? According to John 17:4, He came to earth to bring glory to the Father by completing the work He'd given Him to do. He came to save the love-gift of people the Father had given Him, and then present that love-gift back to the Father (or as 1 Cor. 15:24 puts it, He will "hand over the kingdom to the Father"). And at that time even the Son will be subject to the Father.

For what purpose? So that step four will be accomplished.

4. *God will be all in all (28c).* God will have the last word. Do you see how orderly, organized, and intentional God's plan is for restoring the world to Himself?

The Father put all things under the Son. Why? So the Son could accomplish the Father's plan of reclaiming the kingdom. And once the kingdom is restored, the Son will present it in tact to the Father. Mission accomplished. And then, even the Son Himself will be subject to the Father. And God will be all in all.

Which brings me to a critical question. What are the implications of knowing this truth? Based on 1 Corinthians 15, we know what Christ did at His first coming, and we know what He will do at His second coming. Now what?

Implications: Because we know this...

Allow me to mention two key implications.

1. *We can live confidently.* I don't want you to miss something that stands out in 1 Corinthians 15. There's a connection between the empty tomb of Jesus and the perfect eternal state. The first event guarantees the second. As commentator David Pryor observes (269), "Remove the fact of resurrection and you have excised the very life-principle of the kingdom of God."

Dear friend, because we know what Jesus did and is going to do, we can live confidently. Do you believe that? Is it true of your life? Are you living confidently, or are you shaken by the temporary storms of life? We can live confidently. But there's a second implication of knowing what Christ did and will do.

2. *We should live soberly.* Some people live like there's no tomorrow. Living soberly means we live today in light of tomorrow. Only one life; twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last. Are you living for Christ? Are you living soberly?