

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:20-26. Christ the King Sunday. **November 23, 2014.**

Grace and peace are yours through Christ the King. Amen.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Maybe you are familiar with this book by atheist turned Christian C. S. Lewis. Maybe not. That's ok. The lion is a king, appropriately, named Aslan. He is the real ruler over the land of Narnia. But there's an evil witch who has the land under a spell where it is always winter but never Christmas. Kind of stinky, right? The wardrobe is a portal between the human world and Narnia which four children accidentally discover. Got it so far? The evil white witch has wolves that run around hurting people. She has tons of followers to do her evil bidding. But then Aslan, the lion, arrives. At first, Aslan appears defeated. The followers of the White Witch kill him. He lies dead on the Stone Table. But then, in a great reversal of the story, Aslan rises from the dead, defeats the witch and has the four children rule over all Narnia with him. Cool story!

Do you see how this is just like us and our world? Do we need to explain it all? Maybe it wouldn't hurt. The White Witch is the devil, who seems to be ruling the world. But then Aslan, who stands for Jesus, shows up. Jesus dies, but in a great reversal, rises from the dead, defeats death and the devil in one fell swoop and has all his followers reign and rule with him in his heavenly kingdom. Aslan the king defeated death. Christ the King defeats death. Christ's followers get to reign and rule with him. Why? Christ the King defeats death. Christ the King defeats death. Christ the King defeats death.

It sure doesn't seem like we Christians are winning right now, especially over death. There is dominion, authority and power that the devil wields. By the way, when you see these words like dominion, authority and power, they are usually talking about demonic dominion, antichristian authority and the popular power of the devil. It seems like everything is on their side. Politicians fall all over themselves to speak out against everything Christian. You know what I'm talking about. Any politician who dares to stand up for Christian values is crucified. Governments pass laws contrary to God's Word and refuse to enforce the few remaining laws that Christians might agree with. Popular opinion is against all things biblical. Congressmen pass all things heathen. The courts back them up. It seems like we are losing the struggle.

And there's an even greater struggle, with a greater enemy. We all know we will lose this struggle. What's the enemy? Death. The worst enemy of all. The one enemy we all have in common. Death is an enemy. Death is not natural. God didn't make us to die. God made us to live. But something got screwed up. Here's what got screwed up. One man, just one man, Adam, the first man, disobeyed God and sinned. That one sin, one sin, brought death to all people. Why? Because all people, you, me, followed in Adam's sinful footsteps. When Adam sinned, he brought death on himself. When we sin, we bring death on ourselves.

Sin and death go together. We don't like talking about death because we don't like talking about sin, certainly not my own sin. We can call it bad choices, but it's still sin. I can try to convince myself, "I'm a good person, I just make a few mistakes." But that's not the way it is! I'm a sinful person! I make sinful mistakes. The only choices I can make on my own are sinful choices. And my sinful choices are marching me on a sinful road to ultimate defeat, against the final enemy: death. Physical death, spiritual death, eternal death.

But, but, but.. Did you see the very first word in our text? But! But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead! But! Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. Christ the King defeats death. Christ the King has been raised. He stands raised. He is still raised. He will always be raised. He will never die again. Indeed! Indeed! I wonder if this is the verse of the Bible that inspires our Easter greeting, "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. Christ the King defeats death.

Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. What's first fruits? Well, you don't have to be Einstein to break down first fruits into first and fruits. For people at this time, it was literal. The first fruits were the very first fruit on the tree. That very first fruit you brought to God as a thank offering for providing it, with trust that God would provide more. You knew when you saw that first fruit that many more were coming. Now do you see? Christ is the first fruits. He is just the first one to rise. Many more will follow. Just as Christ died and rose never to die again, so you will die and rise, never to die again. Never. Eternal death is gone for you. Spiritual death right now is gone for you. Even physical death, what appears to be the ultimate winner, loses. Christ the King defeats death. Your physical death is your entrance to heaven. Just as Aslan broke the Stone table and came back to life, so Christ the King broke the stone seal of his grave and came back to life, never to die again. Never.

Christ the King has changed the way we think about death. Death is not the victorious enemy. Death is the laughable loser. Christ the King will raise you, just as he raised himself. Christ the King calls your death only a sleep. I know, people laughed at Jesus when he said dead people were only sleeping. But then Jesus simply said, "Little girl, I say to you, get up." And the dead girl got up. All Jesus had to say was, "Lazarus, come out." And the dead man Lazarus, came out, after four days in the grave. Sounds like Jesus can wake people up from death easier than you can wake a teenager from sleep. That's all death is to Christ the King, a sleep, a temporary condition from which he easily wakes you.

Death is not forever. Here's what is forever. Then, when he comes, those who belong to him will rise. See, first the first fruits rises, then those who belong to him will rise. That's all that we are focusing on today and that's all we are talking about in this part of the Bible. We know that all people will be raised and those who don't belong to Christ the King will also rise to eternal death. But that's not what we are talking about today. Today we are focused on those who belong to Christ, those who believe in him, worship him, follow him. Those are the people who will rise when he comes. Now comes seems like an ordinary, every day word. But the original language uses a special word for the arrival of a king. The word means the king is coming and he's staying for a while, a very long while. In this case, Christ the King is coming and staying forever. You see, death is just a temporary sleep for those who belong to Christ the King. Eternal life, heaven, that's what Christ is bringing when he comes, forever.

He will keep reigning. He will reign over and over. He must reign. We talk about must wins at this time of the year. Christ's battle with death was a must win for him. And a must win for us. Good thing Christ the King did what he had to do. He won. He had to. He defeated death. He keeps on defeating death. He keeps on reigning. It's what he had to do.

He keeps on putting his enemies under his feet. Now I know that once again, you don't have to be Einstein to figure out the picture of putting your enemies under your feet. It pretty much explains itself. But it still sounds kind of strange to us. At that time and for hundreds of years before this, kings would literally put their enemies under their feet. After a king had defeated another king, the victorious king would make the loser lie on the ground. And the victor would literally put his foot on top of the loser's head. There would be no doubt who was in charge. There would be no debate who was the winner and who was the loser. The loser could squirm. He could kick and he could grimace and he didn't have to like it, but that didn't change the fact: you lost, you're defeated.

That's our world today. The devils squirms. He kicks around. He stirs up trouble. But he's the loser.

Christ the King has destroyed all dominion, authority and power and remember those are words to speak of demonic dominion, evil authority and popular power. Christ the King keeps on destroying them. Destroying them does not mean he takes them out of existence. It just means that he puts an end to their power and effectiveness. The devil is still around. He's very tricky at working both sides of sin. Before you sin he convinces you, "It's no big deal. Just do it. You'll feel good." After sin, he convinces me, "It's a big deal! You sinned! Don't feel good. Don't feel forgiven. Don't think you can call yourself a Christian. Don't think God loves you." Christ the King keeps destroying his power. Maybe you had a voice that said, "Sleep in. Take the Sunday off. It's no big deal. You'll feel good." But obviously another voice won out, the voice of Christ the King. That voice from God's Word told you, "You will hear my forgiveness for you. You will taste my forgiveness just for you. That won't make you feel good for a while. That will make you feel great. For eternity!" Maybe you dragged yourself here not knowing what to do with that guilt, that lie of the devil that your sin is too big for Christ. Well then, let Christ the King drag you to another place, his empty tomb. "Come and see," says Christ the King. "What do you see inside? Nothing! No dead body! I rose! You will rise! No sins. No guilt! They are all paid in full. I destroyed your sin. I defeated your death. You belong to me!"

Christ the King defeats death. The first fruits defeats the last enemy. Every time a Christian dies in faith, clinging to Jesus, Christ the King defeats death. Every time you go the cemetery to visit your wife, your grandfather, your daughter who died believing in Jesus, remember, "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!" Christ the King defeats death. Every time! The first fruits defeats the last enemy. Every time! Every time a person is baptized, Christ the King defeats death. Every time! Every time a person is baptized, Christ the King snatches that person from the evil White Witch's clutches and places him on Aslan's side, Jesus' side. Christ the King defeats death. Every time! The first fruits defeats the last enemy. Every time! Every time! Every time! Christ the King defeats death. Every time! Amen.