

We all know what this Sunday is—Easter Sunday, the day that Christians assemble to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We also all know what we are *not* doing today—we are not assembling. And, we all know why we're not gathering—because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Here at Grand, we frequently encourage you to view all of Scripture—and all of life—in relation to Jesus Christ. We teach you that the Bible contains one storyline centered on Jesus Christ. The central theme of the entire Bible is the glory of God in the establishing and redemption of his Kingdom through Jesus Christ. If that is the theme of the Bible, then that is the goal of all history. And so, we encourage ourselves to live all of life conscious of that truth.

This morning, with both the coronavirus pandemic and the resurrection of Jesus central in our minds, I want us to ask: "Where do pandemics fit in the Christ-centered storyline of the Bible? What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ have to do with the coronavirus pandemic?"

To answer those questions is to understand the meaning of this pandemic.

Paul answers these questions in our text this morning—1 Corinthians 15:20-26—where the Apostle explains the guaranteed results of Christ's resurrection. He says (20), "**Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**" Firstfruits refer to the first portion of the harvest brought in from the field, a representation of what the remaining harvest will be like. The idea Paul highlights here is "corporate solidarity"—which is where a group of people is so identified with one person that what is true of that person can be said to be true of the group. Paul will unfold this in a bit. But his point here is that Christ really has been raised from the dead—and everyone identified with him will receive the same resurrection.

In **verses 21-22**, Paul tells us why this is—**“For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”** Paul is contrasting these two humans—Adam and Christ—and what comes into the world through each of them.

Paul assumes his readers are familiar with his reference to the events of Genesis 1-3. But for the sake of answering our questions about coronavirus and the resurrection, I want to overview them.

Creation — Genesis 1 tells us that God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them, including humans. In **Genesis 1:27-28**, we read:

So God created man in his own image;
he created him in the image of God;
he created them male and female.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.”

To be created in God's “image” means to represent him. Humans were to represent God was by subduing the earth and ruling it. **God's plan, from the beginning, was for man to rule the earth and everything in it as his representative.** Psalm 8 says that God has crowned man "with glory and honor and subjected everything under his feet." Nothing was left outside of our control. "Everything" includes

everything—the heavens, the land and the sea, and the creatures in them, including bacteria and viruses.

But, "we do not yet see everything in subjection" to humanity. Instead, we see tornadoes, like the recent one that recently hit Nashville. We see earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and flooding. We see diseases and pandemics, along with all the social and economic fallout it brings.

So What Happened? — If God has created man to have dominion over all of creation, then why are there pandemics that we cannot and do not subdue?

To answer that question, we look to Genesis 2:15. After God created the first man, he placed him in the Garden and commanded him "to serve and protect it." The Lord gave the man specific instructions regarding how to live—from which trees he could eat and from which tree he could not eat. The day in which Adam disobeyed those instructions, death would enter the world.

So, when a serpent entered the Garden and tempted the woman to eat of the forbidden fruit, we expect the man to subdue the serpent and exercise dominion. Instead, the man stands by as the woman is deceived by the serpent and eats of the fruit. Then the man eats with his eyes wide open, and deadly consequences follow.

The Wages of Sin — God had told the man, "in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die." There would be consequences; the wages of sin would be death.¹

Sin would disrupt all manner of things, beginning with the relationships between God and humans, and husbands and wives. Sin would also disrupt the relationship between humans and the world that God created them to rule. Subduing the earth would be painful, as the earth would be radically uncooperative. Listen to what God said would happen:

The ground is cursed because of you.
You will eat from it by means of painful labor
all the days of your life.
It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.
You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow
until you return to the ground,
since you were taken from it.
For you are dust,
and you will return to dust.²

The ground—symbolic of all creation—would not cooperate with the humans' attempts to rule it; it will work against human efforts. Thorns and thistles would grow. Having children, working the soil subduing the earth, and exercising dominion would now be painful and frustrating work—*futility*.

But, even worse, the Lord said: "**you will return to dust.**" **We would die.** The human body, created to live forever, would grow old and decay. We deteriorate. We are susceptible to diseases like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, genetic abnormalities and harmful viruses, like the coronavirus.

The earth and all humanity were under the headship of Adam. When he fell, all humanity fell with him. We inherit his sinful nature. This is why Paul says in our text, "**death came through a man...in Adam all die.**" That includes us, our bodies, and our world.

¹ Romans 6:23

² Genesis 3:17–19

So how do we make sense of our present situation? Epidemiologists and infectious disease specialists, economists and politicians will appeal to various models and theories within their realms of expertise. Their explanations will be technically true (and helpful) in terms of how things work. Yet, as Russ Moore commented on Hurricane Katrina, “We know, however, that at its root this natural disaster isn’t natural at all. It is a creation crying out, ‘Adam, where are you?’”

As Christians, we know there is an underlying theological explanation that cannot be overlooked. Pandemics are part of the wages of sin, the curse due to Adam’s rebellion in Eden. Pandemics because creation was "subjected to futility" and is in "bondage to decay" because of the curse of sin.³

The Apostle Paul once cried out in **Romans 7:24**, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” As we’ve watched the pandemic spread, forced closures of business, the stock market plunging, we are crying out, "What can we do? Who can stop this?" We might well cry out with Paul, and with all of creation, "Who will deliver us from this cosmos of death? Who will come to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it for us?"

The pandemic is not Mother Nature reminding us that she is still in control. Rather, it is creation reminding us that we—in Adam—have failed to fulfill the creation mandate. This pandemic is creation groaning under the burden of sin, crying out for the day when it will be “born again,” crying out for a New Adam.

A Man — God did not abandon his plan for a man to rule as head of humanity over all the earth. In fact, he promised to send a man. He told the serpent:

I will put hostility between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring.
He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.⁴

The woman would have a son who would go to war with the serpent. Though the serpent would land a venomous strike on the man's heel, that man would overcome death to crush the serpent's head. The story of the Old Testament unfolds from there. It is one story looking for that man—a New Adam, who would subdue all rebellion and rule the earth, reversing the effects of the curse forever.

As the story unfolds, the identity of that man becomes clearer.

Israel (called God's son) was to be "one man" who exercised dominion over the Promised Land—and, from there, see blessedness spread over all the earth. But Israel, like Adam, failed.

Then God gave his people a king, who was to rule as God's representative. But king after king after king failed.

Still, God did not abandon his plan. Instead, he promised a Forever-King. He told King David that one of his descendants would be like a son to God and reign *forever*.⁵ The Lord would make his enemies his footstool.⁶

Yet generation after generation, no eternal and righteous king emerged. Still, God did not abandon his plan. Through the prophets, he promised a divine King. The prophet Daniel saw this king come on the clouds of heaven, one whom God was with:

³ Romans 8:20-21

⁴ Genesis 3:15

⁵ 1 Chronicles 17:14

⁶ Psalm 110:1

He was given dominion,
and glory, and a kingdom;
so that those of every people,
nation, and language
should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that will not pass away,
and his kingdom is one
that will not be destroyed.⁷

This figure—both divine and human—would rule. All things would serve and obey the Messiah. The Old Testament ends waiting for his appearance—the New Man, the Eternal and Divine King.

Paul's Answer — Paul speaks to all this in our text. First (21), a new man: "**For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man.**" It was a man who, as head of humanity, introduced the dominion of sin and death into the world. Therefore, it must be a new man who, as head of a new humanity, rules over the curse and brings the undoing of death—resurrection, making the dead alive again.

Second (22), an Eternal King: "For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive." This Christ (which means "anointed," the Messiah)—is Jesus of Nazareth. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, he is fully God and fully man. The voice of the Father and the presence of the Holy Spirit at his baptism confirm he is the Messiah.

Then, in his earthly ministry, what do we see? He commands the wind and waves, feeds the hungry and defends the oppressed, restores hearing and gives sight to the blind. He heals the sick—including those with (viral-induced?) fevers. He casts out demons, raises the dead, and forgives sins.

What does all this mean? We see that Jesus is the **Christ, the greater-Adam who exercises the dominion that the first Adam would not.**

Where Adam sinned, **the Messiah is sinless.** Where Adam failed to subdue and cast Satan out of the Garden, **Jesus exercises dominion over demons.** Where Adam's failure brought thorns and thistles, **the Christ exercises dominion over creation.** Where Adam's failure brings decay and death to our bodies, **Jesus Christ exercises dominion over both sickness and death.**

How the Messiah Redeems — As bad as these things are, natural disasters, demon-possession, sickness and physical death are less than what we ultimately deserve. They are merely a down-payment of what is coming. What we need to be saved from is the wrath of God. The Bible says that the wrath of God is coming on account of our sin.⁸ That wrath is hell—a place of eternal, conscious torment.

Therefore, in order for Christ to remove the curse that Adam's sin brought, he must conquer sin, which he did in his death and resurrection. This is what Paul emphasized as he opened 1 Corinthians 15:

Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...⁹

⁷ Daniel 7:13-14, 18, 27

⁸ Colossians 3:6

⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

The ultimate end of the curse was death under God's wrath. So, "Christ died for our sins." If we are "in Christ," then we died with him.

The resurrection demonstrates that God has made him the King of Kings, Lord and Christ, with all authority in heaven and on earth.¹⁰ **The resurrection means that Christ is putting all his enemies—sin, death, and devil, natural disasters and pandemics—under his feet.** Whereas Adam ushered the reign of sin and death into the world, the last Adam ushered in the reign of righteousness and life for those in him. **So as with death, it will be with his resurrection—"in Christ all will be made alive."**

What does it mean to be "in Christ?" We became Adam's people by being born. We become Christ's people by being born again through faith. The Holy Spirit gives us new life by hearing the gospel so that, through faith, we believe that Jesus is the God-Man and Messiah who died for our sins and rose from the dead. When we trust in Jesus, we are grafted into him as the people he represents. God declares that Christ is our righteousness, our death for sin, and our resurrection from the dead. If sin is removed and righteous is given, then there can be no death for us—no wages of sin. **It means we will receive bodies that are imperishable and immortal—just like Christ's resurrection body.**¹¹

The Already & the Not Yet.

All that raises another question: If Jesus is the promised Messiah who will redeem the cosmos and exercise dominion, then why do we still have pandemics? The answer is, we have pandemics **because we live in the age of the *already* and *not yet*.**

The Kingdom of God is God's saving reign in Christ. The Kingdom of God appeared in the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. That reign was inaugurated when Jesus died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended to God's right hand.

But that Kingdom is *not yet* consummated—brought to its appointed goal. So, Paul says in our text (23): "**But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at his [appearance], those who belong to Christ.**" His appearance refers to his glorious return to earth to make all things new and to reign on earth with us forever. We are waiting for this blessed hope.

So Paul writes: "**Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he abolishes all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be abolished is death.**" The end, Christ handing the kingdom over to God the Father, does not mean that Christ will stop reigning. (God the Father says Christ will reign forever.) Rather, it means that he will subject everything to God's appointed purposes, to God's order.

Christ will do this by "**abolishing all rule and all authority and power.**" This refers to everything that is in rebellion to God—Satan and demons, sickness and death, sin and sinners. This includes viruses and pandemics. It will happen because "**he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be abolished is death.**" Jesus will not cease to reign. He will rule everything—even death itself. And what a glorious day that will be.

¹⁰ Romans 1:4; Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 15:42-58

The End of Pandemic — In the end, what will this Kingdom, this saving dominion of Christ look like? The old earth will pass away, along with every harmful virus and genetic syndrome, every cancer and disease. Listen to what is coming:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.

Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God’s dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.

Then the one seated on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new.”¹²

The Kingdom will be a New City in a New Heaven and a New Earth, free from all the sorrows of the curse, where the redeemed people of God dwell with their bridegroom and their God. For **Revelation 22:3** says, “there will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him.” **There will be no curse there, because the Lamb, unlike Adam, will exercise dominion as He sits on the throne.**

But what about us? What about humans? What will we do? After all, we were created in the image of God to fill the earth, subdue it, and exercise dominion over it! **Revelation 22:4-5** states that we, his servants, “will reign forever and ever.”

At long last, in the reigning Christ, our creation purpose will be fulfilled. We, the redeemed people of Christ, are the rightful rulers of creation. At the resurrection, we will assume our place to reign with our King. We will stand with our living Redeemer and exercise dominion in the new world.

It is on that day and in that world that pandemics and all other such consequences of the curse will be destroyed and gone forever. **That day is coming. Christ’s resurrection guarantees it.**

So, in the meantime, what should we do now? — How should we respond to a pandemic? There are a thousand ways we could answer that from Scripture. But I want to offer just one—the application with which Paul concludes 1 Corinthians 15: “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord’s work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”¹³

¹² Revelation 21:1-5

¹³ 1 Corinthians 15:58