



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

**Sermon for Easter Sunday**  
April 9, 2023

## The Last Enemy to Be Destroyed

### 1 Corinthians 15:19–26

*<sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. <sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

Dear friends in Christ, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” What a wonderful statement! Christ’s resurrection has destroyed death. The victory is complete. Christ defeated the powers of sin, death, and the devil when He died on the cross. His victory was made complete when He rose from the dead on the third day. Death could not hold the Lord of Life. He is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

Sadly, not everyone knows this. Thank God you and I do. We know that Christ is risen from the dead, so we know that our eternal salvation is complete. This knowledge changes the way we view life. It changes our purpose in life. It changes the way we live. It gives us hope and courage as we face the challenges of life and ultimately our own physical death. Let’s spend a few minutes this morning reviewing what it means for us Christians to know that the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Easter is, for us, a huge celebration. Why is that? Why is Easter so special? Out of all the festivals of the Church year, why do we make such a big deal out of Easter? The celebration of Easter completely changed the Church. Easter is the reason we worship on Sunday. On Easter Sunday we sing the most exuberant hymns of the year. Why?

If you were to ask most people if they believed they were going to heaven – presuming they believe in such a place – do you know what answer they would give? “I hope so.” How’s that for an answer? “I hope so. I *sure* hope so!” And if you were to ask them why they think God might let them in to heaven, do you know what they’d say? “Well, I’ve not done anything that bad. I mean, I try to be good. I’m not perfect, I know that. But I think God will probably let me in. I hope so, anyway.” And if you were to ask most people what they think is important in life, do you know what you’d hear? Family. Family is most important. And right after that comes health and happiness. Oh, they might throw in



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helping other people and being kind to others, just so they don't sound too selfish. But now I wonder: How would you answer those questions?

In the opening words of our text the Apostle Paul states, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." Think about this: What is the ultimate loss that any human being can face? Isn't it the loss of life, the life of a loved one or your own life? Isn't death the ultimate loss? And, isn't it the one loss that everyone ultimately deals with?

When a person loses his life – what's left? What good is family to a dead man? What good is it to be in good health or to be happy when death comes? What difference do these things really make? For that matter, what difference does helping others make when your life is over? I don't mean to sound harsh, but who cares?

And this is especially true for Christians. If this life is all there is, then Christians are the biggest idiots in the world. Christians do stupid things like loving their enemies and giving away their treasures for the good of others. Christians allow themselves to be taken advantage of and treated unfairly by people who often get ahead at their expense, and without even a word of thanks for it. What point would there be even to preach God's forgiveness if it's only to make someone feel better in this life? Who gives a rip? If this life is all that you can count on, then the philosophy "Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die," would make more sense.

As the apostle writes, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

The last and ultimate enemy that anyone faces is death, and since Christ rose from the dead, we know that death no longer has any power over us. Christ is but the first of many who will rise from the dead; His resurrection was the beginning of the end of death for those who through faith in Him have received eternal life. As believers in Jesus and His resurrection, our hope is not just for this world. Our hope is not just for this life. Our hope is for everlasting life with Christ in heaven. Because He faced death and rose again on the third day, we can face death and rise again, too. For us, physical death has no power. As we confess in the Nicene creed, we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. In Christ's resurrection, the last enemy – death – is destroyed. Hallelujah!

But that's not all. Because we rejoice in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, we also have hope in *this* life. We're not just looking toward a life that will be. The victory over death is for this life as well. Consider again the words of our text. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order:



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Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’”

Now, what does it mean when it says that Jesus “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet”? Remember where death came from. Eve listened to the devil’s temptation and sinned against God. Sin was the bite of the serpent that brought death to mankind. When Jesus died, sin lost its power to destroy us. Having broken the stronghold of death, He rose again, victorious over death and the devil. However . . . sin still exists in the world. It still clings to our mortal flesh. Sin still causes many to remain outside of God’s grace. There are many worldly forces working against Christ and His kingdom.

For this reason, Christ established His Church. It’s through the Church that the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are given for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of all who believe. Through the Church the saving work of Christ continues and He reigns on earth as the Gospel conquers the world and brings the kingdom of Christ to the hearts of men and women everywhere. It’s also through the Church that Christ strengthens and preserves those who are looking forward to the life of the world to come. In this way He gives us victory over His enemies, the enemies of the Gospel, and the enemies of our salvation. But, here’s the question: Do we believe this?

In today’s Gospel, the women who had been to the tomb and heard the message of the angels told what they had seen and heard to the eleven, but “it seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.” These women had encountered the power of the resurrection, but it was almost too much for the disciples to take in.

“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” That’s the message we hear from St. Paul, and it sounds almost too good to be true. But, beloved, the Lord *is* risen! Death *is* destroyed forever. All who believe and trust in Jesus *will* live. When the reign of Christ is completed and the last person has been brought into the kingdom, He will return, and all the dead will be raised. Christ will then pronounce judgment against all that is evil and corrupt, the enemies of Christ will depart into the death of everlasting fire, and Christ and His Church shall enter together into His glory. “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

Knowing that Christ is risen from the dead, we have the assurance that the last enemy – death – *has been* destroyed. Because this is true, on the last day, our Lord shall raise us up and bring us with Him into eternal glory where sin, death, and the power of the devil no longer exist. We can now face both life and death with confident hope in the victory that Christ’s resurrection guarantees us, as we await the final victory on the day of the resurrection of all flesh. Until then, let us rejoice together in the good news: “The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!” Amen