***1 Corinthians 15:20-23 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.***

 We’re now two weeks past Resurrection Sunday. Thomas has been convinced. Jesus has appeared to the women and the apostles. He’s eaten food, been touched, spoken openly. He’s proven Himself a physical being. Truly, He is Risen from the dead. He’s not a hallucination. As historical figures go, Jesus’ life is far better documented than most! No one questions that Tiberius Caesar was emperor from 14-37 AD. Yet many question the life of Jesus. Simply evil.

 In 1 Corinthians 15:20, Paul begins *But now Christ is risen from the dead.* But now Christ is risen! Talk about Hope! The verses prior to this present how hopeless and fruitless our life is if not for the Hope of the Risen Savior. Looking around, we understand this. People die, things crumble, wealth disappears, jobs end – Eternal Hope cannot live in the non-eternal. Christ is our only Hope to see our deceased loved ones again, to live pain free, to be well again. One of the most depressingly hopeless things I ever hear is when I sit with someone who speaks of living forever, but cannot tell me the path to get them into eternity. They are lost, no roadmap, and won’t take the One offered by God.

 Paul ends Verse 20 *and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.* First Fruits – why is that important? God is God of First Fruits. Leviticus 23 God instructs the Jews to bring a harvest offering of their first fruits. Genesis 4 tells is that Abel offered the first born and was accepted by the Lord. The Feast of Harvest offered the first fruits. Offering our first and best demonstrates our Faith. Jesus offered Himself as first fruit of those who have died. A perfect offering of atonement for sin, bridging the Break between man and God. Being fully man and fully God, only Jesus can draw this divide closed. Think about it:

 Verses 21 *For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.* Since by Adam came death. Not by Eve. Adam – disobeyed and sinned. God told Adam in Genesis 2:17 before Eve was made. Adam received the command. By Adam’s disobedience - death. By Christ’s obedience - life. Our physical body is buried, but our spirit rises in resurrection.

Verse22 *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.* The instrument that the curse of death came through was Adam. The instrument through which eternal life enters is Christ. The word “in” has the idea of an instrument. In John 12:24 we read *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.* When we place a seed in the ground, it is dead. Then, it rises and, in due time, produces life from that which was buried. Such is the lesson of Jesus. Life Eternal from that which was buried. Jesus knew that, unless He died and rose, many would die eternally. Through His death, many live eternally. He knew He is the delivering instrument.

Years ago, people used a bucket on a rope to draw water from a deep well. Without this instrument, everyone went thirsty. I could stand beside that well and believe with all of my heart that I was not thirsty, and, in three or four days, I’d be dead of thirst. Jesus is the instrument that delivers eternal life. John 4:13-14 *Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.* I can stand and believe on whatever I want to believe in and, when I die, I’m dead… unless I believe in the Instrument, Jesus, that brings the Living Water. John 14:6 *Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.* It doesn’t get any clearer than that.

Verse 23 *But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.* Christ went ahead. Hebrews 10 teaches that Christ connects us – Spirit inside, Christ High Priest, God Holy and Mighty. He is our bridge. His Resurrection opened the Narrow Way. He is the Gate – John 10:7 *Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.* Not everyone enters. Those who belong to Christ enter because He is the door, the gate, for the sheep that belong to Him.

This week, may we find our Hope in the Resurrection of Jesus alone, knowing that He is the only way to cross from this life, through the valley of death, into Life Everlasting on the other side. In order to cross, we must be a sheep in His fold, watered by His Grace, and clothed in His righteousness, made white as snow by the Red of His Blood. If you have not accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, do that today. Have Faith that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Leave this place today assured that, when you fall to the earth with this life over, Jesus will sweep you up to spend eternity in Glory He paid for with His Blood for our sins. Salvation based solely on our belief and confession of Him as Lord and Savior, our choice to be His sheep.