

The Written Sermon

December 5, 2021

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A Message of Encouragement

This morning's text is taken from I Thessalonians 4:16-18:

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words. (New English Translation)

By Way Of Introduction

In 1 Corinthians 15:52-54 we read, *"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality..."* (English Standard Version)

The Lord Jesus will leave heaven and come to earth's atmosphere. From the clouds, He will command and raise the believer's bodies of those who have died during the Church age. The Lord Jesus will gather to them those living at that time. This will happen in an eyes-twinkle, the time it takes for light to flash off the eye. In a nanosecond, both saved dead and living will be changed and clothed with new eternal bodies. Does this seem impossible? The Lord Jesus has promised. He has the power and ability to do what He has promised.

This event is the Rapture, the snatching up. Its name is Latin of the Greek word, which the English translates, *"caught-up."* A powerful, irresistible force will suddenly snatch up first the dead and then the living who are *"in Christ."* God will use the Rapture to resurrect and remove saved people from earth and take them to heaven. The Lord will clothe the caught-up ones with new glorious bodies like the resurrected body of the risen Christ.

The saved alive at Jesus' coming will join the resurrected dead in the "clouds" and *"so we shall always be with the Lord."* Paul is saying, "Don't be concerned about believers who've died. We're all going to be united and together in a nanosecond. There will be reunion and no one saved of this age will be left out. No saved person, dead or living at the time of the Rapture, will prevent other believers from being with Christ and from being together.

The definition of death for the believer is to be separated from the body and instantly present with the Lord, see 2 Corinthians 5:8, 9. The reason death will lose its sting, as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:55, is because death becomes the opportunity, the way, to be instantly with the Lord Jesus.

To bring comfort to the church of Thessalonica, Paul gives details of the Rapture. Many of these details do not appear in any other passages, including 1 Corinthians 15 or John 14.

Digging Into the Text

VERSE 16 - THE LORD'S DESCENDING (HIS COMING DOWN)

1 Thessalonians 4:16, *"For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God."* The first event in the sequence of the Rapture is Jesus' leaving heaven and descending to the clouds.

The Lord was the first to reveal that He would return to take them to Himself, so that His disciples would be with Him (John 14:1-3). The Lord states in John 14:1, *"Don't let your heart be troubled..."* Do not vacillate. Be strong in your confidence. I will return and receive you. I want you to be with me as much as you want to be with me.

The Rapture is different from Jesus' return to earth to rescue Israel. 1 Thessalonians 4 states that Jesus will not descend to the earth as He will do seven years later. He descends above the earth, only into the air, the atmosphere-- into the clouds.

The Lord doesn't send an angel. He comes, Himself. 1 Thessalonians 3:13 states He will come *"with all His saints"*. Angels and millions of saved souls will come with Him. These souls were in heaven because their bodies died on earth. These souls will come back with Jesus to be joined to newly resurrected bodies.

Three things will accompany His Descending as noted in verse 16 of our text:

First, The Lord's Shout!!

The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, a Greek word of command. It is a military term. The commanding officer shouted to troops to assemble, to march, to do whatever. Believers will respond suddenly, involuntarily, like commanded troops to prepare, to get ready. He shall descend to the clouds with a shout, a command to raise dead believers' physical bodies.

Jesus said *"He has the power of life."* He alone must come because He alone can command. No one else has the power to make such a command. *"All who are in the tombs will hear His voice and will come out."* We have seen Jesus use this power. Remember the resuscitation of Lazarus in John 11:43. Jesus shouted a loud command *"Lazarus, come forth."* Lazarus' though dead and rotting was instantly repaired and healthy. The Lord Jesus gave life and He added Lazarus' soul from Paradise so that he could resume an earthly life. However, this was a resuscitation. Lazarus would die again. Whereas the Rapture is the permanent Resurrection of all Church age believers. The command of the Lord will raise His disciples into a permanent condition, to life, separated forever from death.

There are still similarities. Both are the result of Christ's command, a command that removes individuals out of the realm and grip of death and places them in life. The Rapture, the Resurrection of believers will be the final work of Christ's Redemption for those of the Church age. This is final victory in the war with

sin for us. The Rapture will permanently remove the believer from sin's presence. It will place our bodies forever into the sphere of life, from which we will never depart. We are eternally secure. Nothing is able to separate us!

Second, The Voice of an Archangel

Michael is the only archangel named in the New Testament (Jude 9). He is instrumental in Israel's resurrection in Daniel 12:1, which declares *"Now at that time (the end of the day of the Lord, a time of great judgment on the Gentile nations and upon unbelieving Israel.) Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people (Israel), will arise. And There will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; (the time of tribulation also known as the Day of the Lord.) and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Many of those (Israelites) who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt."* (New American Standard Bible, 1995)

Daniel 12 promises two resurrections. One of the saved or justified Jews and one of the unjustified. Those raised Jews who are justified will populate the nation of Israel during the 1000-year Messianic Kingdom. At the Rapture, the Archangel will add to the command of the Lord. By his call, he will gather the saved and living to be with the Lord to join the resurrected dead in Christ. Both will meet in the clouds. This is new revelation for we see nothing like it anywhere else in Scripture.

Third, The Trumpet of God Will Sound

The sounding of trumpets in Jesus' day were the means of communicating to the nation. In Exodus chapter 19, a trumpet sounded to bring the people (Israel) together before the Tabernacle to prepare for God's appearance. A trumpet blast was in nearly every festival, celebration, and convocation. It sounded triumph or judgment. It called the people to meet with God, to stand before Him outside the Tabernacle. When it called for Israel to leave tents and come together, it is the trumpet of assembly. In the prophets of Zephaniah and Zechariah, a trumpet will signal the Lord's coming to deliver and rescue Israel from the Antichrist. There it is a trumpet of deliverance.

It was nearly the same for the Roman army--a trumpet issued commands for the soldiers to stop, to move, or to make camp. The trumpet of 1 Thessalonians, 4:16 will be the "last" command for all of the living saints of the Church age. They will be with Christ. What other command do they need? Even though it is the last trumpet for believers of this age, there will be trumpets of judgment later during the Tribulation (the Day of the Lord). Responding to the last trumpet sound of our age, believers will gather in the clouds before the Lord, then we will proceed to heaven. After the Church rises to Heaven, the earth will be full of unsaved people. The trumpets of Revelation 8 to 11 are trumpets of judgment upon the unsaved, rebellious world and upon antichrist and anyone who follows him.

When Jesus leaves heaven and descends to the clouds, the Lord will shout! His command will arouse those who are asleep in the graves. The voice of the archangel and the trump of God will gather and bring together the congregation of living believers. Verse 16 gives these three components of the event, which Scripture calls the snatching out or snatching away of the Church.

VERSE 16 – THE DEAD IN CHRIST

In verse 16 we read, *"the dead in Christ shall rise first."* "Dead in Christ" is a technical phrase applying only to people who have died believing in Christ. A period of over 2,000 years and including multiplied millions of believers has passed since Jesus promised. This period from Christ's first coming to His second is the

Church age. Being “in Christ” (whether dead or alive) is a new identification for those who are saved during this age. The work of the Spirit places the believer into deep connection with Christ and permanently removes them from sin and death (I Corinthians 12:13). Even though the believers of Corinth had died and left behind dead bodies, they remained “in Christ.” Their bodies were in graves, but their souls were present with the Lord. Still, they were “in Christ!” Nothing can remove believers from this unique and permanent position of being “in Christ”. Nothing can, neither death nor life. Nothing can separate us from this secure position, not even death (1 Corinthians 15:23). Christ eternally possesses all those the Father has given to Him. Death separates a person from their body but it does not remove believers from this treasured position. We remain “in Christ.” The Corinthians in either state, dead or alive, were never severed from Him. They remained His treasure, His possession forever, even in death. They were in Christ.

So, it is the dead in Christ who rise first, *“Then we who are alive, who are left, (those saved folk still alive on earth) will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”*

VERSE 17 – THE TRANSLATION OF THE SAINTS

By translation, we mean the moving of that great throng of resurrected believers from the clouds into heaven. Verse 17, *“Then, we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”*

After the Lord’s ascension in Acts 1 the two angels declared, *“You saw Him go in the clouds; you’ll see Him come back in the clouds.”* We’ll be snatched up into the clouds. The saints’ bodies from the grave will meet their spirits from heaven. Oh, that will be glory!

VERSE 17 – THE GREAT REUNION

Whether dead or alive, the Lord will call us to a meeting in the air. We are the welcoming committee, going out to welcome our Savior and Lord. We will not return to earth at this time. We will go to His home to be with Him forever.

VERSE 17 – OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST AND ONE ANOTHER

In verse 17 we read, *“And so we will always be with the Lord.”* With Him during the seven-year period called the Day of the Lord. With Him when He returns to the earth to establish His kingdom. With Him during the 1,000 years of His kingdom on earth. We shall be with Him throughout all of eternity.

VERSE 18 – THE APPLICATION FOR EACH BELIEVER--ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER WITH THIS SPECIFIC WORD CONCERNING THOSE WHO HAVE DIED

A primary area of service, a key ministry for each believer within the congregation is to use one’s words to encourage another. Verse 18 answers the question; with what shall I encourage other believers? Hebrews 10:25 commands each believer not to make it a practice to forsake the assembly whenever it meets. Instead, encourage one another. Encouraging others is a key reason why we meet. We need to hear the encouragements of the Word. Believers need to be encouraged, not only from the pulpit, but by one another. So, get to know encouraging passages of Scripture and pass them on to others. Tell them the verses that encouraged you, motivated you, and helped you recently. Encourage another to do good

works! The highest level of good are words filled with encouragement that build up others. Those words will motivate believers, lift other believers, and build and bless their souls. As Paul exhorts, *“Therefore encourage (comfort) one another with these words.”*

The Question in Conclusion

The question, Will you be Raptured? If you have been born-again, this event, will happen to you. Are you His disciple, loving Him, following Him, obeying Him? Have you made Him your King and the only love of your heart? If so, anticipate joyfully the Rapture. One day, perhaps sooner than anyone would guess, He will call you up-to the clouds to be with Him forever!