**1 Thess. 4:13-18 The Trumpet Call of God 2/28/21**

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***Introduction:***

1. C. S. Lewis said, “At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all of the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in.”

Come, Lord Jesus!

1. Turn to 1 Thess. 4:13-18. Christians are meant to be restless people, like battle-weary soldiers awaiting their flight home or a bride a week before her wedding day. Paul wrote in 1 Thess. 4:13, “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.” One of the most encouraging bedrock truths every Christian must know and understand is this: **Jesus is coming back for all who trust in him, whether we live or sleep.** Do you know that there are over 300 vss. in the New Testament about the Second Coming of Christ? But no passage tells us more about the Second Coming in one place than our text today: **1 Thess. 4:13-18**... In this great text I want to show you **two reasons for encouragement**.

# Be encouraged because no believer will miss Jesus’ return! (4:13-15)

The Thessalonians apparently thought that Jesus was coming back *very* soon and when some in their church died, they were worried that those folks had missed the party. So Paul assures them that they need not worry. Look at **v.14**.

1. For Christians everything starts with this basic, bedrock conviction: *“We believe that Jesus died and rose again* ***and so*** *we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”* Do you see the connection? The second coming of Jesus and the resurrection of believers follows directly and inevitably from the death and resurrection of Christ.
   * 1. Look closely at something here: V.14 says that Jesus *died* but believers *fall asleep*. Those expressions aren’t really synonymous. Harold J. Ockenga said, “Death is the God-forsaken experience of a condemned soul. This is the death of Jesus.” Jesus died in the fullest, most horrible sense of the word—“the God-forsaken experience of a condemned soul.” When we put our faith in Christ, God puts us in Christ. He not only died for our sins, but we died in him. His death swallows up our death. V.17 speaks of “the dead in Christ.” Our condemnation is in him on the cross. And when God raised him from the dead, death’s sting was gone for us and sin’s sentence upon us was paid. So when our bodies give out, we do not really die, we fall asleep. Alexander Maclaren wrote, “His death makes our deaths sleep, and His Resurrection makes our sleep calmly certain of a waking.”
     2. And where are these who have fallen asleep? The verse says, “God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.” Look at 5:10: “He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.” Jesus said to the repentant thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” Paul wrote that he “would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” Those who have fallen asleep are living with Christ, as surely as we who are “awake”, and when Jesus comes, they will come with him.

Remember that famous statement by Moody? “One day you will hear that D. L. Moody of Northfield, Massachusetts, is dead. Don't you believe it! In that day I will be more alive than I have ever been before.”

When we Christians die the passage is no more traumatic than falling asleep. The next moment we awaken in Jesus’ presence. Our *bodies*, however, continue to sleep. Believers’ *bodies* are incubating; dormant, like the lily bulbs beneath the frozen ground in our gardens. But the *spirits* of those who have “fallen asleep” are alert and enjoying the company of the Lord at this moment.

* + 1. God will see to it that those who have fallen asleep will not miss out on Jesus’ second coming. In fact, they get first dibs; front of the line! They go first! V.15, “According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.”

So what will “the coming of the Lord” be like? The Bible doesn’t tell us everything we’d like to know but it does tell all we need to be encouraged. Vv.16-17, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

# Be encouraged in knowing what will happen when Jesus comes back (4:16-17)

* 1. “The Lord himself will come down from heaven.” When Jesus ascended into the heavens the angels told the watching disciples in Acts 1:11, “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” At the signal of the Father, Jesus Christ will rise from his sapphire throne and pass through the arches of glory, past the altar of sacrifice stained by his own blood, past the altar of incense fragrant with the pleading prayers of the saints, past the awesome living creatures who worship him night and day, and, summoning a great archangel and the angel hosts to accompany him, he will cross once again the great gulf fixed between heaven and earth, and step through the curtain of the sky. No need for a star to point him out this time. No need for shepherds or wise men to spread the word this time. No disguises this time of baby flesh or swaddling clothes. This time there will be no missing his coming!
     1. He will come *“with a loud command.”* When Jesus stood before the tomb of his friend, Lazarus, he gave a command: *“Lazarus, come out!”* Someone has said that if Jesus had not specified that it was Lazarus who was to come forth, every grave on earth would have split open at his command. Well, perhaps when he returns his command will be, *“Beloved, come out!”*
     2. He will come *“with the voice of the archangel.”* He has stood guard over God’s people for centuries. He has been in hand-to-hand combat with Satan. He has stood ready at the throne of God. And now he adds his voice to the command of the Lord like a great Amen. Jesus said he would return *“with his holy angels”* (Mk 8:38), so this great archangel leads out a vast entourage of the vast heavenly army behind Christ!
     3. He will come *“with the trumpet call of God.”* Once, God’s trumpet summoned Israel, trembling, to Mt. Sinai to receive his Law. Trumpets called Israel to Passover, their great feast of forgiveness. Two trumpets of hammered silver signaled a reveille for Israel to break camp and set out for the Promised Land. Trumpets were to sound both in times of battle and times of rejoicing. When Solomon dedicated God’s temple, 120 priests sounded the ram’s horn trumpets. All those trumpeting prophecies were muted preparations for this: “the trumpet call of God.”
  2. *“The dead in Christ will rise first.”* Our fellow believers who have been with the Lord will now experience the resurrection of their bodies. Though they have been with the Lord, they have not been complete; their bodies have lain sleeping till this moment. I imagine the spirits of the righteous in paradise find themselves suddenly clothed in permanent new immortal bodies, like Jesus’ body after the resurrection, refashioned by God from the dust and ashes that were left; new bodies, as different from these as the oak from the acorn, or the flower from the seed. And now, clothed in everlasting bodies, they explode forth, rising swiftly through the air to Jesus as exultant crowds to their champion, clothed in the Christlike bodies they have been waiting for.
  3. V.17:*“After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds...”* The Latin word for “caught up” is *rapto*, meaning “to seize, to carry off,” and it is why we call this event ‘the rapture,’—the *seizing*. Elsewhere we’re told that this will all happen in “the twinkling of an eye.”

Part of the reason this *rapture* is so wonderful is what is left behind: all that drags us down here; all that weighs on us, the heavy gravity that draws tears from our eyes and forces our bodies to bend beneath the weight of sin and sorrow. We will be *caught up* and away from crippling memories and sorrows, from habits that have hobbled us, and weaknesses that have hindered us. All thrown off, like sandbags dropped from under a fast-rising hot air balloon.

Those who are still alive when Jesus comes will also receive new bodies. What makes these bodies so glorious is not that we become superheroes—X-ray vision, super-human strength, able to leap tall buildings. Those things may be true, I don’t know, but they pale in significance to the fact that these bodies will be sin-free and sick-free, that these are bodies fit for eternal living; minds unmuddled by the lies and lunacy of this world, hands that will only and ever serve the Lord, eyes which can bear the brilliant sights of heaven; ears that can bear the hymns of saints and angels, tongues that will speak only praise and truth, and hearts clean enough and big enough and loving enough to embrace the glory of God. We will be fit for a new world free of sin, a whole civilization of people like Christ, body and soul. Joni Eareckson Tada, paralyzed now over 50 years, said: “Don’t assume that all I ever do is dream about springing out of this wheelchair, jumping up, dancing, kicking, doing aerobics. No I’m looking forward to heaven because of a new heart, a heart free of sin, sorrow, selfishness. That beats having a new body any day.”

* 1. And we shall be together “with them in the clouds.” What a reunion! Jesus tells us in Matt. 24:31 that “his angels will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.” God’s people have never all been together.
* We have all shared testimonies of our salvation across the generations, but we have never all been together.
* We have all confessed one Lord, one faith, one baptism and eaten at the same table but we have never all been together.
* We have sung the same songs, prayed the same prayers, read the same Scripture, but we have never all been together.
* Each in our own time and place and way, we have testified that “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever,” but we have never all been together.
* We have sensed deep within that we are part of one great church across ages and miles and languages. And finally, on that great day, we will all be together when we meet the Lord in the air.
  1. And look where we meet: “in the clouds... in the air.” The Bible says that this has been the domain of the enemy—“the Prince of the power of the air,” he is called. He who has tormented us, and lied to us, and accused us will be cast down and we will meet in triumph where he once reigned and it will be the Lord’s domain, the place of our reunion!
  2. We shall “meet **the** **Lord** in the air. And so we will be **with him** forever.” We can imagine, perhaps, at least a shadow of what a reunion with our loved ones will be like, but I do not think our minds can conceive nor our hearts grasp what it will be like to meet the Lord in the air. He who died for us and to whom our name is precious, he to whom we’ve prayed and sung, the beloved Lord who has always been near but never seen. Our image of him has always been earth-bound—sandals and robe, the Son of Man cross-fixed, or standing alone beside the conquered grave. But in that moment, we shall see him in his glory, eyes ablaze, his face like the sun shining in all its brilliance, and we shall contribute to that glory, more than all the angels of heaven, for we are those whom he has redeemed, we are the trophies and treasures of his grace!

And the faith we have so carefully cultivated and guarded will no longer be necessary. Faith—being certain of things unseen—will be pointless, for we will see him. We will leave our precious Bibles behind for we will meet him who is the living Word of God and all will be clear!

We rise to meet the Lord as he comes to meet us. On the night before Jesus was crucified, he told his disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled… I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (Jn 14:1-3.) Jesus is our Bridegroom and no bridegroom ever gave more to win his bride and no bridegroom has ever waited longer, nor with such happy anticipation, as Jesus waits to be united with the people he loves so passionately. No one in all that excited airborne assembly of the saints who meet the Lord will be *more* thrilled than Jesus himself.

***Conclusion:***

Our great expectation that Jesus will return anchors our life in this world. It is our abiding hope in death. Whatever happens here, however hard the struggles or long the wait, Jesus is coming back for us and we will be with the Lord forever. *“Therefore, encourage each other with these words.”*

Philip Yancey writes, “I know a woman whose grandmother lies buried under 150-year-old live oak trees in the cemetery of an Episcopal church in rural Louisiana. In accordance with the grandmother’s instructions, only one word is carved on the tombstone: ‘*Waiting*.’”