

The Final Reunion, 1 Thess. 4.13-18
Rev. Dr. Don L. Davis • Season After Pentecost, Proper 27
Blessed Hope Missionary Fellowship • November 9, 2008

*Teachings are proactive for the next Sunday in advance. Unless otherwise noted,
all Scriptures are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).*



Nearly Scared to Death—I've Been Left Behind!

I ran across this news from Austin, Texas recently: The headline read: *MAN EXPERIENCES HEART ATTACK AFTER THE RAPTURE*. Herbert Washington, whom co-workers at Significant Plastics, Inc. say was unduly concerned with the rapture and the second coming of Christ, suffered a serious heart attack when co-workers pretended they'd been caught away without him.

Last Tuesday, they lay work outfits on their chairs and hid in a supply room, and when Herbert came back from the restroom, he thought the rapture had occurred. The janitor, an outspoken Muslim, pretended to have witnessed everyone disappear and ran around the office feigning panic. Herbert fell to the ground clutching his heart and screaming, "I knew you'd forget me, Jesus! What did I do wrong?" He was taken to a local hospital. The employees emerged, sobered, from the supply room and gathered up their extra clothes. "We didn't mean to scare him to death," said one woman. "He's just always talking about it, so today we decided to turn the tables on him." Washington underwent bypass surgery and is recovering well and "digging into the Bible like never before," says his wife.— Don Hawks



THE FINAL REUNION
Caught Up Together With Him

I. What of Those Who Have Fallen Asleep?, 1 Thess. 4.13-14

A. Don't grieve like those who have no hope, 1 Thess. 4.13

1 Thess. 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

1. The Thessalonian epistles are filled with allusions and references to the future, the consummation of the work of Christ for his church and for creation (cf. 1:10; 2:12, 19; 3:13)
2. This section deals specifically with the return of Christ for his own (4:13-5:11), which is the end and goal of the battle of the ages
3. The ones whom Paul refers to here as "those who are asleep" are Christians who die in our time
4. Sleep is used as a figure for death often in the NT
 - a. Mark 5:39 And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping."
 - b. John 11:11 After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him."
 - c. 1 Thess. 5:10 Who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.
5. This is not "soul-sleep;" Christians who die are transported to the presence of the Lord
 - a. 2 Cor. 5:8-9 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. [9] So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.
 - b. Phil. 1:23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.
6. While we grieve for loved ones loss to death (even Jesus grieved, John 11.35), we are neither ignorant nor do we grieve as those who have no hope of bodily resurrection and connection with Christ

B. What God intends to do about them, 1 Thess. 4.14

1 Thess. 4:14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

1. Two reasons why we need not grieve as all others: first, we believe that Jesus died and rose again
 - a. The Spirit who indwells us, Romans 8:11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

- b. In Christ, all will be made alive, 1 Cor. 15:20-22 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. [21] For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. [22] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.
 - c. He who raised up Jesus will bring us into his presence, 2 Cor. 4:13-14 Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, [14] knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.
 - d. The word of the Risen One, Rev. 1:18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.
2. Second, with the certainty of our conviction of this, we also believe that through Jesus God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep
- a. The order of God's ingathering, 1 Cor. 15:23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.
 - b. Citizens of a heavenly realm, Phil. 3:20-21 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

II. The Final Reunion To Come, 1 Thess. 4.15-18

A. Those alive will not precede those asleep, 1 Thess. 4.15

1 Thess. 4:15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

1. The certainty of this revelation: "by a word from the Lord," 4.15a
2. The simple yet profound affirmation: *Those who are alive, left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep*
3. In other words: the bodies of Christians who have died will be resurrected before living Christians are gathered upward into the presence of the Lord
4. Note the *imminence* of this event: "that *we who are alive*, who are left until the coming of the Lord," 4.15a
 - a. The appointed time has grown "very short," 1 Cor. 7:29 This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none
 - b. The Lord is "at hand," Phil. 4:5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand
 - c. The Day is drawing near, Hebrews 10:25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.
 - d. The Judge is standing at the door, James 5:8-9 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. [9] Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.
 - e. The end of all things is at hand, 1 Peter 4:7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

B. The Lord himself will descend, and the dead in Christ will rise first, 1 Thess. 4.16

1 Thess. 4:16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

1. From his exalted position of glory at the right hand of the Father, our Lord will descend from heaven with a cry of command (cf. Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3)
2. The same Jesus of Nazareth who died, rose, and ascended will be the One who returns for us
 - a. This same Jesus, Acts 1:11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."
 - b. The same Son of Man who will reign, Daniel 7:13-14 I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. [14] And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all

- peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.
- c. He will appear, Matthew 24:30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.
 - d. We await the coming of our Lord, 1 Thess. 1:10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.
3. The sounds mentioned here (cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God) have been disputed in the history of interpretation
- a. Could it be Jesus our Lord himself, John 11:43
 - b. Could it be the archangel Michael (Dan. 10:13; Jude 9)
 - c. Could it be another angel
 - d. Will it be a literal trumpet call, or is it symbolic?, cf. 1 Cor. 15:50-53 I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. [51] Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, [52] 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. [53] For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.
 - e. The bottom line: *Christ's return for his own will be announced from heaven with piercing clarity for his saints, and the dead in Christ will arise first!*
4. Here in plain language the resurrection of the dead in Christ is affirmed and declared: *not a single believer who has gone on before will fail to be raised, all through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!*
- a. The earth one day will give birth to the dead, Isaiah 26:19 Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.
 - b. Christ is first in the order of those destined to conquer death forever, 1 Cor. 15:20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

C. Those alive to be “caught up together” with the dead to meet the Lord, 1 Thess. 4:17

1 Thess. 4:17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

1. Living believers will be changed in a moment, caught up with the resurrected believers with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: in a moment, we will be changed, 1 Cor. 15:51-52 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, [52] 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.
2. Notice that Paul included himself in the group of living believers “who are left,” clearly indicating the imminence of this event!, cf. 1 Thess. 4:15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that *we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord*, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.
3. What of the “rapture?:” Latin, *rapturo*, “caught up.” Cf. 1 Corinthians 15
4. Note the force of the action: “so we will always be with the Lord,”
 - a. The goal of our Lord’s building project, John 14:2-3 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.
 - b. We are destined to be fellow heirs with Christ, Romans 8:17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
 - c. We will finally make Christ our home, 2 Cor. 5:6-8 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, [7] for we walk by faith, not by sight. [8] Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.
 - d. To be with him is far better than anything here, Phil. 1:23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.
 - e. We eagerly await being with him, Hebrews 9:28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

- f. Remarkably, we will share the throne with him, Rev. 3:21 The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.
 - g. He will be our temple and our lamp, Rev. 21:22-23 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. [23] And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.
5. Finally, the prayer of our Lord will be fulfilled, John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.
- a. We will know fully, 1 Cor. 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.
 - b. No sin will veil his glory from us, 2 Cor. 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
 - c. We will see the glory of God in the face of our Lord, 2 Cor. 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
 - d. We will see him as he truly is, 1 John 3:2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

D. Encourage one another with these words, 1 Thess. 4:18

1 Thess. 4:18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

- 1. Death cannot possibly win, 1 Cor. 15:54-55 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." [55] "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"
- 2. We will be gathered together again with those whom we have lost, 1 Thess. 4:14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.
- 3. Our destiny is unbroken fellowship in the presence of the living Savior in his new Kingdom
 - a. Joy and pleasures evermore, Psalm 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
 - b. Satisfaction in sharing his likeness, Psalm 17:15 As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.
 - c. Sorrow and sighing will flee away, Isaiah 35:10 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.
 - d. The dwelling place of God will be with us, Rev. 21:3-4 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. [4] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."



REVERENDFUN.COM COPYRIGHT GCI, INC.



SO CONCLUDES MY THEORY THAT THE RAPTURE IS PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE DUE TO VARIOUS LAWS OF PHYSICS AND ... ?

Soon We'll Be Leaving Here

The end of the struggle, the conclusion of the battle, the longing we have for victory is not wealth, or abundance, or prosperity, or blessing. These things are well and good, and intrinsic to the blessed hope we have in the Father's promise for eternal life. As wonderful as these are, the real treasure of our hope the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ together with all the saints. Death and separation cannot possibly have the last word with us; we belong to Christ, and we await his coming that will gather his own unto himself, and we with him. To be together with all the saints in the presence of our Master forever—this is the reunion we seek and the hope we cling to.

The Season After Pentecost: Proper 27 (Year A, 2008)

The Final Reunion, 1 Thess. 4.13-18.
November 9, 2008.

1 Thess. 4.16-17 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

As warriors in the cosmic struggle of Christ for the Kingdom of God, we await his coming; not only will it be the gathering up of all things into Christ, but it will also be the final reunion of all those who have believed in him. We will be gathered unto him, all those who believe in him, never to leave his side or be out of his presence again. The circle will not remain broken—we will be caught up together with the Lord and, so it will be, that we will always be with the Lord. This is our encouragement and our hope, to fight on, to continue the struggle, to finish our course.

Morning Collect: Eternal God our Father, we thank You for the Spirit-inspired truth that soon and very soon, our Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, and we will hear the trumpet call of reunion with Your Son. Your grace and mercy have made it all possible. Glory to Your name! Amen.

Evening Collect: Risen Lord Jesus Christ, as those who have fought the battle strong for years now, we desire, above all else, to be caught up together with the saints to meet You, and so forever to be in Your presence and care. You are our hope and our longing. Come to us, and gather us to Yourself. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Memory Verse: MTB, **New Beginnings in Christ: Series 1. Topic 2, Repentance and Faith, Hear of God's Love in Christ.** John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.