Return Of The King

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[0:00] You've got the Red Church Bible, it's on page 1156, that's page 1156, 1 Corinthians 15, and the second reading is 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 13-18, that's on page 1188.

So 1 Corinthians 15 first. Thanks Sarah. Close to the mic now. Okay. I declare to you brothers that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery, we will not all sleep, but will all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true, death has been swallowed up in victory.
Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
[1:23] Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 13 to 18, page 1188. Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.
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. According to the Lord's own word, we will tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.
For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, and 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. Therefore, encourage each other with these words.
[2:34] Okay, thanks Sarah and Kate. I'll just ask Ryan to come up, and you'll be able to tell from Ryan's accent that he's not a local.

Ryan has been here the last couple of years, part of our church family. Work brought him here, and his wife and two boys and a little girl. And we look forward to it.
Ryan will be sharing with us now. Just before Ryan speaks, we'd just like to pray. Let's pray.
Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that you teach us from it.
Lord, we pray that you would help Ryan as he teaches us from your word this morning. Show us the things that you want us to learn, Lord, and help us not just to listen, but to act on the things that we hear this morning.
We pray for an outpouring of your Holy Spirit, that you would, through him, teach us what you want us to know. We ask these things, Lord Jesus, in your name. Amen. Amen. Thanks, Ryan.
[3:41] Thank you, Ian. Good morning, friends. It's good to be here. I say that particularly because there is a distinct possibility that we might not be here at all today, that we wouldn't see each other.

I actually debated about even preparing a sermon for today, reason being that as we continue our session on 1 Thessalonians 4, today we're going to talk about the rapture.
So it's possible that we could have all just been raptured up this morning, and actually at about 10 until 11 this morning when there were six of us here, I was growing concerned that it had, in fact, happened. But we are here, and as we'll see, the rapture is this big event that's going to happen. It's an event that sees Christ catch up his whole church, all the remaining believers, in one big motion. We'll also see that this could happen at any moment, which brings me back to my point that

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I even really need to prepare.
Being that I'm still here, clearly I did, but I will say that always the optimist, I did wait until the very last minute to prepare. If you would, turn with me to 1 Thessalonians.
[4:52] You're probably there from what we just read. I do want to go through that again real quickly. That's the primary verse that we'll be working through today. So 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 13 to 18.

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. 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.
According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep, 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. Therefore, encourage each other with these words.
I think occasionally we lose a bit of perspective when we read Scripture, because at times it's easy to look at it and we'll read Leviticus, the same way that we read Romans or Revelation or any of the books of the Bible, and we look at them because they have chapter numbers and verse numbers and these handy little headings, and so we kind of look at them all the same.
[6:18] But they're not all the same. They're not the same style of writing, despite the formatting similarities. This book, 1 Thessalonians, is a letter to friends.

It's not a historical account or a broadly prophetic word, but rather a practical, loving note from a dear friend. So today I'd like to talk about the return of the king.
Oh, not that one. Okay, we'll talk about the return of the real king. So if you have something to write with, we're going to go through five points today through this passage.
Revelation, return, resurrection, rapture, and reunion. So Revelation. Well, how many of you have been watching the Olympics the past few weeks?
Okay, at least one. Thank you, Sarah. I'm a huge fan of the Olympics. Actually, today my wife's favorite event is coming up. The closing ceremonies will be here, which means I won't be firmly planted in front of the TV anymore.
[7:22] Throughout the course of the Olympics, has anybody watched any events that weren't already familiar to them? Did you see weird sports that you hadn't seen before? Yeah?

Shane, what did you see that was new to you? Yeah, judo. There were some strange ones. Fencing was one to me. It's not that I was unfamiliar with the general sport of fencing, but to watch it, I really had no idea what was going on.
It seemed like every time somebody scored, I always thought it was the other guy who had gotten the point. I just couldn't follow what was going on. Or taekwondo. You know, this is one that seems pretty straightforward, but it's pretty hard to keep track of.
And of course, when I turn one of these on, the kids run into the room, and they immediately want to know everything that's happening. They want to know who's winning and how they're winning and how the sport goes, and I have no idea on some of these.
And this is a little bit like what Paul's dealing with as he's talking to the Thessalonians. There's a new group of believers here in Thessalonica, and they've heard and they've seen what's going on, but they don't fully understand everything.
[8:30] Like me with taekwondo, I get that they should kick each other in the head, but beyond that, most of it's lost on me. And so Paul begins his part of explanation in verse 13 with this sentence.

He says, Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant. Now, I really like things like this in Scripture where you get a little bit of a vision into the personality of each of the writers. Only a really good friend could begin an explanation of something by saying, You're so ignorant about this that I'm going to explain it to you very simply.
Now, if you drop down to verse 15, it says, According to the Lord's own word. Now, here clearly we are in the New Testament, but this really starts to sound a lot like what we would hear from Old Testament prophets.

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If you would, turn back with me to the book of Jeremiah. We're going to look at chapter 1, and almost right at the beginning, right in verse 2.
My wife's going to help me with the page numbers for everybody in the Red Bibles. 7.55 if you have one of the Red Church Bibles. So, Jeremiah chapter 1 in verse 2.
[9:44] And here it says, The word of the Lord came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of King Josiah. Now, if you just drop down to verse 4 quickly, The word of the Lord came to me, saying, In verse 12, The Lord said to me, Verse 14, the same thing, The Lord said to me.

Okay, now just real quickly, chapter 2, verses 4 and 5. He says, Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, all you clans of the house of Israel.
This is what the Lord says. So what you'll see as you go through Scripture, as you look at the prophetic words that God had spoken to the prophets, as he spoke them back to people, this is a pattern.
You know, when they come back and they deliver the message that the Lord had given them, they say something like, This is what the Lord says. Or, as we see in Thessalonians, According to the Lord's own word.
So we can see that this is not just Paul's interpretation of what's going on, but this is a specific revelation that God has given him as part of the progressive revelation of God's truth to the people.
Now, as a side note, this is what makes some of Jesus' teachings so interesting.
[11:00] If you think back to the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus was speaking to people, he kept saying to them throughout that whole message, You have heard that it was said that, but I tell you that.

He was taking all this stuff that they had been told and that they had believed was truth, and he was taking it. And, you know, and it was so complicated and so challenging for them because it really meant a couple things.
It meant that the teaching that they had received was possibly wrong or incomplete and that what Jesus was saying was now true, and he was setting himself up in a position of authority, of the authority of God, and it's no wonder that he upset the establishment in doing this.
So to the point of revelation, it's important to see that in this passage, it's clear that this is a prophetic word that God has given to Paul for the purpose of delivering to the people.
Point two, the return. So I'm going to make you a promise right now. What I'm going to say next is the best news you are going to get today.
[12:08] In fact, it will be the best news that you ever get. Christ is coming again. If I stood here and said nothing else for the rest of the morning, that alone should encourage you more than anything you will ever hear.

And ultimately, we'll see that this is one of the main points that Paul's making. Now, for those of you that don't know, my wife and I have three children, all of whom are fairly inquisitive. It's not uncommon for us to have a discussion about something, and then hours or days or even weeks later, they'll come back with a question.
And you can tell that they really thought about what we discussed. And once they've kind of wrapped their minds around the basic idea, it raises a whole bunch of other questions. Well, this is exactly what we see from the Thessalonians.
They have some very practical questions surrounding the return of Christ. Things like, what exactly is going to happen when he comes back? What's it going to look like? When is it going to happen? Which would be a really handy thing to know. What happens to the people who have already died? How is all of this going to occur? However, if you're like me, you've probably wondered things like this a time or two yourself.
[13:20] In fact, this is one of the areas of generally what I'll call religion that gets quite a bit of press. You'll see this show up in the news. Anybody remember these people? This was a group that drove around the U.S.

in all these buses. They left their jobs and drove around to tell everybody that the end of the world was coming on May 21, 2012. I guess they missed it.
Although they did put out a press release on May 22, saying that they had incorrectly interpreted scripture and that they had a new date for everybody. So stay tuned for that one. Or how about this one?

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The Mayans. The Mayans have told us that the end of the world is coming in December 21, so I guess we have a few more months to find out if the Mayans are on track with that one.
Although they use the stars as their guide and not scripture. Well, we could spend a lot of time debating these dates and times and a lot of groups have talked about when it's going to happen.
[14:22] And in fact, we could spend a great deal of time going through and talking about the timeline of when all of this is going to happen. And if you want to have a fun exercise, we can spend some time digging into all of this.

You could spend an entire sermon series talking about the dates and times of all of these. But the reality is there's a very simple answer to when this is going to happen.
We have no idea. We are not told when this is going to happen. Now, we do have some idea based on scripture of when in the series of events it's going to happen.
If we look back real quickly at our passage in 1 Corinthians, that's chapter 15, verse 52, we are told that this will happen in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye.
It's going to be just that quick. It will be like a thief in the night that he comes. So this is all going to happen very quickly, but we don't have any idea when it's going to happen. I won't steal Jonathan's thunder because I know he's going to probably dig into this next week.
[15:49] But from all of this that we get in scripture, first, I have no idea how the people on the bus got May 21st or any other date from those passages. But, interestingly, our passage in Thessalonians shows Paul speaking expectantly about Christ's return.

He says, we, he's talking about in our lifetimes. if you look at the we in that way, and this is known as theologically the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ.
He says, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together. Now, you could take that to mean that he is expecting Christ to return in his lifetime, or you could take it to mean that he's speaking of the universal church, that he's speaking of the church, Christ's church, when he's saying we.
Now, clearly we know now that Jesus didn't come back in Paul's lifetime. But what I do want to come back to in a little bit is Paul's mindset here, that he is living expectantly.
He is living every day for the return of Christ. Well, let's just take a quick second to see where in the course of the end time events the rapture will happen.
[17:03] And this is one that's much more difficult to answer conclusively. We have some insight, but I believe it's impossible to know for sure. Now, there are varying schools of thought on the topic.

Some believe that the rapture will happen before the Great Tribulation. Some believe that it will happen in the middle of the Great Tribulation. Some believe that it will happen at the end. And while it's interesting to discuss and consider, ultimately, it doesn't really matter.
In fact, the general belief is that this letter to the Thessalonians would have been written before John even had his vision on the island of Patmos and the book of Revelation was even written.
So for the believers in Thessalonica, they didn't even know that the Great Tribulation was coming. They were simply looking forward to the return of the king. Regardless of the timing, this is a powerful and life-changing truth to consider, that the God who made us sent his son so that we could be reconciled to him and he is coming back for us.
Third, the resurrection. If we look back at our passage in Thessalonians, he says, Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep.
[18:18] Well, Paul isn't talking here about people who are literally sleeping. This would have been a common way to talk about people who had died. In this culture, at this time, the prevailing belief was that once you died, there was nothing else.

There was no common belief that there was a life after death. Now, once this became a central teaching of the Christian faith, it naturally came with a lot of questions. And when it comes to those chaotic moments that will be happening when the rapture happens, the Thessalonians are thinking about what might be going on and one of the pressing questions expresses this sentiment.
They say, Okay, I get that the living believers will be taken, but what about the people that already died? Well, as we just read, Paul confirms for us that they will rise first, followed by believers.
Now, if you thought, when I mentioned the dead coming back to life, your first thought was zombie movies. I need you to put down the remote and step away from the TV. But you're not the first one that might have this ghastly image of the dead returning to life.

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In that same passage in Corinthians, you might just keep your finger there. We'll go back and forth a bit. If we look in chapter 15 in verse 35, it says, But some may ask, How are the dead raised? [19:54] What kind of body will they come? And now you go down to verse 42. It says, So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown perishable is raised imperishable.

It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. So clearly, no matter the physical state of the body, it is raised anew.
As God once formed us from the dust of the earth, he shall form us again, new, imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual bodies. Obviously, the resurrection of the dead holds a powerful and prominent place in our Christian lives.
It was Jesus' claims of his own divinity and resurrection that brought him into such conflict with the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. The resurrection of the dead demonstrates death over victory and sin, which are the dominion of Satan.
This amazing truth reminds me of one of my favorite passages of scripture, which we see in Ephesians. It says, Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.
[21:07] The rapture. Back to Thessalonians. If we look at verse 16, it says, For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with a trumpet call of God, which is to say you won't be able to miss it, 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. So this is what's known as the rapture. Now, you may have noticed that the word rapture doesn't actually appear in this passage anywhere.
Just so you know, this isn't a Christianism that's been made up somewhere along the way. The Latin word for caught up is rapturo, which is where we get the word for rapture. Now, I like made up words as much as the next guy, but not so much in my theology.
As we can see, Jesus is going to come with a loud call and gather up all the believers, past and present to him in one giant motion. We'll be caught up. We'll be raptured. As I read this week, I came across a Greek scholar that outlined the various meanings of the word for the Greek word for caught up and how each of those speaks to part of the act of Jesus claiming his church.
The first was to catch away speedily. So as we saw, this is going to happen in a flash. It's going to happen in the twinkling of an eye like a thief in the night. The second was that he will, it means to claim for one's own self.
[22:39] And we know that the bridegroom is coming back for his bride to claim her as his own. It means to move to a new place because the earth is not our home.

There is a place reserved for believers in heaven. It means to rescue from danger because we know that the devil, our enemy, is like a roaring lion prowling around waiting to devour us.
And we will be rescued from that very real danger in this one act of love. And finally, the reunion. I don't know about you, but I long for this day.
I pray for his return. It's true at the very core of my being that I am not at home, that I'm not whole, that my eternal destiny is forever in him.
And I can't wait to see him face to face. I can see a few important points in these final two verses of chapter 4. First, this will be a glorious reunion.
[23:43] As we've already discussed, we'll all have glorified bodies and we are going to meet the King in glory. As one theologian put it, the suffering that we endure today will be transformed to glory when he returns.

Second, this is going to be a long meeting, like forever. The end of verse 17 tells us that we will be with the Lord forever. He has assured us that this is an everlasting union.
We will never be separated from him again. We will live in his presence forevermore. And third, Paul gives us a command. He says, use this teaching to encourage one another.
Friends, if we can't be encouraged that the author of life is coming back for his treasure, then our priorities are in the wrong place. And this is what I see in Paul's mindset. that he's living expectantly for Christ's return.
The first part of his message to them is academic. He's talking about the last moments on earth and the process and protocol of what will happen. But much more importantly, he doesn't leave the Thessalonians in academia.

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[24:51] He takes them to application. Paul lives as though he understands it could come at any moment. I don't know if everybody here knows Christ as their Savior or not.

If you don't, please hear this. Jesus is not a deathbed decision. He's not simply a character in history. This isn't religion and it's not about a church building.
This is about the one relationship that has eternal ramifications. Death is coming to us all. It's an appointment that we will all have to keep.
There's no guarantee when it will come. We're not assured tomorrow when the day comes or the Lord comes, we will be called to account on one basis alone. We will be found innocent or guilty based solely upon whether or not we have entered into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only one who lived a perfect life and died for the sins of mankind. He paid the debt that we can never pay. He rose from the dead conquering the grave. He ascended into heaven where he reigns until he comes again.
[26:03] We are told in Ephesians that we are saved by grace through faith and this, not of ourselves. It's the gift of God and not by works so that no one can boast. There's absolutely nothing that you can do on your own to save yourselves from the judgment of God.

It is only through the mercy he showed upon the cross and the power of the resurrection that we can come before a loving and just God and know that he will call us his own. Whether Jesus comes to collect his bride or death comes, the decision to accept Christ is one that cannot afford delay.
If you've not made that decision, I pray that you would. Simply tell God that you know you've sinned against him, that you want to be forgiven and that you know Christ is the only way to his forgiveness.
Accept Christ as your Savior and turn from a lost life to one filled with the glory of God. The words that you use are unimportant as God knows the desires of your heart and is waiting for you to come home.
If you want to talk with anybody about it, feel free to chat to me or find one of the other men in the church because, brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant for the Lord himself will come down from heaven and we 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.
[27:20] Friends, I hope you live expectantly knowing that the return of the King is imminent. Let's pray. Father God, for generation upon generation, people lived in expectation of the coming of the Messiah.

And Father, we live in a time where we can look back upon that Messiah and have life in him. But Father, we can also look forward to his return.
We can look forward to that day where you come back for your church, where you come to call your own to yourself, when we can finally see you face to face.
Father, we thank you for the truth of your word, the power of your Holy Spirit, the love and mercy of your Son. And we pray all of these things in his name. Amen. Amen.

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