

Ready To Meet Jesus?

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0:00] chapter 4, I'm reading verses 16 and 17. 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 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. 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 shall always be with the Lord. This morning as we were looking at Psalm 19, we saw of course how the world, the creation, the universe, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the whole creation of this world and everything, speaks to us of God's general revelation.

And that we saw how there is no person in this world who has any excuse, can never turn around at the end of the day and say, I didn't know there was a God. Because everything is speaking to us about God.

But we then went on to look at God's special revelation as we looked at verses 7 really to the end of that psalm. And God's special revelation shows us things that we could never, ever, ever, in a million years work out for ourselves.

[1:28] And that's part of what we see in this chapter. Because it brings before us the most amazing truths of things that are yet to be. Awesome things, spectacular things.

Things that are too wonderful almost for us to understand. Because God, through the apostle here, is unfolding to us some of the future history of this world that will roll in at the end and of what the Lord is going to do.

And we're told very simply that the Lord is coming again. He came once into this world and he came very quietly. Very few that understood at that moment that this was the Son of God, the Lord Jesus who was born into this world.

Very few understood just who this was. There will be no doubting on this particular occasion. Because every eye will see him.

There will be nobody who will be saying the next day, Oh, I heard there was an amazing thing happened. Nobody will be saying that. Everybody in this whole wide world will see the return.

[2:37] Everybody who's living at that time will see the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's an awesome thought. And part of what makes it so awesome and in many ways so frightening is that that is going to be, like as it were, the very cut-off point where salvation will be offered again.

The day of salvation will be no more. Because Jesus is coming as judge of all the earth. He's coming as a bridegroom to take his bride.

And he's coming as a judge to judge this world. He came into this world the first time to bring salvation. He came to seek and to save those who are lost. Second time he is coming to bring everything to an end.

And that is a great question. Supposing Jesus was to come tonight. Just supposing. Are you ready to go with him?

Are you ready to meet him? That is the most important question that you have to ask yourself. Am I ready? If Jesus was to call me, whether it is through his return tonight, supposing he did come tonight, or that you are summoned out of this world by death.

[3:54] Because it's going to happen. One way or another. Either through his return or through our death. Everything is going to change for us. And we have to always ask ourselves, Am I ready to meet with Jesus?

Because it is an appointment that is for everybody. It is appointed unto all men once to die. And after death there is the judgment. Now, as we see here, Paul was writing to this church, the church in Thessalonica, and he was writing over a couple of issues, a couple of problems that were within

the church.

A lot of Paul's letters had to deal with, he wrote the letters to deal with issues and problems and things in the church. And one of the things was that, which was a good thing, the church, some of the Christians, were waiting every day for the return of Jesus.

Now, that's a good thing. It was good that that's the way they were thinking. They were looking forward to the return of Jesus. But the downside of it was that they had stopped working. If they were joiners, they laid down their saw and their hammer.

If they were people who were maybe like scribes, they put down their pen. They had given up work. And all they were doing was, they were waiting and waiting every day, and looking and wondering, wonder if it's today.

[5 : 12] And Paul rebuked them, and he said, yes, it's good that you're waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ, but you've got to continue working. Because what is happening is this, you are dependent on other people to provide for you, because you're not providing for yourself.

And that's not a good witness, because you're appearing to other people to be lazy. And it's not a good witness. So, yes, wait for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, but get working as well.

And then the second thing was that the Christians in Thessalonica were thinking that those who had already died, they were going to miss out at the return of the Lord Jesus.

And they were saying to themselves, oh, it's such a shame that they've died and they've gone, because they're going to miss this wonderful occasion for the return of Jesus coming into this world. And so that's what Paul is addressing here. And he's showing them that, no, they will miss out on nothing. Those who have gone, they will not miss out.

[6 : 17] And we'll see, we'll see just as we go through these couple of verses. But it's very interesting, the term that Paul uses with regard to death.

It's a very biblical term. It's a New Testament term. And God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. That's how it's recorded for us, that it is asleep.

And we know that death is cruel, it's painful, tears, it rips, pulls apart. But for the Christian, it's falling asleep. You remember when Lazarus had died and news had come to Jesus, Jesus told the disciples, so he said, I have to go to Bethany.

I have to go. Lazarus is asleep. I must go that I might waken him. But of course, Lazarus was dead. And Jesus was going to waken him, to raise him from the dead.

It was the same with Stephen. Remember how Stephen died in the most barbaric way, where he was stoned to death. And as the stones rained down upon his body, and his body was broken and battered, and eventually he was killed through that stoning, it tells us that he fell asleep.

[7 : 36] And you'd say to yourself, fall asleep with boulders smashing onto your skull. And you cannot think of a more brutal way of being put to death. And yet the Bible talks about falling asleep, that they've slept in Jesus.

And so it's a beautiful term. And in a sense, we often think about that as we lay a Christian brother or sister into the grave, and we're saying to ourselves, well, it's just like putting them into bed and rolling over the duvet and over the covers, over them, until the resurrection morning.

Because that's what's happening. The sarcasm tells us that the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory. And their bodies, being still united to Christ, they rest in the grave till the resurrection.

It's like just a resting. And so it's a beautiful picture that is given to us of all this. But of course, as we are in this world, we are not, the Christian is not in a place of rest.

We know that that's one of the difficulties of this world. Yes, there's loads of blessings, loads of good things. But it's a place of trouble and strife. And particularly for the Christian, because we're living in an enemy territory.

[8 : 59] There are forces and powers that are out to destroy us and to trip us up all the time. Every day and every night, the powers of darkness are at work.

They're targeting you. They're going to try and get you. Satan and his legions of angels that are busy, busy, busy all the time and say, oh, we'll go for him, we'll go for her. We'll sort this, we'll do this, we'll do this.

All the time, we're targets of the evil one. And so there's external forces and pressures that are internal forces and pressures at work. And sometimes, sometimes it becomes quite exhausting in the Christian faith.

Because sometimes the Christian will say, you know, I'm tired, I'm weary. I'm weary. It's a constant battle. And you know that if you're in a battle, in a struggle, you can give maximum effort for a while. But not all the time. Sometimes you see, just say in a game of football, or some footballers who are blessed with the most incredible engine, so to speak. Call them box to box. And they're going all the time.

[10:02] Now, a lot of people can't do that. They can maybe do it in short, but some people have this incredible capacity of keeping going like for the 90 minutes non-stop. And you say, wow.

And it's the same in so many things. But it doesn't matter what we do, there's still a limit to what you do. And there comes a point where you say, I can't keep going like that. And that's how it is in this world.

Because we're bombarded all the time. And so, it's inevitable. There are times we feel weary. But the great thing is that when we die, excuse me, we go into a place of rest.

That's one of the things that we're told, that there is a rest for the believer. We labor in this world, but we labor in order to get to this rest. This world is not a rest.

This is not your rest, we're told. But there is a rest for the people of God. And we're to labor to get into that rest. And how wonderful a prospect that will be when we're delivered from all the troubles and strife and all the difficulties and all the temptations and the bombardment and all that goes on all the time, relentless.

[11:17] We're told that those who die in the Lord will rest from their labor. And that's one of the things that sleep does when we go to bed at night. We can go to bed really tired, and if we get that decent night's sleep, we wake up refreshed, renewed.

And that's kind of the picture that we have here of what is going to happen. Because our bodies are going to go into the grave and our bodies are going to rest in the grave, but when the resurrection morning comes, our bodies will rise and they will rise into a level of newness that they've never known or understood before.

everything is going to become so new. And so we have this amazing moment here that is described for us. Because here we have the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And a lot of people think of the return of Jesus, and they just think of him as the Jesus, the human man who lived here for 33 years in this world. Just like you and me, with just the same physical appearance.

but what we've got to remember is that no longer is Jesus just like that. Yes, still the physical appearance, but a radical transformation because he has now entered into glory.

[12:37] He is appearing in all his radiant glory when he returns. You get a little glimpse on the Mount of Transfiguration. Remember the dazzling brilliance of Jesus.

And Jesus, we've said it often enough before, reveals himself to two people in this world in his resurrected, glorified appearance. And both of them fell to the ground when he did that.

First was Saul. When Saul was the great enemy of the church and he was riding full pelt down to Damascus to persecute the church, Jesus stopped him and said, Saul, Saul, why persecuteest thou me?

Saul saw the blazing light and he fell to the ground. And he was blinded by it. The other is John, the Apostle John in Revelation. And again, if you go to Revelation chapter 1, he gives the most incredible description, a graphic description in the most beautiful pictorial language of Jesus. And when he saw Jesus and he heard his voice, he fell down at his feet as one dead. He was overwhelmed by the appearance of Jesus. Well, that's the Jesus who is coming this time.

[13:53] Not the babe of Bethlehem, but this altogether glorious Jesus. And that is why there is going to be such a reaction. There's going to be two distinct reactions from everybody when Jesus returns.

Those who have mocked him and ridiculed him, those who have opposed him and rejected him, when they see him coming, we're told in the Bible that they will call on the rocks and the mountains to fall on them and to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb.

The appearance of Jesus is going to be so awesome and terrifying that they can't bear it. The Christian, on the other hand, will utter the words that we find at the close of Revelation which says, even so come Lord Jesus.

That's what the church will be saying. Those who are alive when they see the return of Jesus, they'll be saying, even so come Lord Jesus. Totally different reactions.

That's why I'm asking the question, what will your reaction be were Jesus to come tonight? And so we see here that there are three distinct sounds that will be heard.

[15:10] Now one of them I don't understand, I'm not sure what it is because it tells us for the Lord himself will descend from heaven. Now we understand what this is to a certain extent with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel and at that I'm not altogether sure and then with the trumpet of God.

So there will be these three distinct sounds. Now the cry of command that will be heard, we believe, is the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ as he summons the graves to open.

Remember when Lazarus died and Jesus went and Lazarus had been in the grave four days and Jesus stood by the grave and Jesus, remember, he was moved in his heart by what he was seeing and everything and the impact and the effect of death.

But then he prayed to the Lord and after to his Father in heaven and after he prayed it tells us that with a loud voice he cried, Lazarus, come out!

And it tells us that the one who was dead came out of the grave, came out of the tomb. Well, that was a cry of command. Well, this is going to be a cry of command.

[16:36] Yes, from the same lips, from the lips of Jesus. But it's going to be this cry of command to every grave. And it's going to be a cry of command to all the graves of every one of his people.

And we're told in the Bible that the graves will open and that the sea will give up its dead. Amazing thought. All those who are burnt at the stake. What a moment that's going to be.

All this is going to happen. And then we see that the trumpet that the trumpet is going to there's going to be the sound of the trumpet.

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. Now, in Jewish history the trumpet was used for various things.

It was used to make an announcement announcing the feasts announcing celebrations and such like. But it was always blown when the people were to assemble and God was to give a message to them.

[17:43] One of the most important times that ever happened was when the law was given at Mount Sinai. The trumpet was blown all the people had to gather together.

But the trumpet was also we find in scripture a signal of God coming to rescue his people. And there's various references but for instance in Zechariah it tells us the Lord will appear over them. The Lord God will sound the trumpet. On that day the Lord their God will save them as the flock of his people for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land.

So, when God was coming in order to deliver his people there was the sound of the trumpet. And here is going to be the ultimate deliverance.

The sound of this trumpet will reverberate right throughout this world. And there's going to be this huge this awesome cry of command graves open my people rise.

[18:49] And you say to yourself how's that going to happen? I'm the first clue. Neither does anybody. No idea how the Lord is going to raise up all those bodies that have died.

But all we can say is this. Can you think it's not going to be difficult for God? Because the God who made out of nothing remember it tells us in the beginning God said let there be let there be let there be this let there be that.

God made that's what creation is what he created. He brought into being what had never been before. He created the sun. He created the moon.

He created the stars the planets. He created this world. He created you and me. He created the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and all the animals out of nothing.

Well he made us out of the dust of the ground. And it's not in any way inconceivable that the God who has done this and when you think of the likes of the whole starry sky and the milky way and all that he has brought into being and he counts the number of the stars and he names them one by one.

[20:05] Do you think it's difficult for him to raise up again from the dust and restore us and renew us and make us more wonderful than ever we were before?

Well that's what's going to happen. And this is going to be the most amazing thing because first of all those who are in the grave are going to rise and they will go up and they will reunite with their souls because their souls are coming with the Lord.

Because it tells us that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. So when Jesus returns all the souls are going to come with Jesus and the bodies are going to rise up and there's going to be that's going to be the first reunion where body and soul are brought together.

You know there are amazing moments you know sometimes you go to a shop and you get a new suit and you go to the mirror and try and look in the mirror and see what it's like. I wonder if it fits and I tell you I'm difficult to get a suit because of my shape and all that.

But you look in the mirror and say okay. Can you imagine what it will be like on that day? It's not just a new suit. It's a new body and it will be magnificent resembling our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[21 : 38] Paul gives us a kind of an instance of an example of what it's going to be like and he said it's like planting a seed and from that seed comes a beautiful flower a beautiful plant. That plant and that flower couldn't be there apart from the seed.

It's directly connected to the seed. It is the seed actually blossomed out into this plant. But that seed had to go into the ground and die and see what's come from it.

And that's the very same what's going to be with our body. Our bodies are planted into the ground and then we will be raised up with bodies that will resemble our Lord and our Savior Jesus.

It's the most amazing concept. And then we see then we who are alive who are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds.

Always clouds with the Lord. To meet the Lord. I love where the meeting is going to take place. to meet the Lord in the air. Now when you think about it you might say to yourself well that's alright we meet the Lord in the air.

[22 : 52] Now what does the Bible tell us about the air? Who controls well I shouldn't say who controls who we're told in Ephesians is the prince of the power of the air.

Satan. That's what we're told in Ephesians too. The prince of the power of the air. Ephesians 6 talks about principalities and powers of evil forces in the heavenly places.

So all around us and about us we cannot see it but there is the forces of darkness are all around us and they're at work in the air.

and this is what I find absolutely amazing that Jesus is going to take his bride up to meet him in the midst of the enemy territory and Jesus will display his authority and his power and his majesty and his glory and all the enemies will look at Jesus and look at his bride and they can't do anything.

They will be there with hatred and anger and resentment and every evil thought and wanting to tear us but they can't do anything.

[24 : 16] And you know as I was thinking about that I was seeing a picture from Psalm 23. I know Psalm 23 is about our life here and the Lord's shepherding.

But you know at the end of it it says goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me and in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be. But the previous verse it talks about where the Lord remember how my cup overflows where the Lord has set a table in the presence of my enemies and my cup will overflow and where he anoints my head with oil.

It's like here's the supreme moment of joy. It is the greatest moment of all time and it's in the presence of my enemies. And my enemies can't do anything about it.

And it's just a thought I had but I said this is the ultimate where we will be in the presence of the enemy of the Lord and they can't do anything. And it's going to be our most supreme sublime moment where we are then heading into dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

That's what the Lord has planned for us. This is all part of the salvation. We tend to think of the salvation simply for our souls coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 43] No, the salvation covers our bodies as well. It covers everything. It covers our eternity. From the moment you are born again, your life changes completely. Your destiny, your everything changes.

So amazingly. And so there is this reunion. Then we which 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'll ever be with the Lord. What a reunion this is going to be. First of all, there's the reunion of our souls and our bodies. Then there's the reunion with people who have gone and those who are still alive.

all centered around Christ. And I don't think we can even begin to comprehend just how awesome that is going to be.

And of course we'll know people. Do we know one another? Because you think in the Mount of Transfiguration for instance when Moses and Elijah appeared. How did the disciples know it was Moses and Elijah all who believe the Holy Spirit makes this clear who is who?

[26 : 50] and we will meet those who have gone in the Lord. It's going to be wonderful. The wonderful reunion. But also those that we have never met before but will know it's going to be and it's forever.

No end to it. Never anybody saying, have you seen so and so? Oh, he died. He died. I never heard. That will never be spoken about in glory.

These sort of things are going to be confined to history. Part of this world not there forever with the Lord. So the question I have to ask is, is that where you're going?

Is that your hope? Is that your future? Is that what you're longing? Tonight are you genuinely able to say, you know, I'm looking forward to that? Or are you tonight saying, I hope he doesn't come tonight.

I need to get myself sorted out. Well, if you need to get yourself sorted out, sort yourself out tonight. You can't sort yourself out. He can for you. He's the only one who can do it.

[27 : 55] And he came into this world to sort us out. He came to seek and to save those who are lost. Remember, when he returns, there's no more time.

But today is still the day of salvation. So you seek him while he is to be found, and he can be found tonight. Let us pray. Lord, Lord, Lord, we give thanks for what you have shown us that is yet to be. We give thanks, Lord, that there is a day coming, an awesome day, a wonderful day, a day that we cannot even begin to imagine. But we give thanks, Lord, that you've shown us and our tiny minds can grasp hold and lay hold of some of it.

But we pray, Lord, that we may live in the light of eternity, and live in the realization that we are moving there very quickly. We pray to bless everybody here, bless our homes, our families, and all whom we love.

And may we seek Jesus, may we seek him with all our heart. Part us with your blessing, do us good. Pray to bless the commissioning service that will take place on Wednesday as Gordon begins and takes up the new post.

[29 : 09] We give thanks, Lord, for his willingness to become involved with the youth work and discipleship. Pray, Lord, that it will be a fruitful ministry.

And we pray for James, who will lead that service. Again, this morning, we give thanks for Alison's years of service there and all that she did, and pray that you will bless her.

Watch over us all, and do us good, and take away from us our sin. In Jesus' name, Amen. Let us conclude our service singing in Psalm number 16. Psalm number 16.

This is in sing-sams, and we'll sing the last four verses of this psalm, from verse 8 to the end. Psalm number 16.

Before me constantly I set the Lord alone, because he is at my right hand, I'll not be overthrown. Therefore my heart is glad, my tongue with joy, will sing, my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering, for you will not allow my soul and death to stay, nor will you leave your Holy One to see the tombs decay.

[30 : 23] You have made known to me the path of life divine. Bliss shall I know at your right hand, joy from your face will shine. Psalm 16, from 8 to the end.

before me constantly I set the Lord alone, because he is at my right hand, I'll not be overthrown, therefore my heart is glad, my tongue with joy will sing, my godly tune will rest secure in hope unwavering, for you will not allow my soul is rest to stay, nor will you leave your holy one to see the tombs decay.

You have made known to me the path of life divine, blessed shall I know at your right hand, joy from your case will shine.

now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.