

A Day To Be Reckoned With

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[0 : 00] 1st Thessalonians chapter 4 and I'd like to take verses 16 to 18 just for our consideration this evening.

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 will always be with the Lord. And therefore encourage one another with these words.

This great day, the day of the Lord.

And this is a day that a lot of people don't really want to think about. And they put it away to the back of their minds and out of their thinking altogether.

[1 : 12] Perhaps because they don't believe it's going to happen at all. That it's just religious nonsense. These people perhaps thinking that I'm enjoying life and that's all that matters to me right now.

There's another group of people, and most likely people in here this evening, who have heard about this day since childhood, but have not committed themselves as yet to the safety and refuge of Jesus.

And of course there are other folk in here this evening, who truly believe in this day, and who are living their lives here on earth, resting on all of God's promises.

Well the thing is that we all have a special bond with this day. We all have this appointment with Jesus that is impossible to miss.

We can't cancel it out of our diaries at all. It's as if it's there in permanent markup. This second coming of Christ. This day of the Lord.

[2 : 32] What I'd like us to consider this evening is, first of all, just a little bit of background about this church in Thessalonica. And then secondly, to focus on the Christian's hope in Christ.

And then thirdly, just some thoughts on the second coming of the Lord. So first of all, just a little bit of background as we have it here, of the Thessalonian church.

Thessalonica was a thriving city with many people there. And Paul stated here is very much a follow-on from his first visit, which we read about there in Acts chapter 17.

Paul, as we read, had had to leave that newly founded church. They are very suddenly because of persecution and because of the jealousy of the leaders of the Jewish community.

They were jealous of his success, meaning that they saw many folk being drawn to faith in Jesus Christ through Paul's teaching.

[3 : 44] And they were targeting the newly converted Christians. And as we read there, they took Silas and others into prison.

But they forced Paul to flee from there before he had finished giving all his teaching and guidance and counsel to that newly formed church.

They were believers who had young believers in faith. They had just come to faith. And Paul was giving them instruction. But he had to flee and leave the city before he finished all his teaching.

And as Timothy reported, because Paul had sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, as Timothy reported back to Paul, he told Paul that the Christians in Thessalonica, they were generally holding fast to their faith.

But that they were misguided in some of their practices particularly. And Paul wrote to, he wrote this letter to them to encourage them and to give them instruction on living out their Christian lives in a proper way.

[4 : 57] This was because of a lack of understanding they had with particular issues, which had made very clear as you go through this first epistle of Thessalonica.

And Paul gives various instructions to the Christians, the ear of this new defined church. He directs them on their conduct and witness in their community.

And he encourages them, particularly with regard to prayer and their assurance of faith. And how important these things were to them so that they will be, in the words that we have here, well-pleasing to God.

And he also explains aspects of the second coming of Christ. And that's what I would like to put, just to focus this evening.

The second coming of Christ and just some of the confusion that there was with these young Christians in Thessalonica. This is the most prominent theme in 1 Thessalonians.

[6 : 15] Because it's mentioned in all the five chapters of this book. The Christians in Thessalonica, they fully believed in the second coming.

But they were confused and concerned because some believers had already died. And this caused them some real problems because they thought that because these believers had died, that they would be disadvantaged and that they would miss out when Jesus came back again.

And Paul wanted to assure each one of them that those who had died, that they wouldn't miss out on any of the glory that will also be experienced by those who are still alive at the coming of Christ.

So here, in the verses we're looking at this evening, we see Paul's answer. And it's not just for the people in Thessalonica who were alive in that first century, but it's also for all of us here tonight and for people throughout all of the ages.

And Paul, so secondly, focuses mostly on this Christian hope. And this is primarily what the text is about.

[7 : 42] Paul centers on the believer's hope in Christ. And we might ask, well, what's so special about this kind of hope?

Well, first of all, it's not like this word hope that we understand today. It's not just what we generally regard today as something that we might get or we might just get if we're lucky.

Because it's not the way we use this word hope so often today. I hope I win the lottery. I hope I can go on holiday. I hope I can get a new car and so on and so on.

All of these things where there is no confidence of that expectation. But what this sure hope is, it's a sure hope and it's a confident expectation of eternal life.

And it's wholly based on faith in the finished work of Christ at Calvary. And Paul goes on to say here that those who have already died, that they have fallen asleep in Christ.

[9 : 06] He refers to the Christian's death as being sleep. And we might ask, well, how is that? Well, it's significant that Jesus' death is never referred to as him sleeping.

That is because he died. He endured the full horror of true death because of our sin. And in doing so, he transformed the death of the believer into sleep.

In the New Testament, Christians are never said to die. They fall asleep. And that's because Christ died for them.

I heard a description from a minister many years ago which has never left me, that Christians sleep in the grave and get unbathed in the love of Christ until the resurrection.

And the believer's death is also very often referred to as a rest after their labors in this world because it's just a temporary state.

[10 : 22] Just as our normal sleep is followed by waking up, so death will be followed by the resurrection. And Paul makes it immediately clear that the Christian's hope focuses on the second coming of the Lord.

And this will be a complete and final revelation of God. A personal and powerful visitation by Jesus the King.

When Jesus went to raise his friend Lazarus from the dead, in that account that we're told of in John chapter 11 where he refers to himself as being the resurrection and the life, he said, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.

That was the language that Jesus used as he went to raise Lazarus from the dead. But the Christian's hope is much more than the expectation that Jesus will return.

It's also the belief that the Christians who have died will rise and go with him. And those who are alive at the time of Jesus' second coming, that they will join them.

[11 : 50] And it's with this confirmation here that Paul addresses the heart of the problem of these believers in Thessalonica. And Paul solemnly he assures them that their fears are totally groundless.

If you look at verses 14 and 15 in chapter 4, there are three clear points that Paul has brought out here.

First of all, the fact that Jesus died to secure our salvation. salvation and that he rose again is at the very heart of Scripture. And that's what the apostles preached.

That's what the church of God believes. And that's the reality of Jesus triumphing over death. And secondly here, Paul tells us that God won't abandon his own people to death. death. But on the contrary, he will raise them. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, when Jesus comes again, his people will rise to be with him.

[13 : 04] And what this does for us is it suggests a picture of Christ coming down from heaven and bringing with him the souls of all of those who have already died, all those believers who have already died.

Because Paul's point here is that all Christians who have died or who have fallen asleep, that they will be with Christ in the second coming as Christ descends to earth where body and soul will be reunited.

And thirdly, here in these two verses, Paul confirms that neither the Christian dead nor the Christian living will be left behind or excluded or disadvantaged in any way.

This is the ultimate reunion. All of God's people have been gathered to be with him, to be with our Lord forever.

And Christ is faithful to all of his promises. And if we read in Romans and chapter 8, just the last few verses there, from verse 35 to the end, Paul says as he speaks to the Roman church, who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

[14 : 31] Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, for your sake we have been killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. Knowing all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Christ is faithful to all of his promises, and Paul there has put a very real emphasis on the bond that has been between Christ and his people, and that is an unbreakable bond.

Even death itself cannot destroy it. And in Philippians 3, Paul further wrote there that for him, life meant Christ, and death was gain.

And he could hardly have regarded death as being gain, and have been even better by far, unless he believed it would bring him into a closer, richer, and fuller experience of Christ than he was already enjoying there on earth.

[16 : 10] And what is described here in the passage is just like a program of events where we have the return of Christ, Christ, and we have the resurrection of his people, and then we have that great reunion, that final reunion between Christ and all of his people.

In verse 17 here, Paul says, we who are alive, he says, then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them, and so on.

We shouldn't think that this implies that Paul was convinced that he himself would be alive at the second coming, but rather that all Christians should be prepared for Christ's return during their lifetime.

I think that's the real emphasis that Paul has there. And of all of this, seems to be far too wild an idea or a thought that any of this could happen.

All we need to remember is that the one who is going to do all this, that he is the creator of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.

[17 : 33] And the one who created everyone and everything in the first place. And he is the one who will bring all of these things to pass at the end of time.

I think we could gain perhaps a bit more understanding of these words just by taking a reading of 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul deals there with the resurrection of Christ, and then the resurrection of the dead, and then thirdly of the resurrection body.

And it does help to give us an understanding of these things that we are considering here. The third point I would like to look at is this manner of Christ's second coming.

We have given names to special days, special events in our own personal lives, and also some specific days in this world.

And we celebrate these days. We recognize days like our birthdays, or graduation days, or perhaps the day that we pass our driving test, the day of our marriage, and also anniversary days, and so on.

[18 : 59] And we also recognize days in this world, like Christmas Day, and New Year's Day, Easter Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, May Day, and so on.

All kinds of different names in which we recognize and celebrate. But this last day, the day of the Lord, has quite a few names as well. It's referred to at times as the Day of Judgment, or the Day of Reckoning, the Second Coming of Christ, the Day of Salvation, the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord, and so on.

This end of the world, as we will know it, and even in our lifetime, there have been many, many people and groups predicting when this might happen.

We're told though, in Scripture, that it's going to come like a thief in the night. Throughout the New Testament, the use of the phrase, like a thief in the night, it suggests to us unexpectedness, and perhaps even at times, unwelcomeness.

And this is going to happen, the Lord is going to come in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and there will be no prior warning.

[20 : 43] And Jesus emphasizes that in Matthew chapter 24, and Luke chapter 12, with his own words. and there's going to be no announcements on TV or radio or in the papers.

There's going to be no intimation from the pulpits. There's going to be nothing on Facebook or Twitter or Snapchat.

We're not going to get a month or a year's warning that the end is nearing. And it's not going to be localized either. And what I mean by that is the way that a new year comes into this world because of the time zones.

For example, when we're at 12 midday on 31st December, then that is new year, and this begins celebrating because of the time zone in New Zealand and Australia.

And following that is celebrated in other continents through different time zones in Asia, in Africa, in Europe, and so on, everything building up until it reaches ourselves at 12 midnight and a new year comes in and then it's our turn.

[22 : 05] coming of the second coming of the Lord is not going to be like that. It's just going to happen. And His glory and the presence of the Lord will fill the whole earth all at once.

as we read there when people are saying there is peace and security in sudden destruction will come as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman and they will not escape because this cannot be stopped once it begins.

This day of the Lord is going to come. It will be sudden and unexpected and it will be sudden and unavoidable. Just as we're told as the Lord tells us as a flash of lightning appears from nowhere and seems to cover the whole sky as far as we can see and it covers in an instant and so it will be on that great day.

And we're told that He will come in the clouds and it's unlikely that this means the earthly rain clouds that we see but rather it symbolizes the clouds of glory that surround the presence of God and we have many accounts of that throughout the scripture.

In the Old Testament the Exodus the children of Israel were led by a pillar of cloud by day which signified God leading them and his presence with them and a pillar of fire by night.

[23 : 52] Once again on Mount Sinai as Moses was given the commandments and other instructions for the people God's presence was in the cloud. It's a familiar symbol of God's presence.

We have it in the New Testament at the Mount of Transfiguration the presence of God in the cloud as he said the words of Jesus this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

And Jesus left the earth and went up in the clouds and he will return that way. The Lord himself will descend and this will be personal it will be visible and it will be glorious a universal coming of the Lord Jesus in glory and power and majesty and his presence everywhere filling the whole of creation all at once.

Just as after creation God in Christ spoke and everything came into being so also when Christ commands on this last day the world as we know it will cease to exist.

And just as at Lazarus's tomb Jesus called out in a loud voice Lazarus come out then on this last day there will be these three noises which we read of one word of command one shout of an archangel and one blast of the trumpet of God and the Lord himself will come down from heaven he is in control and he will summon the dead to wake from their slumber not one body will be left in the grave the one body that has been cremated and the ashes scattered will be left like that but all reformed by the Lord and all who have been lost at sea they will be taken up as well the body and soul will be reunited in a different state but nevertheless body and soul will be reunited and on that day that is the day that every knee will bow and every mouth will confess that Christ is indeed [26 : 46] Lord and it won't matter on that day what you've accumulated here on earth for yourself you can't take any of it with you you know that anyway the only thing that will be of value on that day is to have Christ as your personal saviour and it's only while you're alive and in this world that you can come to faith in Christ as you have heard many times I'm sure it's only while you're here on mercy's ground God has opened up a way of salvation for everyone through Christ's death on the cross and he has given every one of us the choice as to what we do with our offer of salvation we're told in John chapter 3 and 16 just to reiterate that that God so loves this world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life you know

I mentioned just earlier on how the Christian's death is referred to as sleep and I heard a story at a funeral I attended just a few weeks ago and it hasn't left me and what the minister said was that there was this elderly Christian man on his deathbed just about to pass away and his two sons were with him let's just call them one called David or David and one called Malcolm and let's one of the sons let's say David was a Christian believing son who had the Lord as a saviour but Malcolm the other son he had no time for the things of the Lord and he just lived out life as he wanted and doing whatever he wanted with no word of the things of the Lord and no sign of salvation within him and just as just as the elderly

Christian gentleman was about to pass away he turned to his son David and he said good night David and then he turned to his other son Malcolm and he said goodbye Malcolm and that son Malcolm looked at him and he asked why have you said good night to David and goodbye to me and the father answered well son he says your brother there he's a believer in Christ he's got Christ as a savior and he will rise with me in that same to that same place forever to be with our Lord so we will be together again but the way you're living your life just now unless you change it and unless you turn to the Lord and seek after God and find him then you will rise in that day to a very different place and I will never see you again it's a short story but it's very solemn the clear picture we're given in scripture of a soul without

Christ on the last day is for them pleading and calling out for the mountains to fall on him as they begin to realize that they are to endure the wrath of the Lamb of God throughout eternity surely even that itself ought to make you think of your own situation personally this evening even to ask the question what must I do to be saved well the answer is in scripture seek the Lord while you may be found call out to him while he is near as the Lord says to each one of us come to me all of you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest when Paul finished explaining what will happen on the day the Lord comes back he said to the

Christians in Thessalonica when he was referring to the glory of the believers he said comfort and encourage each other with these words he was giving them reassurance because they were insecure in their faith because of their lack of understanding in these things but he asked them to comfort and encourage one another with these words what a blessed day that will be for all of God's people that day when the Lord returns whether it's those who have died or whether it's those who are still alive for all of them there will be no fear involved for any believer but just the joy and the wonder and the awe and the glory of going to be with the Lord but we all need to be ready as Jesus tells us

[32 : 27] Jesus speaks these words in Matthew chapter 24 he says therefore you must also be ready for the son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect we need to be careful and we need to be diligent we need to be vigilant and we need to be in a state of expectancy for this day of the Lord we can't put off this meeting and that is a reality and that is a fact but the big question for each one of us here this evening is if Jesus comes back tonight will he find you ready let us pray we thank you Father for your word we thank you for the comfort of your word for all of your people we

thank you for the offer of salvation that you hold out your hand to all who are as yet strangers to you
bless your word to us this evening

Lord bless us together as we meditate upon these thoughts may the glory be yours in Christ Amen
well let's conclude and we'll sing in the Scottish Psalter version of Psalm 72 just the last four verses
from the middle of verse 16 so page 314 page 314 of the blue sand bricks Psalm 72 in the middle of
verse 16 the city shall be flourishing her citizens abound and number shall light to the grass that
grows upon the ground his name forever shall endure last like the sun it shall men shall be blessed
in him and blessed all nations shall him call from the middle of verse 16 to the end of the psalm to
God's please the city shall be flourishing our citizens abide in number shall men shall endure last
like the sun in shall men shall endure last like the sun men shall men shall be blessed in him and
blessed all nations shall him call now blessed be the

Lord our God the God of Israel for he alone that wondrous works in glory hath excelled and blessed
be his glorious name to all eternity the whole earth let his glory fill amen so let take peace now may
the grace of the Lord

Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest upon and abide
with each one of you now and always amen