

“Being With Jesus!”—1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Being With Jesus!”, is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 → *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. Therefore encourage one another with these words.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

You wake up to face a new day just as you do every morning. After going through your morning “routine” you hit the day with its many tasks and responsibilities in your usual way. However, this day hits you with a surprise, the likes of which are unbelievable!

While in the mall you hug one of your family members and within a split second you are hugging his clothing, his body completely removed. Dazed and confused you wonder where he went as you search through his limp articles of clothing. Frightened, wondering who is responsible for this strange occurrence, you look around to see others confused as they too see piles of

clothing laying around. “What’s going on?” you asked with tears starting to well up in your eyes. Your day has just taken a horribly new direction as you and others try to figure out what’s happening in all the mayhem and destruction accompanying so many missing people.

This is similar to the drama of a movie entitled “Left Behind.” It is intended to depict what has been referred to as “the rapture” where Christians are taken up from the earth to be with Jesus while unbelievers are left behind trying to figure it all out. Supposedly it is based upon the description of Christ’s coming given to us in our text today. Indeed, Christians will be with Jesus when He comes back again on the Last Day!

The Christian has the desire to be with Jesus eternally in heaven and is described in Philippians 3:20-21 as eagerly awaiting *a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body*. In the Nicene Creed we confess that we “**look for** the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come!” Along with the Christians of the first century, we Christians in our day expect Jesus’ return at any moment and long to be with Him eternally!

In light of such expectations of Jesus’ return, the death of Christians before Christ’s return produced questions concerning their participation in the bodily resurrection on the Last Day. Thus, Paul gives a description in our text of

Christ's return and the bodily resurrection of believers to be with Jesus together eternally so that they could *encourage one another with these words*. The encouragement and comfort is needed in light of both their grief over the death of their loved ones and their questions about their being with Jesus eternally!

Verse 16 of our text reveals a much different picture than the "Left Behind" movie. It says that Jesus *will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God*. Throughout Scripture the coming of Jesus was "announced" in various ways. In the Old Testament the coming of the Messiah was announced through Yahweh's prophets. When the time came to send His Messiah God announced His coming through an angel to Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds. His coming was announced to the wise men by means of a star connected with Old Testament prophecy. Later His coming into His public earthly ministry was announced by John the Baptizer, followed by Jesus' miracles, His Father's voice reaffirming Jesus as the Son Whom He loved, and so forth.

His 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming will also be announced *with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God*. Why? **So that everyone will know that it is Jesus coming on the Last Day to take those who trust in His atoning work for the forgiveness of their sins to be with Him eternally!** What's

happening will be public knowledge based upon the promise given in Revelation 1:7 → *Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and **every eye will see Him**, even those who pierced Him, and **all tribes of the earth** will wail on account of Him.* There will not be people scrambling to put clues together to figure out what's happening. It will be so clear what's happening that at the declaration of *name of Jesus every knee will bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.* (cf. Philippians 2:10-11) Unfortunately, those who failed to be with Jesus by faith in this life will confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ on the Last Day to a life of separation from Him eternally in hell.

Being with Jesus is not just something which is some hope based upon wishful thinking. Neither is being with Jesus necessarily the same as “being in a better place” after death. Death is not some kind of “friend” which is the portal to some utopian existence of bliss. Death is a result of sin and thus brings feelings grief and the reality of our sinfulness to the forefront of life on this earth. The only remedy for comfort in the midst of such grief and hope in the midst of such sin is being with Jesus on the basis of His being with you!

God wants all people to be with Him in a perfect relationship forever as He originally created it in the beginning. Because of your sin God's Law cannot restore this relationship because you cannot keep it perfectly. Romans 8:3-4 says: *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.*

*By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* God came to be with us in the Person & Work of Jesus so that by faith in Him we can be with Him forever!

Notice how Christians are described: as those *who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*. Walking *according to the flesh* happens when you live in disobedience to God's Will and Word; when you define being with Jesus in your own self-serving way; when you treat lightly or even contemptuously the manner in which Jesus provides for you to be with Him through Word and sacrament! It is far too easy for the sinner to bask in the salvation of Jesus until the sinner wants it his way! Then re-interpreting or completely ignoring God's Word becomes very convenient in light of the situation at hand and he ends up walking *according to the flesh*.

Walking *according to the Spirit* means that the path you walk in this life is determined by the Holy Spirit's work and guidance according to the written Word of God. He works through the means of grace to bring you to Jesus, gives you faith in Jesus and empowers you to be with Jesus regularly through those same means of grace! His Word will guide all areas of your life, even when you fall into sin, by bringing you to Jesus in His means of grace again

to experience His forgiveness anew! Walking *according to the Spirit* means that **Christ is your life** and *when Christ Who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.* (cf. Colossians 3:4)

Being with Jesus NOW is essential for being with Jesus ETERNALLY when He comes back on the Last Day. Verse 17 of our text reflects the eternal nature of our relationships in eternity in connection with our relationship with Christ in time. It says that when Christ comes back again we *will be caught up together with* those Christians who have preceded us in death *in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.* Is this the truth to which people refer when they talk about meeting in heaven? It is if it **based upon being with Jesus, not just being related to each other in some earthly manner.** Never again will we be parted from one another by death because *we will always **be with the Lord.***

Notice the primary focus of our reunion is based upon the Lord Jesus Christ. It's because we are connected by the blood of Christ and not just because we are connected as blood relatives somehow that we will be together in paradise!

Come to be with Jesus as He comes to be with you through His Holy Spirit in the written Word of God daily. Come to be with Jesus as He comes to be with you with His complete forgiveness of your sins as you receive His body

and blood in the Lord's Supper regularly. Come to be with Jesus as He comes to be with you in the assembly of His body in this place for worship regularly. Come to be with Him now as His Spirit prepares you to be with Him when He comes again on the Last Day! Amen.

Jesus says in John 14:2-3 that there is room in heaven for everyone:

*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?*

*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.*

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.