

Years ago, Henry Ward Beecher was invited to visit an atheist club presided over by the brilliant and blasphemous Robert Ingersoll. He went and listened to Ingersoll as he made a witty speech in which he unmercifully attacked Christianity and then sat down to thunderous applause. Ingersoll then turned to Beecher and invited the famous preacher to say a few words.

Beecher rose slowly to his feet. *“Gentlemen,” he said, “you will forgive me if I appear somewhat preoccupied. But this evening I witnessed something shocking. Let me tell you about it. I saw a blind man groping at the curbside. I saw a young fellow offer to help him across the street. But, just as he took the blind man’s arm, a great hulk of a fellow came along. He boxed the young man’s ears and chased him off down the road. Then he came back and seized the blind man’s stick and beat him with it. Then he pushed him headlong in the mud and went on his way laughing.”*

A silence followed the telling of this tale. Then Ingersoll jumped to his feet. *“The bully!” he exclaimed. “The bully! Do you know who he was, Beecher? The unspeakable bully!”*

*“Yes,” said Beecher quietly, “as a matter of fact, I do know who he was.”*  
*“Who was it?” demanded Ingersoll “It was you!” responded Beecher. “You are the man! Listen to me. Man is poor and blind and wretched. He has little enough to lean on as he gropes his way through life. Few will help him. So what do you do, Ingersoll? You come along and pull all of his props from under him. You rob him of his faith. You push him in the mud. You bully those who would help him. And then you go laughing on your way. Oh yes! I know who the man is. It is you...”*

Today there are bullies who attempt to rob Christians and knock the props out from under them. Only these bullies are not atheists. They come from inside the ranks of professing believers... and they seek to rob us of some of the most encouraging... and faith-building passages of Scripture... that we need to be leaning on – especially in these last days.

*“Don’t even bother with studying passages like the one we come to today. Discussing the things that our passages lays forth... has produced so many arguments! Just let God work it all out in His perfect way. We don’t need to know...”* ... When I was in college I had a pastor say to me as we walked out of a restaurant together: *“Eschatology (end times matters) has so much that we just don’t know. Why spend time and effort on **that** - when there is so much in the Scripture that we **do** know... and are accountable for? You need to focus on being obedient to what we **DO** know”* – he said.

He was just one of many believers (today)... who don’t want to study it at all. *“It will all pan-out. ... Don’t let it concern you. ... Just let it be.”* But this is robbing believers of something very valuable to our faith.

You see... when Paul came to Thessalonica and started the church there... Acts 17:2 tells us that he did it in less than a month. He only had three sabbath days in which he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures. In less than a month – Paul had done a herculean task! ... He preached the Gospel... converts were made... and a church was born. Then he taught these brand-new believers the great truths of the Christian faith. ... (BUT HERE IS SOMETHING TO CONSIDER)... out of all the important things to teach a freshly born church... Paul taught them about the end times!

Maybe you have heard (just as I have)... that the deep truths of the end-times is only for “*mature believers*”... It shouldn't be given to new believers... .. (You know)... isn't it too bad that Paul was not given this wisdom? ... He hadn't been with the Thessalonian believers for a full month... and yet he was teaching them end-time prophecy! ... In fact... when we get to the second letter to the Thessalonians... we will see that he had taught them about the Great Tribulation... the Anti-Christ... and other things which are to come.

You know what? Paul demonstrates for me... that there is value in knowing these things. My hope is that today's passage will inspire you to share the perspective of Adrian Rogers who said: “***I believe we ought to be living as though Jesus died yesterday, rose this morning, and is coming back tonight.***” ... .. Let this passage today excite your faith.

**Sorrow looks back, worry looks around, but faith looks up!**

(Now)... before we turn to the passage... let me give you its context.

Paul told these people at Thessalonica... when he was with them: “*Jesus is coming... and we're going to see Him... and we're going to reign with Him in His kingdom!*” ... And they were all expecting the Lord to come at any moment.

But in the interval... some of those saints at the church of Thessalonica died. ... And the believers in Thessalonica had lost hope for their departed loved ones: “*What will happen to them? They won't have a part in the spectacular return of Jesus. They will miss out in participating in His majestic Kingdom rule. They won't reign with Christ because they died... were buried... and now they have decayed and deteriorated...*”

So Paul wrote the passage we are studying today... to put their hearts at ease... and to tell them that those who have died have **not** missed the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. There will be a heavenly homecoming... and a re-union with all our saved loved-ones in the air. ... We will **all** be snatched-up to meet our Lord in the sky.

**Sorrow looks back, worry looks around, but faith looks up!**

**1 Thes. 4:13**

*"Do not be ignorant about these things"*... Paul writes. The Greek term "uninformed," (*agnoeō*) literally means "ignorant." ... Do not be ignorant about end time prophecy. ... Study and grasp what God teaches. Be comforted. ... Be encouraged in this glorious hope that God gives to us.

Now... perhaps some of you would be a little more encouraged... if Paul had used the word "dead" instead of "sleep" (*uninformed about those who are dead...*) ... I must be honest... I used to wish that Paul was more clear about what he was writing about... thinking that the word "dead" would have been more clear. ... But there are two things that I have come to realize. ... (And) now it makes much better sense to me... because I see that "asleep" is actually clearer.

**#1.** In most cultures... the idea of sleep is a euphemism for death. It certainly was to the Macedonian culture when Paul wrote this. So the Thessalonians would not have been confused at all.

**#2.** The dead body of a Christian – and the body of a person who is sleeping are very similar. A person who sleeps does not cease to exist... and neither does a believer who dies. Sleep is temporary – and death for

the believer is temporary. Sleep has an awakening – and death for the believer has an awakening... at the resurrection.

### **2 Corinthians 5:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> *Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

Paul's use of the word "asleep" in 1 Thessalonians 4:13... re-enforces the point that he is making. Their loved ones who have died will awake at the rapture! ... As a matter of fact... they will awaken – even **before** those who *are still alive* - are snatched-up. They will part of the glory of Christ's return.

This means that Christians do not mourn when their fellow believers die – like non-Christians mourn at funerals. ... Christians weep... of course! ... There is nothing wrong with that. Paul never says that Christians are not to weep. What he does write is that we are not to sorrow as others who have no hope.

I simply must show you what Chuck Swindoll writes about this...

How tragic is a hopeless grief! How desperate the sobs of those who kneel before the grave with no prospects of ever seeing their loved one again! Without a God-given revelation, humans are left with only unanswered questions: Where are they now? Is there life after death? Is my father in torment? Will I ever see my mother again?

Paul says believers in Christ don't have to grieve like that. Yes, they grieve at the loss of a loved one. Paul doesn't condemn appropriate mourning. Only unfeeling psychopaths would face the death of a child or parent or sibling with the proud logic of Mr. Spock. There's nothing Christian about an emotionless vacuum. The death of a fellow believer is indeed a sad occasion. Believers aren't called to a chiseled stoicism. We're called to "walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4, emphasis added). But in that walk we

can have the God of hope at our side, reminding us that death is not the end, but that an eternal dawn will come after the darkness of night.

The basis of this hope isn't just a line of a creed that says, "I believe in the resurrection of the dead." And it isn't merely a handful of hymns singing about "some glad morning" in the "sweet by-and-by." Nor is it a few moving graveside sermons crafted to soften death's blow with platitudes of "she's in a better place" or "his striving is over." The solid foundation for our hope is a fact of history: "Jesus died and rose again" (1 Thes. 4:14).

### **1 Thes 4:14**

Believers can have hope in the resurrection... because of what happened to Jesus. Jesus died and was raised to life again. Believers can now trust that those who have died will also be resurrected. AND THEN when Jesus comes... they will come with Jesus.

### **1 Thes 4:15**

Please notice that he **first** assures his readers that the details he's about to share with them didn't spring from his imagination. They aren't "educated guesses"... or clever interpretations of obscure passages. ... No! they come from "*the word of the Lord.*"

But I believe he is primarily indicating that these details are a *new revelation*. ... "*These — details had not previously been told to you when I was with you...*" And what a great picture it is! God is about to break His silence.

You know... one of the great mysteries of the past two thousand years has been the total and lasting silence of God. The world has been wracked by terrible wars... and God has remained silent. ... Fearful injustices plague

society... and God is silent. ... Domestic tragedies occur... and God is silent. ... Famines wipe out whole populations. ... Pestilence... plagues... earthquakes... tornadoes... and volcanic eruptions occur... and God is silent. ... Persecutions... the holocaust... crimes... and atrocities are committed... and God is silent. ... Wicked men grow rich on the misery of others... trading in alcohol... drugs... and sex... and empires are built and sustained on syndicated crime... and God is silent. ... Regimes have flourished on the systematic enslavement and exploitation of millions... political parties show more corruption than ever... and God is silent. ... False religions hold other millions in soul-damning spiritual darkness... and God is silent.

The great cry of humanity is, “Why? Why is God silent? Why does He not act? Why doesn’t He speak?”

The answer is simple. - He has! ... He has spoken. He has displayed might and miracle on an unprecedented scale on this planet. He has intervened. He did so two thousand years ago. What the world is witnessing... in this mysterious silence... is the infinite patience of God.

And here is Paul new revelation: When God breaks this silence... it will be with a shout! ... He has spoken once in grace by sending His Son to this planet. ... And they murdered Him. He sent His Spirit... and the world ignores Him. ... The next time... He will speak with an **authoritative** shout. The whole creation today is holding its breath... waiting for that shout.

What a mighty shout that will be! ... His is the voice that wakes the dead. We hear **this shout** three times in Scripture — and each time... the gates of death are opened.

The first time was at the tomb of Lazarus:

**John 11:43-44 (ESV)**

<sup>43</sup> When he had said these things, he cried out **with a loud voice**, “Lazarus, come out.” <sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

The second time the shout was heard was from the cross. Matthew tells what happened:

**Matthew 27:50-53 (ESV)**

<sup>50</sup> And Jesus cried out again **with a loud voice** and yielded up his spirit. <sup>51</sup> And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. <sup>52</sup> The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, <sup>53</sup> and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

The first time one man was raised; the second time many were raised.

But Paul gives the Thessalonians a new revelation that there will be a third time that the shout will occur. ... And it will be the most spectacular of all three. ... He writes that this shout will result in a wholesale exodus from a **LOT** of graves! ... This mighty shout will ring out across every continent of earth... and the seven seas. ... Its vibrant echoes will comb the mountain peaks... the arctic poles... the desert wastes... the ocean caves... the valleys and the prairies... the crowded urban graveyards... and the world's great battlefields. ... **All** the dead in Christ will rise!

They will **all** come forth! Martyrs of the faith will rise. Missionary pioneers will rise. Apostles and prophets... evangelists... pastors and teachers... the least productive member of the church will rise... countless numbers... ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands. ... For the first



time in history... the **whole** church — universal and triumphant — will be assembled. Every member will be present.

This new revelation from Paul also describes this shout in two other ways. He gives three different descriptions of the same sound. The three sounds that 1 Thes 4:16 lists (the commanding shout... the voice of an arch angel... and the sound of a trumpet) are all three the same utterance. We know this because the very **precise** original language of the New Testament (Greek) employs a grammatical rule called “*apposition.*”

(Now bear with me for just a moment. I promise I am not going to take you deep into the weeds and keep you there...) ... .. Whenever a writer of First-Century Greek wanted us to know that he considers a listing... *to all refer to the very same thing...* he would use the equivalent of our English word (“and”) only once – and it had to come between the last item... and the next-to-the-last item in the list. - “*the shout of command, the voice of an archangel, **AND** the sound of a trumpet.*”

(You see) proper Greek grammar places “and” between every item in a listing when they are all **different** items. So if Paul wanted us to see these as three **different** sounds... he would have written it as “the shout of command **AND** the voice of an archangel **AND** the sound of a trumpet.” ... But he didn’t. He used “and” only once at the end – so that we would **know** these are descriptions of the **same** sound. ... (In English we don’t have such a rule of grammar – but the precise language of Greek – **does!**)

So when Jesus calls forth the dead... it will be like a military command... a shout of great authority! ...An **irresistible** command! Every long-decayed

particle... from every saint (even if it has been dead for thousands of years)... will respond to it immediately.

But this shout will also have the quality of the voice of an archangel. ...

What is this description about?

The voice of the archangel means ruin for the world. That voice sends the angels forth to war. The amnesty is over... His patience has come to an end... God has broken off diplomatic relations with the world that murdered His Son.

For long centuries now... the warrior angels have been straining over the walls of heaven (so to speak)... eager to avenge the terrible wrongs that the wicked children of Adam's race inflicted on their Beloved... down here on planet Earth. ...But the angels have been held back by sovereign grace.

Now... finally... the angels come to the forefront.

Throughout the 7 year Tribulation... angels are prominent. They sound the trumpets... pour out the vials... and issue warnings and proclamations.

This sudden outbreak of angelic activity... will also be heralded by the shout of command. The removal of the church has cleared the way - now the angels can go to war.

And then THIRD... to further punctuate that the silence of God has ended... this utterance will also have the quality of being like the sound of a trumpet. ... Now... this is not the only place where Jesus' voice sounds like a trumpet. In Revelation 1:10 Jesus' voice is like a trumpet (telling John to write down all that he is about to see.) John did and it is the Book of Revelation. The voice of Jesus sounding like a trumpet is associated

with the events in the Book of Revelation. God will end His seemingly long-silence when He raises all the saints!

### **1 Thes 4:17**

An important distinction needs to be made between what is described here (the Rapture) and the second part of Christ's return. Jesus is coming back... and I believe it is going to be in two parts. First is what verse 17 presents. Jesus will **not** come to the "*terra firma*" of the earth. His feet wont touch ground. He comes and meets the saints *in the air* it says. ... Somewhere in the atmosphere between earth and space... we will experience a great meeting (a re-union) with our loved ones - and our Lord.

And verse 17 (also) declares that we will be with Him *forever*. ... ..

Sometime after our Rapture... Jesus is coming back... only this time His feet **do** touch ground... on Mt Olivet near Jerusalem. ...And because verse 17 says that we will be with Him forever... we must be coming back *with Him*.

(Now) our passage today deals with the Rapture – not Jesus' return when He reigns on Earth. ... So let's talk a little more about this Rapture. Paul wants us to be encouraged by knowing about it. Therefore let me take you to another passage of Scripture where Paul wrote about it. Let's do some more thinking about this resurrection body. ... What are we going to be like...?

### **1 Corinthians 15:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> *But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"*

Now that is a very good question. I'm glad some have asked it... prompting Paul to give us an answer. ... Paul answers it by giving an illustration. He says that it is going to be like a seed that falls into the ground and dies.

**1 Corinthians 15:36-38 (ESV)**

*<sup>36</sup> You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.*

God gave to us an illustration from His creation. ... Every time you plant a seed in the ground... and that seed rots... it dies... it decays. ... And yet... somehow... there is a sense of continuity. ... There is a germ of life that remains and can come back fully as itself in a different form. Even though that seed goes into the ground... it dies... it decays... and it rots — there's a principle there that causes it to spring forth into something even more glorious.

Please consider how an acorn and an oak are actually the same life. Isn't it quite a marvel that a mighty oak tree can come out of a little acorn? Have you ever looked at a giant oak tree and realized ... how it became such a glorious oak tree...? What an improvement!

Two years ago we had millions and millions of ugly... repulsive worms all over our roads and driveways... which were stained from smashed carcasses and their body juices. But the majority of them were able to go into the ground where they spent two lifeless years in the grave of a cocoon. This year millions have emerged as Pandora moths. From ugly crawling creatures to winged insects... the same, and yet, not the same.

Look at a lump of coal; and then, look at the diamond that you gave your wife when you wanted to marry her. They're both the same. Both are carbon, but one is carbon in humiliation; the other is carbon in glory.

Oh, what a change there's going to be in you and I! Back to 1 Corinthians 15...

**1 Corinthians 15:43-44 (ESV)**

*<sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup> It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

The God Who created the universe out of nothing (with a word) is fully able to reassemble the decayed bodies of all His saints in a moment of time... and make them even MORE glorious! It won't matter if the person died in the ocean and was swallowed by sharks... or if he was eaten by carnivorous animals in the desert... nor if he was buried in a forest and the roots of a tree absorbed the body... sending its particles to the bark and leaves. Creator God can re-create and it will be even better!

Now lets go back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. We've been talking about resurrection. Our Lord said (first of all) to be reassured. Your dead loved ones are **not** going to miss it. We will **all** be raptured.

Now... the word *rapture* is **not** here in the text... but that doesn't mean there's not going to be a rapture... because the Bible **describes** the rapture. Its true - the word *rapture* is not found ANYWHERE in the Bible. However "catching away" **is** found and it is used here. ... It is just like the word "Trinity." It is not found in the Bible... but it certainly is taught and

described. And... the word “*millennium*” is not found in the Bible... but Scripture speaks of a thousand years (which means exactly that.) ... We will be snatched up. And that word (snatched-up) carries some powerful meaning. Jesus’ coming is absolutely decisive. It will be sudden... and as 1 Cor. 15:52 says... in the twinkling of an eye. There will be no opportunity for those who have been sitting on the fence without asking Jesus to save them. It will be too late for their long-delayed conversion.

### **1 Thes. 4:18**

What a glorious family reunion that will be! Husbands and wives... parents and children... friends and relatives... even all of our heroes of the faith! Such a revelation of end-times events must have come as awe-inspiring news to the Thessalonians... who were confused about how to fit the pieces together.

Several times this week... as I studied the passage... my eyes welled-up with tears of Joy. I have such anticipation of being re-united with my mom... my aunt Mary... and my grandma – all of who shared the Gospel with me... and spent many long hours praying for me. ... And I can’t wait to see my father-in-law who lived most of his life as an atheist. In his final hours of life... he trusted Christ for His salvation. We prayed so long for that... and he is a beautiful testimony of God’s grace.

One day there will be a moment like no other. With a thundering shout and the blast of a trumpet... Christ will split the sky... blast open the graves... and claim His own. ... Then we who are alive... plodding through this dark world of sin... suffering... and death... will finally see our Savior face-to-

face. ... We'll meet those loved ones who have gone on before us... now transformed into glorious bodies... as we are all taken to heaven to be with our great God and Savior - Jesus Christ! ... Are you ready?

***“I believe we ought to be living as though Jesus died yesterday, rose this morning, and is coming back tonight.” ... [ P A U S E ] ...***

I close with the words of Warren Wiersbe. He wrote...

I once saw a quaint inscription on a gravestone in an old British cemetery not far from Windsor Castle. It read:

*Pause, my friend, as you walk by;  
As you are now, so once was I.  
As I am now, so you will be.  
Prepare, my friend, to follow me!*

I heard about a visitor who read that epitaph and added these lines:

*To follow you is not my intent,  
Until I know which way you went!*

We Christians have wonderful assurance and hope, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and His promised return.

Do you have that hope today?  
Which way are *you* going?

**Sorrow looks back, worry looks around, but faith looks up!**