

1Thessalonians 4:15-18 The Last Day. A Very Busy Day.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 - 18 ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain 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. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

As we saw last time Paul is winding down his message to the church as he reminds them that God is faithful to His promises to return to rescue and resurrect His people as He ushers them into His eternal Kingdom.

And as he comforts them he reminds them that those who died in Christ before them will be at no disadvantage when our Lord returns.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

What Paul is addressing is Christ returning to gather His people from the four corners of earth.

Matthew 24:30-31 ³⁰ "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. ³¹ "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Again, the context of Matthew 24 has to do with the end of the age when Jesus Christ returns in judgment. As we saw last time this is known as the Day of the Lord, the Great Day of judgment.

But when Jesus says, "He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other," He is speaking of the same event in 1Thessalonians 4:15-18.

In other words, when Jesus gathers His people at the end of the age it will be the final chapter in redemptive history as He gathers the elect, both those who died in Christ and those who are alive at His coming.

And notice when it happens according to Matthew 24:31, "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET....."

Both Jesus and Paul are saying that when Christ returns to gather His elect from the four corners of the earth it will be accompanied by a Great Trumpet.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

The first part of verse 16 is a direct fulfillment of what the angel promised the disciples when Jesus ascended from the earth back to the right hand of the Father.

Acts 1:11 ¹¹ They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

The promise is that just as Christ ascended back to heaven He will descend from heaven in the same way, bodily.

And this is precisely what Paul says," For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven."

But notice that in this descent we have some descriptions of this event. First Jesus is said to descend from heaven with a shout, and along with that, the voice of the archangel.

Is this shout the shout of Christ or the shout of the archangel? It could very well be both. It is Christ who will initiate this second coming as the Father sends Him to gather His elect. The shout that is recorded in our text is not simply the kind of shout that one might have at a football game to simply make noise.

The shout in our text implies a reason attached to it, namely a command to accomplish something. And so, the shout could be inferred as something along the lines of, 'go get My people.' Or the shout of Christ could very well be what is recorded for us in Revelation.

Revelation 16:17 ¹⁷ Then the seventh *angel* poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done."

And the angel voices his response in the affirmative. But we are told later in Revelation that the very end of the age will be accompanied by our Lord's return in judgment and more shouts of praise, which then ushers in the event we know as the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Revelation 19:1-7 ^{NAU} After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; ² BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER." ³ And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER." ⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" ⁵ And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great." ⁶ Then I heard *something* like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. ⁷ "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for *the marriage of the Lamb has come* and His bride has made herself ready."

"The marriage supper of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

This is a picture of Christ gathering His sheep and bringing them to Himself at that great time in redemptive history where the union of the bride and the bridegroom is consummated and thus we shall be with the Lord forever more.

But what must take place for this marriage to happen? We must first be resurrected on that last day. And this is precisely what Paul is speaking of in our text.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, *and the dead in Christ will rise first.*

Who are the dead in Christ? The very people Paul addressed in the previous verses.

1 Thessalonians 4:14-15 ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

Those who have fallen asleep are those who died in Christ and await the resurrection when the Lord descends with a shout, with the voice of the archangel.

And when will this happen? Jesus makes it clear.

John 6:38-40,44,54 ³⁸ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but *raise it up on the last day.* ⁴⁰ "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will *raise him up on the last day.*" ⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and *I will raise him up on the last day.* **54** "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and *I will raise him up on the last day.*

Any guesses as to when the resurrection of God's people takes place? How about *the last day*?

Even Martha, the sister of Lazarus, understood this about her brother's own resurrection.

^{NAU} **John 11:24** Martha said to Him, "*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.*"

The last day is the end of the age that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:31 ³¹ "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

This is unmistakably the same day that Paul refers to in our text.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

The dead in Christ rise first which is to say that the dead in Christ are resurrected from the dead. And when does this happen? On the last day, when Christ Himself raises them from the dead. But what happens immediately after that of those who are alive at His coming?

1 Thessalonians 4:17 ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,

So, now you've got those who died in Christ resurrected from the dead on the last day, and we who are alive are caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. This latter aspect is what is commonly called the rapture. And when does this happen? At the essentially the same time that the dead in Christ are raised, *on the last day*.

By the way, Paul speaks of this last day and what happens on this last day when writing to the Corinthian believers as he encourages them that when Christ returns there will be Christians who will not have died, but something will happen to them on that day that is very special, along with those who died in Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:51-55 ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. ⁵⁵ "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?"

When will this happen according to verse 52? At the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. Changed to what? Changed to that which is imperishable at the resurrection.

The last trumpet here in 1 Corinthians is the same trumpet spoken of in our text.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel *and with the trumpet of God*, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then

we who are alive and remain 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.

It's all the exact same event. To suggest that the resurrection and the rapture are different events at different times separated by years, simply ignores the obvious teaching of the word of God.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,

So, this “catching up” of we who are alive at the coming of Christ does not precede those who “fell asleep” in Christ and together both groups will meet the Lord in the air in the clouds. Does this mean that Jesus never touches down on the earth?

Well, what we do know is that when Christ returns He will return for a specific reason; actually a variety of reasons, which includes what we have already stated: the resurrection and rapture of God's people from every corner of the earth; again all of this happening on the last day.

But on this last day there is also God's final judgment of His enemies starting with Satan himself.

Revelation 20:7-10 ⁷ When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. ⁹ And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

But, along with Satan, who being judged once and for all time in the Lake of Fire, there also results the final judgment of men on the earth who are the enemies of God.

Revelation 20:11-15 ¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened;

and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Verse 11 is interesting in that it seems to imply that at the Great White Throne judgment, the earth is no longer the habitation of human beings as the passage tells us “from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.”

Not found for whom? Those in verse 12. The dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne. Where is this throne if the earth and the heavens have fled away? It is the throne of God in the present heaven. What this tells us is that these people, who are the enemies of God, have already received their resurrected bodies as well.

And it will be in their resurrected bodies that they will receive their judgment and punishment.

Daniel 12:2 ² "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, *but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.*

John 5:28-29 ²⁸ "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹ and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, *those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.*

This judgment, also called the Great White Throne judgment of Rev.20:11, will happen on the last day.

John 12:48 ⁴⁸ "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.

But when we look back at our text where God's people are raptured/resurrected on the last day, both groups meet the Lord in the clouds in the air. If, as we saw in Revelation 20:11 where the earth and heaven have fled away, (which is a reference to the entire

universe), it would seem to make sense that we would meet the Lord in the air.

So now, in addition to the enemies of God being resurrected and judged on this last day, God's people being raptured/resurrected on the last day, we also have the earth and heaven fleeing from God's presence.

Does this mean that the universe has been annihilated? Does this mean that there is no habitation for God's people other than the present heaven?

Well, the apostle Peter has already addressed this.

2 Peter 3:7 ⁷ But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

Notice again the time frame of the present heavens and earth being reserved for fire. It coincides with "the" Day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men, as we have already seen, according to Jesus' own words, which is the last day. (John 12:48)

So, on this last day we also have the present heavens and earth being reserved for fire. But to what end? Well, Peter continues his thought a couple of verses later.

2 Peter 3:10-12 ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

What Peter is describing here is what Revelation is stating as earth and heaven fleeing from God's sight. But Peter gives us a fuller picture of what Revelation is referring to. Peter is talking about the destruction of heaven and earth as it is burned with intense heat as all of this is taking place on what Peter describes as the Day of the Lord in verse 10 and the Day of God in verse 12.

It's the same day with the same affect; judgment and the finality of the curse as is seen in this burning with intense heat of the heavens and the earth. But again, we must ask the question here. Are we

talking about the annihilation of the heavens and the earth as they flee from God's presence?

The answer is no. The universe will be destroyed, but this destruction speaks more to the destruction of the curse in the universe than it does to its total annihilation. The means by which God does this is seen through fire.

Fire is seen as the judgment of God all throughout Scripture.

Genesis 19:24 ²⁴ Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven,

Numbers 26:9-10 ⁹ The sons of Eliab: Nemuel and Dathan and Abiram. These are the Dathan and Abiram who were called by the congregation, who contended against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the LORD, ¹⁰ and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up along with Korah, when that company died, when the fire devoured 250 men, so that they became a warning.

1 Kings 18:24 ²⁴ "Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, He is God." And all the people said, "That is a good idea."

But though fire may consume many things, fire does not annihilate anything. It simply transforms it into a different form.

And part of what God will accomplish on the last day when He destroys the earth and the heavens with fire is to transform it from a cursed creation into a new heavens and a new earth. And this is where Peter was going with his description of the destruction of the earth with fervent heat.

2 Peter 3:12-13 the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

The question then arises is this a new heavens and new earth that is a brand new creation as it takes the place of the present heaven and earth?

Again, the answer is no. Peter makes it clear that the present heavens and earth will not be replaced with an entirely new creation but will be transformed by the fiery judgment of God as it

is molded, if you will, by the hand of God, into new heavens and a new earth.

He makes this clear as he compares the last watery global judgment by God with this future judgment with fire.

2 Peter 3:3-7 ³ Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." ⁵ For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago ***and the earth was formed out of water and by water,*** ⁶ ***through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.*** ⁷ But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

When God destroyed the earth in the great flood of Noah's time it was not annihilated. It was simply transformed into an uninhabitable place. But after the waters receded men began to repopulate the existing, though changed, world, shortly thereafter.

Peter's point is that, in the same way as God destroyed the present earth during Noah's time, He will destroy the present earth and heavens with fire, not to be annihilated, but to be transformed from its cursed state to a state that is brand new, without the curse and sin, to be inhabited with the people of God with Christ as its head here on this new earth forever more.

And Paul points this out when writing to the Romans.

Romans 8:19-22 ¹⁹ For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

The existing creation on which you and I live, that is the present earth, waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. In other words, the existing earth and heavens eagerly await the resurrection of God's people.

Why? Because like men today, all creation suffers the pains of the curse. But on the last day when God's people are resurrected unto life eternal, the creation itself, that is the present earth and heavens, will also be transformed from the curse to a pristine and marvelous new creation suitable for the glory of the Lord and His people.

On the last day, all creation will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

And the apostle John gives us a glimpse into what that will look like.

Revelation 21:1-5 ^{NAU} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

This is what Paul is speaking of in our text.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain 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.

But he stops short of what Peter, and Paul himself, have clearly spoken of in other portions of God's word, and that is that we will not spend eternity in the clouds to be with the Lord in the air, we will be above the earth on that last day with the Lord, as we behold the rebirth of a new heavens and new earth where Christ Himself will prepare our final home with Him on the new earth, where the tabernacle of God is among men and Christ Himself will dwell among them and they shall be His people and God Himself will be among them.

That is, you and me in Christ, as the Lord prepares our eternal home with Him. And when we begin to meditate upon what is in store for us, that is the Kingdom of God on earth, we can begin to appreciate the encouragement Paul ends with in our text.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

And as we are comforted to know that Christ will come back and take us to Himself as He prepares our eternal home with Him on the new earth, may we be encouraged to walk in His ways and love as we await that time. I'll end with these words.

Ephesians 3:14-21 ¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.