

An Anticipating Church 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Slide 1

Jesus has assured us, more than once, that He's coming. The Second Coming of Christ was something to which the Thessalonian church eagerly looked forward.

Last week we saw that in chapter 4, Paul praised the church for avoiding lust, adopting love, and applauding labor.

Then, a week earlier, we saw in chapters 2-3, that he described them as a scriptural church, a suffering church, and a strong church.

And in the beginning, in chapter 1, Paul praised them for being an energetic church, an elect church, an evangelistic church, and an expectant church.

They were an expectant church because, as 1 Thessalonians 1:10 says, they were eagerly *"looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven."*

The second half of chapter 4 and the first half of chapter 5 expand on that idea.

Paul explains what the Thessalonians had to look forward to, and what mighty churches of every generation can still look forward to today.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, *"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen*

asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

In this passage, Paul identifies four elements of the Second Coming that Christians can anticipate.

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First, a mighty church can anticipate Christ’s return.

I ran across a news article on the internet the other day. The headline read: *Man Experiences Heart Attack After The Rapture*. It read:

“Herbert Washington, whom co-workers at Significant Plastics Inc. say was unduly concerned with the rapture and the second coming of Christ, suffered a serious heart attack when co-workers pretended they’d been caught away without him.

Last Tuesday, they laid work outfits on their chairs and hid in a supply room, and when Herbert came back from the restroom, he thought the rapture had occurred.

The janitor, an outspoken Muslim, pretended to have witnessed everyone disappear and ran around the office feigning panic. Herbert fell to the ground clutching his heart and screaming, “I knew you’d forget me Jesus!”

The poor guy underwent bypass surgery and is recovering well. His wife says he’s reading his Bible more than ever.”

While it may make for entertaining movies and heart-stopping pranks, the reality is... the Bible never speaks of a secret rapture where faithful Christians disappear while unbelievers are left behind.

Rather, Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God.*" Revelations 1:7 adds, "*Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him.*"

Just imagine you're in your car driving home. Thoughts wander to the game you want to see or meal you want to eat, when suddenly a sound unlike any you've ever heard fills the air.

The sound is high above you. A trumpet? A choir? A choir of trumpets? You don't know, but you want to know. So, you pull over, get out of your car, and look up.

As you do, you see you aren't the only curious one. The roadside has become a parking lot. Car doors are open, and people are staring at the sky.

Shoppers are racing out of the grocery store. The Little League baseball game across the street has come to a halt.

Players and parents are searching the clouds. And what they see, and what you see, has never before been seen.

As if the sky were a curtain, the drapes of the atmosphere part. A brilliant light spills onto the earth followed by an endless fleet of angels.

Thousands of silvery wings rise and fall in unison, and over the sound of the trumpets, you can hear the cherubim and seraphim chanting, "*Holy, Holy, Holy.*"

Suddenly, the movement stops and the trumpets are silent. All is quiet.

The angels turn, you turn, the entire world turns—and there He is... Jesus. Through waves of light, you see the silhouetted figure of Christ the King.

Before you stands a figure so consuming that instantly you know: Nothing else matters. Forget stock markets and school reports. Sales meetings and football games. Nothing is newsworthy.

All that mattered, matters no more, for Christ has come. Will it be like that? I don't know.

But I know that, when Christ comes, everyone will know it and everyone one will be amazed. Mighty churches anticipate His return.

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Further, mighty churches anticipate the resurrection. Paul assured the Thessalonians in verse 16, *“and the dead in Christ will rise first.”*

Of course, the resurrection raises a whole classroom full of questions itself. In fact, Paul anticipated those questions in his letter to the Corinthians.

He writes in 1 Corinthians 15:35, *“But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?”*

Thankfully, Paul not only asks the questions; he answers them, too. He compares the resurrection to a seed that's buried in the ground before sprouting new life.

1 Corinthians 15:42, *“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable.”*

He then describes some specific changes we'll experience in our resurrected bodies.

He says we'll go from perishable to imperishable, from dishonor to glory, from weakness to power, and from a natural body a supernatural body.

Won't it be wonderful to have a body like that? A body that never gets old or grows tired? A body defined by power and glory?

Billy Graham once passed a shop which was no longer open for business.

A sign hung in the window that said, "*Closed for Renovations.*" The owner had closed shop for a while in order to remodel the store.

After a while he reopened the business with many changes and improvements. This, Graham says, is a picture of our death and resurrection.

When we die, our spirit moves out of our body temporarily until it has been repaired and remodeled.

Then, at the resurrection, our spirit will move into our newly remodeled, indestructible, glorified, powerful, supernatural body.

What exactly is a supernatural body? I don't know; but, like the Thessalonians, I'm looking forward to finding out. Mighty churches eagerly await the resurrection.

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Furthermore, mighty churches look forward to a great reunion. Paul's purpose in bringing up the resurrection seems to be the Thessalonian's concern for their lost loved ones.

He writes in verses 13-17, *“we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope... God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him... we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”*

The point is—mighty churches not only look forward to that reunion, but to the reward.

Let me tell you about Fred. When Fred arrived at the Pearly Gates, he was a little nervous about being admitted into the heavenly city.

Very quickly he found himself standing before an impressive angelic being with a clipboard.

“Fred, it would help the process if you could share with me some experience from your life on earth when you did a purely unselfish, kindly deed,” the angel said.

Well, Fred thought about it for a minute and then said, *“Oh, yes. One day I was walking along and I came upon a little old lady who was being mercilessly harassed by a motorcycle gang.”*

“Well, I just stepped right up and pushed one of their motorcycles over, just to get their attention. Then I kicked one of them real hard in the shins and told the old lady to run for help.”

The angel replied, *“Wow, that certainly qualifies. Could you tell me just when this happened?”* Fred looked at his watch and said, *“About three minutes ago.”*

Thankfully, if you’ve put your faith in Jesus, you won’t have to prove your worth to get your reward.

Rather, Paul assures us in 1 Thessalonians 5:10, *“He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.”*

He states it more succinctly in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, *“we will be with the Lord forever.”* This is the hope of every believer. Life without end. Life everlasting. Life without limits!

Throughout Jesus’ ministry He promised one thing that no one else could offer—eternal life, immortality. That’s what Jesus came into this world to offer.

Jesus declared boldly in John 10:10b, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”* Jesus speaks here of both quantity and quality—both beyond measure.

This life has its limits and letdowns. Sometimes life isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. But the life that Jesus gives will never disappoint. There’ll be no more suffering, sadness or pain.

No more boredom, bounced checks, or bad moods. No more tantrums, tedium, or terrorists.

The Message puts it this way, *“I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.”* This was the reward the Thessalonians so eagerly awaited.

Paul wanted the Thessalonian church to see the coming of Christ as an encouragement.

Whether or not it happens during our lifetime, all of us will be resurrected on that day.

We will be reunited with fellow believers of every age, and rewarded with eternal life in the company of Christ.

In the meantime, our job is to be prepared. Paul cautioned the church in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, *“Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”*

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Conclusion

While on a South Pole expedition, British explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton left a few men on Elephant Island, promising that he would return.

Later, when he tried to go back, huge icebergs blocked the way. But suddenly, as if by a miracle, an avenue opened in the ice and Shackleton was able to get through.

When he arrived, he found his men, ready and waiting. They quickly scrambled aboard and no sooner had the ship cleared the island than the ice crashed together behind them.

Contemplating their narrow escape, Shackleton said to his men, *“It was fortunate you were all packed and ready to go!”*

They replied, *“We never gave up hope. Whenever the sea was clear of ice, we rolled up our sleeping bags and reminded each other, ‘The boss may come today.’”*

There’s no predicting when Jesus will return, so a mighty church is *“packed and ready to go”* at all times.

Are you ready? Have you put your faith in Jesus and accepted him as your Lord and Savior? If not, it’s time to start packing.