

Text: I Thessalonians 4:13-18 (Pew Bible, pg.1171)

Title: “Our Resurrection”

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION - When you go to a movie and watch the previews of coming movies they take the best parts of the movie and put them in what is called the trailer. There may be three outrageously funny clips in the trailer, and you think it's going to be a really funny movie. But when you watch the movie those were the only three funny places in the whole movie. There may be three really great action scenes in the trailer, and you think this is going to be great, and that's all there was ... three action scenes. The rest of the movie was rotten. In other words, the movie is rarely as good as the preview. Well, that's not true when it comes to what we know from the Bible about heaven. What the Bible gives us today as a preview is really just that a preview. You cannot in your wildest imagination picture what the real thing is going to be like.

ILLUSTRATION – If any of you have little boys around your house you probably know about Transformers. If you grew up in the 80s and 90s you probably played with guys like this. This one is Optimus Prime ... one of the Rescue Bots ... one of the good guys who are trying to save the planet. So Optimus is semi-truck who can transform into a robot ... or a robot who can transform into a semi-truck ... Transformers.

Three days after Jesus was crucified He rose again with a transformed body. Several weeks after that Jesus ascended back to heaven. But one day He's coming again, and one of things that will happen when He does is that He will transform the bodies of believers so that we will have new, glorified bodies. Why? God is in the business of transforming lives.

Philippians 1:6 - He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

God's vision for redemption is much grander than most of us realize. God is not just interested in getting you through this life and helping you to manage your sin as much as possible until you die. It's bigger than that. It's more than just getting your soul saved. That's great, but His vision is bigger than that. God is not just interested in getting you to heaven where you will spend eternity with Him. That's true, but His vision is even bigger than that. In fact, it's not just about you. God's vision for redemption includes a total makeover of every molecule of this vast universe and of your body.

Now here is where this world and the universe as we know it is headed.

2 Peter 3:10 - But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Why? Sin has not only corrupted humanity, it has corrupted the entire universe. And God will judge it all. But it doesn't end there.

2 Peter 3:13 - But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

So this new heaven and new earth will be the eternal home of the righteous. But for us to be able to inhabit this new home in heaven for eternity, we need a makeover too. And the Bible says the people of God are going to undergo a great transformation.

Romans 8:23 - Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Do you realize that the time will come when God will finally put the finishing touches on our redemption? If we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ we are as saved right now as we can be on this earth. The Bible says that if any person is in Christ they are a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come. That is a spiritual reality. But our born-again spirits have been encased in a fallen body. The body you now inhabit has been tainted by the sin that has been passed to us all the way down the line from our earliest ancestors, Adam and Eve. And in these bodies we struggle with sinful impulses. As hard as we try to resist them, they remain very powerful. But God's not through with us.

The final installment of our redemption comes when every last effect of the curse, the fall and our sin has been completely eradicated in our new resurrection bodies. Just think of that! Every dimension of our life ... body, mind, spirit, heart and soul ... will be perfect and eternally holy. No more sinful thoughts ... no more selfish words ... no more hateful attitudes ... no more lustful looks. No more battles with weak bodies ... no more cancer or Alzheimer's disease. No more fights, arguments or quarrels. No more disappointments or anger. No more sorrow or grief.

And we will be citizens of a new universe that is the full expression of the Kingdom of God. No more wars between nations, no more hunger, no more natural disasters, no more government corruption, no more foolish or godless philosophies. A new heaven and a new earth will be our eternal home.

So there's a huge change coming for us as believers. Let's turn to I Thessalonians 4 and see how all of this will take place. Heaven is the prepared home for God's prepared people. And in order for us to be able to inhabit our new eternal home we're going to have to be outfitted to do so. Some believers in the ancient city of Thessalonica had some questions, just like we have, about what it will be like for us when we die. What about our loved ones and friends who are already with Jesus in heaven? Read text.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - Brothers, we do not want you to be ... like the rest of men, who have no hope.

That's the condition of many people today ... they have no hope. As they think about their life and their death, or the death of loved ones there is no hope. Well you can have hope if you know and believe there are certain events that are still ahead. And everything starts with...

1. THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST

1 Thessalonians 4:14b - 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.

Now we are entering Easter Week and it's an opportunity for us to really think about what we believe ... what we cling to ... what keeps us going ... what supports us. Jesus died and rose again ... and that changes everything for us. Use this week to really let those truths soak deep into your souls. But the next big thing on God's calendar is that Christ is going to return.

1 Thessalonians 4:15b - the coming of the Lord...

And we have a few more details given to 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, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

This tells us at least three things about Christ's return. It is...

- **Literal** – “The Lord Himself will come down...” His second coming is as real as His first coming, His death, His resurrection and His ascension.
- **Personal** - It is the Lord Himself, not an angel or some other representative. The “coming” of the Lord means His “arrival.” Jesus will personally arrive.
- **Unmistakable** - The Philips translation catches some of the impact of the Gk here: “One word of command, one shout from the Archangel, one blast from the trumpet of God and God in Person will come down from heaven.”

And when this happens it will answer many of our questions:

1 John 3:2 - Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

So first there is the return of Christ. Next is...

2. THE RESURRECTION OF DECEASED BELIEVERS

1 Thessalonians 4:14 - We believe ... that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

“Fallen asleep” is one way the NT describes the death of believers. It's like their bodies are asleep in the grave. But for believers who die, their spirits go to be with the Lord. And there's never a moment when they are away from the Lord. We don't have to worry about them. The Bible says that...

1 Thessalonians 4:15b - We who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

In other words, those who happen to be alive when Christ returns will not be the first to be transformed.

1 Thessalonians 4:16b - The dead in Christ will rise first.

Now this is going to be something to behold. Every cemetery on the face of this earth where Christians are buried will be a busy place. Out of the graves will come the saints with their new glorified bodies ... just like Jesus was resurrected. The Christian's soul and body will be rejoined in a new glorified resurrection body. The fact that it happened for Jesus is the assurance that it will happen for us.

Now Jesus said...

John 5:28 - "A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice

John 5:29 - and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

Now that may surprise some of you. All people will be resurrected ... believers and non-believers. When Christ returns the bodies of the redeemed will be joined to their spirits and they receive new, glorified, perfected bodies. The Bible says that later the bodies of those who have rejected Christ will also be raised, but not with glorified bodies, but apparently in the condition they were in when they died, including with their sin.

Revelation 20:13 - The sea gave up the dead that were in it,

ILLUSTRATION – Ships and airplanes have been combing the bottom of the Indian Ocean searching for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 that crashed several weeks ago. They may never find the plane or the bodies of the passengers, but at the resurrection the sea will give up their dead.

But that first resurrection is going to be for believers. Just think about those loved ones who were believers but whose bodies were consumed by some illness or disease. The last time you saw them, maybe in a hospital bed or in a nursing home ... and they were emaciated with disease and sickness and pain. But when Christ returns they're going to be given a new body that will never again experience sickness or suffering.

Remember, the resurrection is necessary because we'll need new bodies with which to inhabit heaven for eternity. Then the next thing to happen is...

3. THE RAPTURE OF LIVING BELIEVERS

1 Thessalonians 4:17 - 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.

Note: There's nothing in these verses about other important events revolving around the second coming: the Great Tribulation, the 1000 year reign of Christ (Millennium), or the various judgments. We'll talk about those at another time.

The word for "caught up" means to snatch something away in a sudden, almost violent action. And the Latin translation of that word is where we get our word "rapture."

Now just imagine what it will be like when the rapture occurs. You have dead believers being raised out of cemeteries or out of the sea or wherever ... and you'll have this sudden snatching away of believers who are live.

ILLUSTRATION – I remember seeing a bumper sticker years ago that said, "Warning: In case of the rapture this car will be driverless."

Matthew 24:40-41 - Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

And this requires the power of God, just like the resurrection of Jesus required the power of God

Philippians 3:20 - But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,

Philippians 3:21 - who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

So the dead will undergo a transformation like that our Lord experienced when He was raised from the dead and given a glorified body. And the living believers will be transformed and changed at the moment of the rapture. It will be amazing!

So we have seen the return of the Lord, the resurrection of the deceased saints and the rapture of the living saints. There's one more thing ...

4. THE REUNION OF GOD'S FAMILY

This reunion is with all believers of all the ages:

"After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them..." (I Thessalonians 4:17a)

But most importantly this reunion is with the Lord.

"And so we will be with the Lord forever" (I Thessalonians 4:17b)

The purpose of this great reunion is to meet the Lord. I look forward to that day. I have never seen Jesus in person. I have known Him in my heart since I was a young teenager. I've had some sublime times of communion with Him in His Word, in prayer and in worship experiences. But I have never seen Him. When that day comes I will be with the Lord.

This is the essence of heaven ... to be with the Lord forever. All the blessings of the Christian life find their fulfillment in that incredible eternal union with Christ ... with the Lord forever.

CONCLUSION

So what are we to do with this information?

1 Thessalonians 4:18 - Therefore encourage each other with these words.

This word "encourage" is seen over and over in the NT. And it can have at least three different meanings, all of which are important for us.

- The word can mean "comfort." Some of you need the comfort of knowing the condition of family and friends who have died. Are they OK? Will I ever see them again? Yes!
- Then word can mean "encourage." We know what it means to encourage. Some of you are going through tough times. Will you make it? Sure you will. And if Christ comes in your lifetime you will be lifted out of the hardships of this life, but until then continue to be faithful.
- The word can mean "exhort" or "challenge." Maybe you're so much in this world that your longing for heaven isn't as intense as it should be. God's goal for our redemption is to make us like Christ ... and He will do that. But that may not be your goal. We should groan for this like a sick person groans to be well ... like a prisoner groans to be free ... like a farmer who groans for the harvest time to come ... like a hungry person groans for food.

Some of you have never honestly faced the fact that you are a sinner and you've never found forgiveness in Christ. You will miss out on this and you will instead face something more disastrous than you can ever imagine if you persist in rejecting Christ.