

WITH A SHOUT  
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18  
March 27, 2011 (kit)

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I saw a movie recently, directed by Clint Eastwood, called Hereafter. In the story, a woman has a near death experience and sees what comes next. She is so entranced by it that she cannot go back to her regular life. Instead, she must write a book about it. But she is an important media person in France and talk of the afterlife is frowned upon. Meanwhile, a boy in England loses his twin brother to an auto accident. He desperately seeks every psychic and mystic he can so that he can talk to his brother again, but they are all fake. Finally, there is an American man who had an injury as a child that enables him to touch peoples' hands and then hear from their dead loved ones. Eventually, the three people meet and the story goes on from there.

It seemed that the two main themes of the movie were one, the afterlife is invisible and often absent from our thinking, but it is real and should affect our daily lives. I'd agree with that, by the way. What I liked about the movie was that it speaks to our modern world and says, "Wake up. You are going to die. There is more to this life than here." The second theme is that there is nothing to worry about. Death is an entrance into another world where we have regrets about life and wish we could talk with those still living –however, on the whole, the afterlife is kind of safe and peaceful. I don't agree with that theme so much.

There is a new book out by a pastor named Rob Bell, called "Love Wins." In the book, Rob Bell questions the traditional view of the afterlife that Christians have, implying that somehow, in the end, chances are, everyone is going to end up all right and in heaven, some even after going to hell first. Hell is not final, and heaven awaits us all. Bell will sell millions of books, I predict for he has a perfect understanding of what the modern man thinks.

Fortunately, we are not left to Clint Eastwood or Rob Bell in our source for hope in the afterlife. We have Jesus. Like Eastwood, Jesus called people to think more of the life after this one than they do of this one. But unlike Eastwood and Bell, He didn't give the impression that everything will be all right, no matter what. He said things like, "what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?" And "you fool, don't you know that this night your soul is required of you?" and, "do not fear those who kill the body and can do no more. Rather fear Him who can throw body and soul into hell." We all die. What hope do we have?

This is the question the church in Thessalonica had. Some of them, knowing that Jesus would soon return, feared that their loved ones who died before His coming could not be resurrected because their bodies and spirits were already separated and their bodies were decomposing into dust. It seemed safer just to remain alive till Jesus returned, but what if one died first? Paul answers these questions in our text for today.

Our text for today is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 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. 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.

Paul lifts our spirits with the words, “those who are asleep.” He describes the death of our bodies as sleep. Now, our souls do not sleep, for Paul elsewhere teaches us that to be “absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” However, our bodies he doesn’t call dead, but asleep. And make no mistake, our bodies sleep deeply! So deeply that they turn back into dirt! What is asleep can be woken up. The bodies of those who love Christ will be woken up when the alarm clock goes off! (In this case a shout and a trumpet!). Christians have died and their bodies lay in the graveyards all around here. I wouldn’t want to dig them up and look at their sleeping bodies! But one day, Jesus will wake them up and they will rise.

Some Christians died and their bodies were lost at the bottom of the sea, or were destroyed by fire, or blown up in bomb blasts. Although we don’t have a grave site where a body lies, they are still sleeping and God will wake them up physically. This is the hope that all Christians have, but not that all people have. Those who sleep in Jesus need not fear death. Now, I’d like to go further on this passage by asking two questions. When and why? Let’s start with when?

### ***When?***

Christians love to argue about the end time events and when certain things will happen. The question is harder than we think for often God speaks of many events without telling us of the gaps in time between them. However, there are often clues about the ordering of end time events in the Bible.

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.

The order of these events is this: Jesus descends from heaven, and there is a shout and a trumpet and then the dead in Christ rise. It is hard not to think that Jesus descends but raised bodies of the believers who have died meet him in the air on the way down. Awesome to imagine, huh! Then, those Christians who have not died join them. But do they join them right away? Is there a break of only seconds, or years, or days, or months? It’s hard to say, but my guess is that it is relatively quickly because of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:

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.

This passage says, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet." There's that trumpet again! It seems reasonable that this is the same trumpet he also mentions to the Thessalonians. So, a shout, a trumpet and then the dead are flying off the earth, alive and shining, and we are changed. That's got to feel good! All sickness and weakness and aging leaves in an instant, replaced by health, vitality, a clear head, strong emotions, joy and all the rest. Then, we lift off and meet Jesus in the air.

Now, timing matters here, because some people believe that Jesus then stops descending, takes us all, and heads back up to heaven and leaves the unbelievers on the planet to go through a living hell. Furthermore, during this time (7 years) millions and millions of people get saved without anyone there to preach to them. Instead of being convinced by the Holy Spirit before this event, they are convinced after when they see their loved ones fly away. That's the most popular theory among Christians. I don't think it's true, though. Here's why. The time before Jesus returns is often referred to as the Great Tribulation. Jesus said it would be worse than any time ever in the history of man. The thought that Jesus zips in and beams out the believers in order to spare them this trial, while saving millions without a preacher and then having them endure this trial –well, it is all a timing issue. In Matthew 24, Jesus says this:

Matthew 24:21 21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

So there will be this great tribulation. Will we be taken up before this or after? I say after. Why? Well, look at what Jesus says after this:

Matthew 24:29-31 29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

So we have the great tribulation, then after that tribulation, the Son of Man comes and gathers his elect from the four winds. So, we have here Jesus showing up in clouds and bringing all the believers up to Himself in the sky. Some people say, "Yes, well this is His second act. The first time He showed up, He came and took the church. Now He is taking believers who got saved during the great tribulation (who are not called the church, by the way)." Okay, but the timing is marked by a trumpet blast.

Paul says in Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians that the gathering of believers, both dead and living, would be preceded by a trumpet blast. What reason have we to believe that this event is different from what Paul describes in Corinthians and Thessalonians? What reason do we have to believe that God would spare one group of Christians from this time of great tribulation because it is not meant for Christians, but then submit millions more Christians to the same experience? And what reason do we have to believe that millions of believers get saved without a preacher, when the Bible is clear that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God? My friends, whatever is coming on the earth, Christians will go through it along with everyone

else. But one day, we will hear a great shout and a trumpet will blast, and we will see what cannot be imagined, as the dead in Christ rise before our eyes, and then we join them in the air and descend together with Christ to set up His Kingdom on the earth.

### **Why?**

Specifically, why is the resurrection of believers preceded by a shout and a trumpet blast? To answer this question, we can search the scriptures for examples of shouts that God originates or commands and also for trumpet blasts that God produces or commands. When we do this, we find that shouts have to do with victory over enemies. The shout has a two fold purpose: One, it signals terror and defeat to enemies, and two, it signals joy and victory to those who shout.

When I am involved in sports, I shout. When I win, I shout. When I see athletes in victory with their mouths open in full shout and see them tense up and put all their power into their full-throated yell, I know what that feels like. That is the shout of victory over an opponent. It signifies not only joy for one, but defeat for another. Now, sports don't matter in the long one, but this is really the cry of battle.

As for the Trumpet blast, there are three main uses in Scripture. One is priestly and signifies the holiness and presence of God. Consider Mount Sinai, when the people were gathered around and instructed not to touch the mountain, there was thunder and a trumpet sound as God showed His holiness to Israel. Also think about when the Hebrews marched around Jericho, the priests went before the Ark of the Covenant (which represents God's holiness) and blew their trumpets. Then, with a shout, the people yelled and the walls of the city came down. Trumpets also are used as musical instruments to praise God. And finally, trumpets are blown for war. When the enemy appears, the trumpet is blown to warn the people and rally the army to battle.

Let's put all this together:

We are living out our lives today. We live by faith, serving Jesus with joy, loving one another and seeking to represent Christ to the lost, enduring the suffering of this world, giving thanks to God and persevering. Some of us die along the way. The rest go on. Then one day, without warning, and without anyone expecting it, a shout is heard, not only in Western PA, but all across the country, all across the world. And with that shout of victory comes the blast of a trumpet. The noises will startle us all. We will look up and in the sky will be our King, whom we will see with our eyes for the first time. We will know instantly that the sorrow is over. We will see the shining figures of glorified people from all ages –the gathering with our king will be a number so large it will be impossible to number at a glance. The apostles and prophets will be there. John the Baptist will be there. Martin Luther and Augustine will be there. Lewis and Spurgeon will be there. Corrie Ten Boom, Jim Eliot and all those who suffered in this life for Jesus will be there.

Then, as you watch, you will instantly feel change run through you as your body transforms into one like Jesus' glorified body, like the bodies you see in the air! You will join them and as you do, you will know that grace has won and that this life you lived, fighting for your faith and persevering, was all worth it, no matter what trials you faced.

But for many, the shout and the trumpet will cause them to fall to the ground in fear and trembling because they will know for certain what they always knew deep within: the day of

reckoning has come when the Lord will come and His holiness will rule the earth. They will fall to the ground and wish the rocks would fall on them to hide them from His glorious face.

I'd like to finish this message with an appeal to you, the living. No matter what certain movies say, and no matter what certain pastors write in books, the afterlife will not turn out alright for everybody. There is a heaven and there is a hell, and one of those two places will be your destiny. To die is to meet your Maker. Your spirit will then run to its Maker. All your sins will then be what they are, ugly, offensive, and blasphemous before a holy God. The only way to have a good after life is to have your sins forgiven and the only way to have your sins forgiven is to trust in Jesus who paid for those very sins when He died on a cross. Run to Jesus now while there is still time! Time is running out. When you hear the shout and hear the trumpet sound, it might be too late. When your life comes suddenly and unexpectedly to an end, it might be too late. Listen to the following words as if God is speaking to you directly for they are the words of Jesus:

Isaiah 61:1-2 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; 2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,

Christ died for sinners like me and you! Run to Him and receive His great love.

For those of you who know Jesus, who wonder from time to time if it is all worth it, listen carefully to the following words as if God is speaking to you directly, because He is:

Isaiah 42:13-16 13 The LORD will go forth like a warrior; He will arouse His zeal like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes; He will raise a war cry. He will prevail against His enemies.

Zechariah 9:14 14 Then the LORD will appear over them, And His arrow will go forth like lightning; And the Lord GOD will blow the trumpet, And will march in the storm winds of the south.

Daniel 12:1-3 "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. 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. 3 "Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.