



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

“The Age of the Church, part III - Its Destiny”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for another opportunity to study Thy word. We thank Thee for this wonderful book and for God's plan of the ages which we have been considering and studying together. And we pray now, Lord, as we look toward the future that the hope of the Second Advent, the hope of the rapture and other great events of the future may grip our hearts and affect us in our daily lives. Guide our thinking so that we understand what is in Thy word. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Now tonight we're going to look at "The Destiny of the Church." And of course, the destiny of the church is for us bound up primarily in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ or the rapture of the church. But let me review just for a moment or two the church age, one or two things that I have not said actually in connection with this age.

Now remember in each one of these ages or dispensations we have seen that God has given man certain revelation and then man inevitably has failed. Man was placed in the Garden of Eden. He was given a simple test and he failed. So the end of the age of innocence was failure and consequent judgment.

Then there followed the age of conscience. And again man was given certain privileges and responsibilities, failed and the flood came. And in the age of human government, the same pattern developed. We had certain privileges given to man, certain responsibilities and ultimately man failed and the tower of Babel judgment took place. And finally in the age of promise, the same thing with the same pattern and ultimately God gave the law.

Now the age of the law, of course, has consumed most of the Old Testament because the age of the law began in the second book of the Bible in the early part of that book, for that matter, goes on into the New Testament, on through the great portion of the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and concluded with the cross of Jesus Christ when the veil of the temple was rent in twain which signified that the Mosaic economy was no more. Again man failed and the judgment of course was ultimately carried out upon Israel in that in seventy A.D. Jerusalem was destroyed and the nation Israel was scattered to the four corners of the earth where they are still today.

Then on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came and baptized believers, only believers, not church members, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, into the one body which was the church of Christ and the church age began.

Now the church has also been given certain responsibilities. Remember, last time we said that the mission of the church was to evangelize. Extensively they were to go out into the four corners of the earth and proclaim the good news concerning the Lord Jesus. They also had an intensive mission, or an internal mission. They were to teach the word of God, to have fellowship: the fellowship of breaking of bread and prayers. So that the church's responsibility in this age has been the responsibility of evangelizing and then the responsibility of edifying believers in the study of the word of God.

Now of course, the New Testament also gives us some instruction with regard to the method whereby these things are to be done. We don't have time to develop that in this study because we just have a limited amount of time. But the New Testament, from

Ephesians chapter 4, tells us how the responsibilities of the church are to be carried out. They are to be carried through the instrumentality of evangelists, pastor-teachers, prophets, and others who are gifted of God who are to teach the word, build up the saints, so that they may do the work of the ministry.

In other words, according to the divine pattern, the early church was not a church in which one man stood up and gave a message every Sunday and then people went home and reflected upon it during the week and then came back to hear another message on the next Sunday. This was not the pattern in the early church. The pattern in the early church was for the believers to come together and gifted men in the assembly were, as they met around the Lord's Table, they were to encourage one another, build one another up in the faith, so that each individual might during the week do the work of the ministry.

We have it backwards today. You know we have in our churches, most of our churches at least, a Reverend Doctor So-and-so, and he is expected to do the work for us. And so we pass the collection plate on Sunday. We sign pledges. We give money in order to support him so that he may do the work that we think he ought to do. So he does the work of pastoring. He does the work of preaching and teaching.

And we are like those who are on the sidelines in the Texas-Oklahoma game every year. We cheer on our respective teams. They are doing the battling down on the floor of the Cotton Bowl and we're cheering them on. And so the average church is structured along that line. We come Sunday morning and we cheer on the Reverend Dr. So-and-so so that he may carry on his work. And of course, sometimes we don't cheer him on. If we don't think that he is doing the work, then of course, we behind his back curse him a little bit, in a kindly tender way, you know, such as only saints can do.

But at any rate, we have the idea that the church is made up of one man who is something like a president of the corporation and we are to help him on. Our duty is not

to do the work of ministry, but our duty is to encourage him and help him so that he might do the work of the ministry.

Now I say I don't have time to develop this, I wish I did, because this is something extremely important. But you just go to Ephesians chapter 4 and read that passage over ten or fifteen times and especially read it over in the American Standard Version or one of the other versions in which one or two slight corrections are made in the text which were clarified for you. And you will discover that the gifted men whom God has given to the local church are not designed to do the ministry at all, that they are to equip you so that you do the work of the ministry. And it is the average believer in the early church who was the one who was to do the ministry.

But it wasn't long after the church was formed on the Day of Pentecost, in fact just after one hundred A.D., till a form of government began to intrude itself into the early church, which led to the situation that we have about us today with one man doing the work of the Lord and the rest cheering him on. But God never intended it to be that way. And it would be much better today if every single believer in the Lord Jesus realized that the work of ministry of the gospel of Christ is the responsibility of every person and not the responsibility of the one, the Reverend Dr. So-and-so. His responsibility is to equip me so that I may do the work of ministry. In other words, using this room as an example, it is not my responsibility to do the work of the ministry by just giving you some information every Sunday, entertaining you with some teaching from the word. It is my responsibility to equip you so that you go out and throughout the remainder of the week do the work of the ministry. It is to be done by every one of us.

Now the church has failed greatly in this. It's only natural if we have one man doing the work that all should do, that the work of the church of Jesus Christ should suffer. If for example, in a local assembly of one hundred people, if one hundred were doing the work of the ministry, how much more wonderful than one man, no matter how

marvelous he might be as a minister? How much more could be done for the Lord if everyone was doing the work of the ministry?

Now this was the method whereby God intended that the local church should carry on its ministry. Well, just like Israel in the Old Testament, they were not satisfied to have God alone at the head. It wasn't long before the age of the judges comes and Israel must have a judge. And it isn't long before Israel looks out at the nations about them who had their kings and so they said we must have a king too. And so God allowed them to have kings. But he never intended that to be the divine pattern. He wanted to be king himself. He wanted to be judge himself. And he wanted Israel to be led and directed by the eternal God himself. But instead, they put men between them and God. And I'm afraid in the local church today we have done just that. We have put our pastors, our ministers, between the local church member and the Lord. He wants to be head of the assembly. He wants us all to be under him and the church to be carried out, its work, under him.

Well now, let's go on according to the Bible and look on to the end of the church age. Now we're moving beyond ourselves here, and so we must look at the prophecies of the word. And since we are trying to cover a lot of ground tonight, let me just ask you to follow me without looking at the text for a moment or two, and then we're going to look at one specific passage.

The church age ends in failure. Just as every other age has ended in failure, so the church age will end in failure. The church has failed to get the gospel out. Today there are still over, well I used to say over one thousand tongues in which people do not even have the Bible yet. Now it is far beyond one thousand. Just think of that. No Bible at all in over one thousand different languages. Can we say that we have carried the great commission out to go into all the world and preach the gospel? That of course is a ministry which we have failed remarkably in.

As a matter of fact, the church itself is a failure. If you look at the local church today, what do you find? Well, you find usually about two or three times as many women active in the local church as men. And God never intended that it should be that way. He intended that the work of the Lord should be carried on by the men. And in our evangelical churches this is especially true. We have far too many women who are taking responsibility and far too few men.

Do you know that even when we come to the mission field, that the great majority of missionary candidates today are not men? They are women. Just recently I went to Lancaster Pennsylvania where over two hundred missionaries were there. I cannot say for certainty just what the percentage was, but looking out over the audience, it was quite obvious that the great majority of the missionaries were women.

And all of the missionary societies in their leadership today are asking the question: Why is it that we do not have any men to apply to our mission boards? You see, we have reversed orders in the local church. And we have not challenged the men. But most of all we have not gotten the gospel out, so that today we are actually losing ground. More people are being born constantly than we are reaching, so that we're not gaining, we are losing day by day.

Now when you look at the church from the standpoint of that ministry which they are to carry on within themselves: they are to teach the word of God. What do we find today in the local church? Just taking the church in the United States, because that is the church with which most of us are familiar. What do we find? Do we find a great ministry of the teaching of the word of God going on in our churches? No, we do not. We do not find the Bible taught at all in the great majority of our Protestant churches.

Oh, the Bible is opened up on Sunday morning and a text is taken from it. But so far as teaching the member of the local church so that he is able to handle the word of God, that is nonexistent today. If you go about and you open the Bible and began to teach it, people will flock around and say, We've never had the Bible taught in this way.

Why is this? We have abandoned the Bible. We are not teaching it any longer. And of course, since we have not been teaching the word of God we have lapsed into doctrinal apostasy.

Let me give you a quotation, just for the rest of the night, we could give quotations of famous preachers and what they have said about the teaching of the Bible. But this is one. This is by a man who just a few years ago was the head of the National Council of Churches. This is what he had to say about the bodily resurrection.

Now the Bible very plainly teaches the bodily resurrection. Professor James Denning of the church of Scotland, one of the great evangelicals of a couple of generations ago said, "If when we talk about the resurrection we do not talk about the bodily resurrection we should not talk about resurrection at all." So we must believe, if we believe in the resurrection, in the bodily resurrection. That term has to do with the body.

This is what Henry Sloane Coffin said, "That this body of ours shall rise and live, we can neither believe nor desire." Now this is a leader in the Protestant church of America. It's quite obvious that you're not going to have a great and extensive teaching ministry in a church which has men like this as a minister.

Furthermore there is moral apostasy. And the Bible predicts this. I'd like for you to turn with me to 2 Timothy chapter 3, verses 1 through 9, and see if you can recognize the age in which we are living.

Now of course, we must be careful when we are talking about biblical things. We must be careful to point out this: That there are many things which the Bible speaks about which have been going on down through the years. Now many of these things are true. It is not so much the fact that some of these things are going on. It is the fact that all are going on at the same time that is significant.

2 Timothy chapter 3, verses 1 through 9, page twelve-hundred and eighty.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents (My, what you could say about that today.), unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness (and we really have the form of godliness today, church after church, great, large, impressive buildings, and inside our churches beautiful pews, beautiful carpets, beautiful vestments, beautiful choirs and choir robes, and lavish and impressive ritual in our churches) Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, (And there are many today who are leading astray women too in religious things.) For Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as their's also was."

So the Bible says that this church age shall end in apostasy, doctrinal apostasy. Peter says that in the last days there shall come false teachers, just as there were false prophets in the Old Testament, who shall deny the Lord that bought them. So doctrinal apostasy and moral apostasy will conclude the church age. Just as in every other age, man has failed, so too, in the age in which we are living, man shall fail.

Now we should not then be surprised if we find that men who claim to be religious are abandoning the truth of the word of God. If they are abandoning the Bible, that is a terrible thing. And we of course should feel very, very sorry for them, but remembering at the same time that this is exactly that which the word of God has said would happen. Men would go into apostasy. And though we do not like this, nevertheless we can recognize the hand of God and the time is which we are living.

Well what then shall happen to those who come under the judgment at the conclusion of the church age? Well of course for the visible church, those who profess to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, those who profess but who have not really believed in him, they are going to have to go through this period of great tribulation, so that the judgment for the church is the period of the great tribulation judgment. That means that it is true that the church which does not believe in the Lord Jesus is going to pass through that great tribulation. That is their judgment. Just as here Adam and Eve were judged by being cast out of the garden, as the flood came and the tower of Babel, and ultimately the destruction of Jerusalem in the cross, so at the end of the church age there shall be the great tribulation which shall be out over all of the earth. And those who have refused to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ must pass through that great tribulation. That is their judgment.

Now what about those who have believed in the Lord Jesus? What about those who have been faithful during the present church age? What is their future?

Now that is what I want to look at tonight, because this is the destiny of the true church. So turn with me to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 13 through 18, for here we read of our destiny, that is, if we have really believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is our destiny. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 13 through 18. Now let me read these verses now.

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. (Verse 15) For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent."

Now that word really means precede and if you have a Bible with a marginal note, you will notice that that correction has been made. This old English word prevent meant in sixteen hundred and eleven, when the Authorized Version was translated, meant to precede, It does not mean that today. It means to hinder today. But it really means precede.

"Shall not precede them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Now this is a very, very interesting passage, because in it Paul tells us what our destiny is. Now let's take a look at it in detail. And you notice that he, at the beginning, says "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren."

I have a good friend and he is a very fine Bible teacher and he loves to say when he comes to one of these passages which begin like this, and Paul, remember, has several passages that begin, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren." He likes to say, he says, You know, I wouldn't mind being one of the United Brethren, or one of the Mennonite Brethren, or one of the Plymouth Brethren, but there is one type of brethren that I don't want to be a member of and that is one of the ignorant brethren. [Laughter]

So Paul says, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren." Now that is a kind of brother that I don't want to be too.

Why did Paul give them this information? Well, now if you investigate the background of this little epistle of 1 Thessalonians, this epistle was written to a church which Paul had formed through his own preaching, that is, which God had formed through the preaching of Paul. Paul had left Thessalonica, which was in northern Greece

and he had come down to Athens. When he was in Athens, he had been very much concerned about them, because they were new believers. He knew that they were going to be persecuted considerably by those in Thessalonica. And so being very concerned about them, he had left some of the brethren in the north.

Ultimately they had come down to Athens. He had heard good news from Timothy, but again being concerned about them, he had sent Timothy to the north, because Timothy had said, Paul the Thessalonians are getting along fine but there is one thing that they are concerned about. When you were with them you told them that Jesus Christ was going to come again. And those who are alive, when he came, were going to be caught up together to meet him in the air. And Paul, they of course have rejoiced in this truth which you have taught them, but a problem has come into their minds.

I imagine that they gathered around and discussed the things that Paul taught, just as we are here in this home, for remember they had no church buildings. They just met to talk over the things of the Holy Spirit and the messages that Paul had given. And also, the things that Timothy had taught them, too.

And so they began to ask questions. And you know how people are; they want to ask every kind of thing that comes into their mind. The Bible may not have anything to say about it, but that's the very thing that some people want to know, you know. What about the heathen? What about this and what about that? All these questions come into our minds.

Now unfortunately, the apostles are dead and gone, and we cannot call them up. I assume from this that there are many of these questions that are really nonessential. But this apparently was an essential question, because Paul wrote them a letter in order to answer a question that had come to their minds. Paul, you say that when the Lord Jesus comes we're going to meet him in the air? Well, what, Paul, about those who die before the Lord Jesus Christ comes? What's going to happen to them? What is their place in the rapture of the church?

Now this little epistle, in this section 13 through 18, is written to answer that question. What is going to happen to the bodies of the dead when Jesus Christ comes in the air to take the living members of the church of Christ to be with him? What about those who believed in him but are now with the Lord? Are they going to miss the rapture, because they have died? So, Paul says, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep."

Now let me stop for just a moment. This word asleep, you notice occurs in verse 13. It occurs in verse 14. It occurs in verse 15. And it occurs in verse 16. Four times he speaks about, well I think three times, and then in 16 he says "the dead in Christ." So here is a word, asleep. What does it mean? Asleep in Christ. Asleep in Jesus.

Well now the word sleep is a word that ordinarily for us signifies that a man is taking a nap. There is this that is significant about the word sleep. Ordinarily when a person is sleeping, he is first of all, resting. Secondly, he is alive. And thirdly, he will have an awakening. So he is resting. He is alive; you can tell he's alive; he makes noises to let you know that he's alive when he's sleeping. And then he is to be awakened. Those three things.

Now that is why in the Bible the word sleep is used metaphorically of the person who has died in Christ. Now it is never used of an unbeliever. It is never said that they are asleep in Jesus. It is said that they have died. So an unbeliever dies.

Now a believer dies, too. But when he dies he goes to sleep in Jesus, because he is resting in the presence of the Lord. And secondly he is alive. He is with the Lord. Paul says, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

If I were to suddenly drop dead before you and collapse on this rug, my spirit would be immediately with the Lord Jesus. You would call the funeral home and take away my body and in two or three days it would be placed in the ground. But my spirit would be with the Lord. My body would be asleep in Jesus, because it would be resting. I would be alive and my body would have an awakening.

Now when mother tells you, Jack or Chip, to take a nap, and you sleep, you are resting, you're alive and you expect to wake up and be active again. That is why this word sleep is chosen here with reference to a Christian.

Now there is one other thing about this word asleep that I think we ought to notice. It has to do primarily with the Christian's body. Now I want you to turn with me, keeping your finger in this place in 1 Thessalonians 4, I want you to turn with me to Acts chapter 7. Acts chapter 7 records the speech of Stephen and also Stephen's death.

Now remember at the conclusion of his sermon, which was a magnificent sermon and one which caused the Jews to protest and finally stone him to death, in verse 59 now of Acts 7, this is page eleven-fifty-nine, we read these words, "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Now notice that. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Now, what I want you to notice is this, that Stephen said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit, " as he died. And then when he died the text says, "When he had said this, he fell asleep."

Now what then does the word sleep refer to? The word sleep does not refer to his spirit, for his spirit went to be with the Lord Jesus. The word asleep has to do with our bodies, our bodies. You see, our bodies fall asleep when we die, but our spirits do not sleep. That's why also we do not speak of the resurrection of the spirit, for the spirit never dies. It is the body that rests. It is the body that falls asleep. It is not the spirit.

Now there are many false cults that go around teaching the doctrine of soul sleep. They say that when die, we are dead and we don't know anything. We are totally unconscious. Our soul falls asleep. That is a nonbiblical doctrine, for the Bible says the moment we die our spirits go to be with the Lord. It is our bodies that fall asleep. For the body will be raised at the time of the resurrection. So Paul you see, has chosen a

word that is very, very excellent for the expressing of a believer's death. He is with the Lord, but his body is asleep.

This is what the Lord meant one day when he was going to Lazarus' tomb. And he said, Now we're going down to Judea because he said, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." And the disciples said, Oh, Lord, if he's sleeping, that's fine. Let him take his nap. But then John says, But he was speaking about the sleep of death. They didn't understand it. They thought he meant that he was just taking a rest. Why go then, you see?

But now Paul says, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep." So what does he mean? He means believers who have died, whose bodies are in the grave, whose spirits are with the Lord. "That ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope."

"For" Now watch these "for"s as Paul describes what's going to happen to us. "For" Every one of these "for"s gives us some explanation. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Now you Thessalonians, I want you to notice this, he says, that when the Lord Jesus comes again from heaven, those who have died in Christ will be brought with him, that is, their spirits. As he descends from heaven, the spirits of those who have died will come with him.

Now you're asking me, What's going to happen with them? Are they going to miss the rapture? I want you to notice that they are going to come with him when he comes. That's the first thing that he says. But let's go on.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord (that is, we which have not died) we shall not precede them that are asleep."

Now what does he mean there? Why, he means that when the time of the resurrection comes, when the Lord Jesus comes in the air, we who are living on the earth are not going to precede those who have died in the resurrection. You're wondering

about those who have died and who are now with the Lord, whether they will miss the rapture. Why, I want you to know that we will not precede them. We shall not be first in the resurrection.

"For" You notice now another for. Every time he explains. "For the Lord himself."

Now you know these "for's remind me of a person painting a picture. I'm not an artist, but I do know some things that an artist does particularly a portrait painter. Now a portrait painter , the first time that you sit before him, he will do what he calls. I have spoken, I remember one time, oh six or eight or ten years ago now, I had an opportunity to converse with one of the outstanding portrait painters in the south. He was painting some members of my family in North Carolina. And knowing this passage and the fact that I had used this illustration, I wanted to get the right terminology.

And so I got him down in the living room of the house, and I said, Now what do you call it when at the first sitting or the second sitting, whenever it is, after you've looked at the structure and form of the face and features and so forth, what do you call it when you first draw in the outline of the portrait that you are going to paint? And I don't, I haven't looked at those terms in a good while, but I remember him saying something like this, Well, the first thing I do is to set out the fundamental structure of the subject. And then, of course, in the sittings that follow, I fill in details.

Now that is exactly what Paul is doing in this passage. He is setting out the fundamental structure of the rapture of the church. And each one of these little "for"s is just like another stroke of the brush. He has said in verse 14, Why God is going to bring them with the Lord Jesus. And then in verse 15 he has said about those who have died, We shall not precede them. Now in verse 16 he adds the final touch.

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first."

Now you Thessalonians have wondered about the dead in Christ, about your relatives and your friends who have died. And you've wondered whether they're going to miss the rapture. They're not going to miss the rapture. They're going to rise first. They take precedence in the rapture.

Jim McGinley was a very down to earth preacher. He was a Baptist preacher who preached in the east most of the time. He's famous all over the country, a very amusing man, very little, short dapper fellow, somewhat pugnacious. One time after a meeting, a woman came up to him with a [indistinct] and she put it on her nose and she said, Dr. McGinley, the Bible says that God is no respecter of persons. Then how is it that the dead in Christ rise first?

And Mr. McGinley, of course, was a little disturbed by this. He didn't know exactly what to say and like most professors, I know this because my students frequently ask me questions I cannot answer, so he said, Uh, uh, repeat the question, please.

Dr. McGinley, the Bible says God is no respecter of persons but the Bible also says the dead in Christ shall rise first. Explain that. Finally he said, Well, you know the dead are six feet farther down, that's why they rise first. [Laughter]

Well now, that's not really the explanation of this passage. But the point is that they do take precedence.

Now what about the living? "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." I read about one preacher one time who was objecting to this doctrine of the rapture of the church here. He said, This cannot happen because it's against the law of gravity. [Laughter]. "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together."

Now, let me say a word about this before I explain the points here. The word rapture is frequently used of the church here. The rapture of the church. Do you remember your Latin? Do you remember the word *rapi* ? That word means to seize, remember? And you remember its principle parts? And then the perfect present participle

was raptus, remember that? *Raptus -a -um*. Is some of the Latin coming back to you now? *Raptus -a -um*.

Well, anyway, from this word comes the word rapture. Now the word *rapi* means to seize or snatch. If I were to reach over and snatch that Bible out of Chip's hands, that would be *rapi*, to seize or to snatch. And the word rapture has come to mean a seizing or a catching up.

Now we often use it in different ways. We use it now of being enraptured with certain music. We may listen to some music that is so wonderful that we are caught up in ecstasy as we listen to it. That's rapture.

Now when we speak of the rapture of the church, we mean the catching up of the church. And that's the word which is referred to here in verse 17 in the Greek text with the word caught up. Now the Greek word is *harpaz*, but it means the same thing as the Latin. Our term rapture of the church comes from the Latin term, but the Greek term, which Paul wrote, means the same.

Alright, now let's summarize what Paul has said. What about those who have died? Well, in the first place their spirits are going to come with the Lord Jesus. We who are living and remaining shall not precede them. As a matter of fact, the dead in Christ shall rise first.

In other words, the bodies which have been placed in the grave of all who have died in Christ, when the Lord Jesus comes from heaven, those bodies shall be caught up. They shall rejoin their spirits which have come with the Lord. The bodies shall rejoin the spirits in resurrection. And then we who are living and remaining upon the earth shall meet with them and together we shall meet the Lord in the air. "And so shall we ever be with the Lord," Paul says.

This is the doctrine of the rapture of the church. The bodies of the dead are caught up first, rejoin their spirits, together we meet with them and then meet the Lord, so that the whole church meets the Lord Jesus in the air as a unit. All who have been born

again since the Day of Pentecost until the time of the rapture, one great company, which forms the bride of Christ.

But there is one thing lacking here is 1 Thessalonians 4. The bodies of those who have died will be resurrected, so they will have a body like the Lord Jesus Christ's own glorious body. What about our bodies? Paul hasn't said anything about that in this passage. Why has he omitted it? Well he wasn't answering that question here. The question here is What about those who have died? Not about the bodies of those who are alive. He wrote an epistle later on the Corinthians and in that epistle he tells us what will happen to our bodies.

So I want you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, now, and let's read what happens to our bodies when the Lord Jesus comes in the air. This will complete the picture. 1 Corinthians 15. This of course is the great chapter on the rapture of the church and the resurrection of the body. 1 Corinthians 15. Primarily here of course it is the resurrection of the body. Now 1 Corinthians 15, verse 51.

Well let's read beginning with verse 50.

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep. (What does that mean, we shall not all sleep? Well if sleep has to do with death, that means we shall not all die, doesn't it?) We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. (Not all of us will die, but every one of us will have a different body some day.) In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. (Now here "the dead shall be raised," that was what Paul was talking about in 1 Thessalonians 4. Those whose bodies have been corrupted have turned to dust. They shall be raised incorruptible.) And we shall be changed. For this corruptible (in the grave) must put on incorruption, and this mortal (this body which I have which is destined to die) will put on immortality. So when this

corruptible (that has died) shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal (which is destined to die) shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? (The bodies have been raised. Those who are mortal shall not die) O grave, where is thy victory? (You see those who have been placed in the grave shall be raised triumphant.) The sting of death is sin; the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

So let me review it once more. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes, he will bring the spirits of those who have died with him. Those who have died, their bodies are in the grave. Their bodies shall be resurrected first. They shall rejoin their spirits. They shall have a body like unto the Lord Jesus Christ's own glorious body. We who are living and remaining at the coming of the Lord, we shall in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, be changed so that we have a body like unto the Lord Jesus Christ's own glorious body, too. We shall rejoin all of the redeemed since the Day of Pentecost so that the whole church shall be together as one body. And then we shall all meet the Lord in the air. And we shall be forever with the Lord.

Now isn't that a wonderful prospect? Wouldn't it be wonderful if that should happen tonight? Would you be in this body? Would you be meeting the Lord Jesus in the air?

You know in the Old Testament there's a wonderful story about Isaac and Rebekah. Do you remember it? Well, it's a story like this. Abraham sent out his servant to get a bride for his son Isaac. The servant went out and it's all just a parable of the present age. For you see, God the Father has sent the Holy Spirit out since the Day of Pentecost bringing the gospel to this person and to that person, to this old person, this young person, this black person, this white person, this male, this female, bringing together the body of Christ. And so Abraham's servant went out.

Remember, he came into the land of Rebekah. He laid down certain conditions whereby he would know that this one was the one for Isaac. He saw Rebekah. Rebekah came down to the well and you remember the details. At any rate, he saw that this was the one that the Lord had for Isaac. He went home with her. And then he told her all about Isaac. That's what the Holy Spirit does today. You see, he tells men about Jesus Christ seeking to win them to him through the gospel.

Well ultimately Rebekah agreed to come to be the bride of Isaac. Isaac had never seen her. And so as they were coming back, near the end of the story in Genesis chapter 24, it says that Isaac went out at eventide to meditate under the trees. And he looked up and behold the camels were coming. And then Rebekah saw Isaac, and she asked the servant, Who is that? He said, Why, that's my Lord. And so they met. The text says that he took Rebekah to his mother Sarah's tent and they were married and he loved her. That's the story of the bride of Isaac, Rebekah, won by the testimony of the servant.

Now that is what the Lord has been doing in the present age. The gospel has been going out . He has been winning this person and that person and another since the Day of Pentecost all to form the bride of Christ. And then when the Lord Jesus comes, the whole church as the bride of Christ will meet him in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Now you know we are living in very, very interesting days. We're living in days in which if we read the Bible correctly, the time of the rapture of the church of Jesus Christ just might be not so far away. We cannot know. We cannot say. It may be fifty years from now. It may be a hundred. It may be more. It might be tonight. We cannot say. We know that there are certain signs in the Bible . We know that Israel will be a nation again. And Israel is already a nation. We know of other signs. And as far as the word is concerned, these signs that have to do with the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, some of them seem to be already with us, which means that the rapture when precedes it is that much closer.

Well I want to tell you just a little story as we close. There was a Bible conference just about ten years ago. A man by the name of Andrew Frasier, a very lovely Godly man was present there.

In this conference, the Bible teachers gathered together and they had no set speaker. They waited for the Holy Spirit to move upon those who had the message of God. And one man would stand up and give his message and then afterwards there would be quietness in the Holy Spirit. They would seek to have the Holy Spirit direct the conference. And then another man would get up and give his message and sit down and they would be quiet. And in the midst of this, Andrew Frasier was present.

There was a large group of Christians there and one man got up and gave his message that morning and then there was quiet and they were waiting and praying and asking the Lord for the right man to get up with the right message. And Mr. Frasier who was a very Godly and elderly man, suddenly got up out of his seat, walked up to the platform, stood with beaming face, smiling all over, clapping his hands like this, and said "The camels are coming, the camels are coming." And with that he sat down.

And those who were there in that conference said that that lifted that conference up so that that was one of the finest conferences they ever had, because he sounded the note, you see, of the soon advent of the Lord Jesus.

We're not interested in the camels. Isaac was not interested in the camels. He was interested in Rebekah. We're not interested in the signs. We're not interested in the fact that Israel is a nation today. We're not interested in the fact that there is apostasy in the church. We're not interested in the fact that we have failed in other ways. We are interested most of all in the fact that Jesus Christ may be at hand. And that would be wonderful.

Well our time is up. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we are so grateful to Thee for Thy word and for the promise of the rapture of the church. And we know, Lord, that though the church has failed, Thou hast a glorious prospect for the few who have believed. Help us to be faithful. Help us, Lord, to carry out the ministry of the word by the Holy Spirit so that Jesus Christ may be glorified and the church completed before his coming. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.