



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The Resurrection of the Church”

TRANSCRIPT

In our study of Eschatology we have made the following points in our studies. First of all, we attempted to point out in the present age God is silent, because it is a time of the gathering of the church. In present age, God is visiting the nations to take out of them a people for his name. So it should not be surprising to us that he is silent in so far as the miraculous is concerned. We are also told in addition to the fact that God is visiting the Gentiles to take out a people for his name in Acts 15:14, but we are told in Second Peter chapter 3 and verse 9, in the text to which we have referred several times, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” That text also teaches the fact that he is gathering his elect.

So this age is the age of the gathering together of the elect. It is the age of the visiting of the Gentiles in order that the church, the body of Jesus Christ, may be built up and completed. We also learned I hope in the first of our studies that when God does speak again according to the Scriptures, it will be speaking in judgment, and so this is the day in which the grace of God is being proclaimed. When God does begin to speak again in the visible and supernatural way, he will speak in judgment.

We also sought to show that the second coming is certain for logical reasons, for biblical reasons, and for theological reasons. And those theological reasons included the consummation of our individual salvation (the second coming is essential for that); the consummation of Israel’s national salvation (the fulfillment of the promises that were made to the nation); the consummation of international salvation (the fulfillment of the promises of the word of God that have been made to the Gentiles); and finally the second coming was absolutely certain necessary for the reason that God has set forth in the Scriptures a plan that covers his whole creation, Jew, Gentile, the church of God and the physical creation of which we are a part.

Then last time in our study we took a look at the calendar of future events. I hope we found it. I know it is exciting and thrilling, moving from the coming apostasy in the church -- a measure that is already with us -- through the advent of the Lord Jesus to the eternal state. We who are believers surely have a great hope – I’m not at all sure that we speak of it too much – in fact probably under the influence of criticism we do not speak of our heavenly hope enough. The Bible tells us quite plainly that the hope of the future, the prophetic word, is the source of a great deal of the moral values that are offered to us through the word of God.

George Morrison was one of the great preachers of Britain he preached for a long time in Scotland. He says in one of his sermons that he came under the influence of an old Scottish elder, a man who was a very godly man, and in addition to being a very godly man he was a man who had had a lot of experience. He had suffered a great deal. He knew most of the sorrow which life brings and through it all Mr. Morrison said he had kept a radiant faith.

One day when he was talking with Mr. Morrison he said an incidental remark, he said his only quarrel with the younger preachers was that they taught so little about heaven, and then Mr. Morrison went on to say that he rather thought that that criticism was justified. And he then went on to speak about the moral values of the Second

Advent teaching. He said it is really the secret of surrender to the purpose and plan of God. And he cited the text in Hebrews chapter 13 verse 14 in which the author of that great epistle states, “For we have here no continuing city but we seek one to come.”

Now that text begins with a for, and the hope that is set forth there is the reason for the preceding statement. And interestingly enough, the preceding statement is a call for the believers to go forth unto the Lord Jesus outside the camp bearing his reproach.

Coming back to Mr. Morrison and the elder. The elder said that he thought that the younger preachers do not speak about heaven enough, and then Mr. Morrison said in Hebrews chapter 13 verse 14 that text begins with a for, and gives the reason for the preceding statement which is, let us go forth therefore unto him outside the camp bearing his reproach. In other words, one of the incentives for witnessing in such a way that we boldly make our Lord Jesus Christ known is the hope that we have of the future, “For we have here no continuing city but we seek one that is to come.” The hope that we have of ultimately reaching the New Jerusalem is an incentive for Christian testimony. In other words, the second coming truth has moral value.

Mr. Morrison went on to say that not only was the hope of the second coming the secret to surrender but it also was a great aid to submission to the word of God. He comments upon the fact that Abraham and those who were with him dwelt in tents. They were willing to pass their time through this earthly existence dwelling in those temporary tents, because they looked for the city that had foundations. In other words, it was the heavenly hope that enabled them to live the life of faith that they did.

And then he went on to speak about the fact that the hope of the second coming of the Lord Jesus was the secret of spiritual peace and serenity. Because the Lord Jesus in John chapter 14, in the great passage so often read at funerals, “If ye believe in God believe also in me. In my father’s house there are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for

you, I will come again and receive you unto myself.” So, one of the great incentives for the constant exercise of faith is the second coming hope.

So this great prophetic message has tremendous moral value. We should never think of the doctrines of the word of God with reference to the future as simply doctrines that tickle our curiosity. They are doctrines that are designed to affect our spiritual life. They are designed to make us more moral, more spiritual, more Christian in all of our activity.

We want to study the resurrection of the church, for this is the next great event that we look forward to. Now we want to look at the resurrection of the church and then in our next study we will look at the translation of the church. So we shall concentrate on the resurrection. In our next study we shall concentrate on the translation, and then we want to talk about the time of this event – when it will occur.

Will you turn with me now to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, and will you listen as I read verses 13 through 18 of 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 13 through verse 18. The resurrection of those asleep.

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them who 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 who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord.”

That is very interesting. Evidently, the Apostle Paul had with reference to the rapture some special words from the Lord. Now Paul was not only an apostle. He also evidently had the gift of prophecy, true gift of prophecy, not that silly supposedly gift of prophecy that people claim today in which, as I say, they get up in meetings and give prophecy that the Lord is going to give us a great blessing next Sunday when we meet, in that insipid

kind of thing. You can tell the difference between the true biblical prophecies and the kind of prophecy that we have in the word of God.

“This we say unto you by the word of the Lord that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede (some of your texts read, prevent, that is the old English word that meant at the time the King James Version was translated “precede”) precede them who 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.”

Let’s stop at verse 16, because that is the section that deals with the resurrection of those asleep.

Thessalonica was a city without hope. Thessalonica was a city that was known for its materialisms. Thessalonica in that sense was a modern city. It was a city in which on the gravestones of individuals who had died there were things like, after death no reviving, after grave no meeting. It was a place, predominantly a heathen place, in which there was no hope of anything after this life which we are now living.

The Apostle Paul had gone to Thessalonica, and he had had proclaimed the word there. And God in his wonderful sovereign grace, his sovereign distinguishing grace, had singled out from that community of people in Thessalonica a group who had been converted. They were an elect company. They began to meet together as the church in Thessalonica. It was an amazing group, a group whose testimony spread over the whole world, we read, and the apostle, a few weeks afterwards writes them a letter. Evidently he had been in Thessalonica only a short time but he had unfolded for them some of the great truths of the prophetic word.

Now the apostle was quite a bit different from preachers today. The preachers today will tell you that you shouldn’t tell people about the day of the Lord and the antichrist and the rapture and all of those prophetic truths until they are well established in the word. You ought to tell them other more simple types of truth. But the apostle so far as we know was only there a relatively few weeks, probably under any reading of the text no more than six, perhaps as few as three Saturdays, but he taught them all of these things. For in the second epistle he says, when he is talking about the antichrist and the day of the Lord, “Don’t you remember when I was with you I told you these things?” So he told them great bodies of the truths of the prophetic word.

Now they were so impressed by what he had taught them, and they got the point so well that the Lord Jesus was going to come in the air and going to take them to be with them that when some of the Christians died, after the Apostle left, that threw them into a little bit of confusion. They then wondered if those who had died were really going to enjoy the second coming of the Lord Jesus, the rapture, on the same level as those that were alive. So the apostle, in seeking to answer the question that was before them, points to the fact that those who have died will have an equally favorable resurrection.

Now he is talking about an equally favorable resurrection that is evident, because he says in the 14th verse that if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. They will not lose out. They will have an equally favorable resurrection even though they have died. He does not say that they will be raised, but the Lord Jesus will bring them with him, and then in verse 14 he says that, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him,” stressing the fact that they are going to heaven equally favorable resurrection.

Verse 17, “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them they are not going to lose out in any way, and finally verse 18, “Wherefore comfort

one another with these words. In the 5th chapter in the 10th verse he said, “Who died for us that whether we are awake or asleep we shall live together with him.” So the point that had troubled them was not that whether they would have a resurrection, but the question was are we going to have the same favorable resurrection that those who are alive when he comes again shall have. And Paul’s answer is, yes they shall have that favorable resurrection.

He says but I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren. Now I have mentioned this before, but I have a good friend who is a preacher of an independent Baptist church in Michigan. And he has a very good sense of humor. And he loves to say every time he comes to a text like this to comment something along these lines. He said, “Now you notice Paul says, I would not have you to be ignorant brethren.” He says, now I wouldn’t mind being one of the grace brethren. I wouldn’t mind being one of the Plymouth brethren. But one of the brethren that I don’t want to be a part of is the ignorant brethren that Paul speaks of here [laughter]. So I would not have you to be ignorant brethren, and I don’t want you to be ignorant brethren either.

Concerning them who are asleep. Now this word, sleep, is a very important word I’m looking right at the Greek text right now, which says, now we do not wish ye to be ignorant brethren concerning the ones who are sleeping. Now the word sleep of course is an extremely interesting word, because it is a word that describes those who have died, “sleepers,” or the ones who are falling asleep.

The word is used metaphorically. It refers to the sleep of death. Sometimes in the New Testament it is used of those who fall asleep literally in the sense that they are taking a snooze. But it is also the metaphorical word for the Christian’s death. The Christian falls asleep, and of course, when speaks of the Christian’s death, it refers to the sleep of death of the Christian’s body.

Will you turn with me to Acts chapter 7 verse 59 and 60? Acts chapter 7 verses 59 and 60, and you will recognize since this is the 7th chapter of the Book of the Acts that we

are dealing with the experience of Stephen, the first martyr, the deacon who also preached. And we read in verse 59 of Acts chapter 7,

“And they stoned Stephen calling upon God and saying 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 will you notice the two expressions. We read here in verse 59 that Stephen called upon God as he was being stoned and said, Lord Jesus receive my spirit, and then when he had added, Lord lay not the sin to their charge, he fell asleep. Now if we may assume, and I think we may that Stephen’s prayer was a Scriptural prayer, he prayed that God or the Lord Jesus would receive his spirit, so his spirit went to be with the Lord but the text says he fell asleep. Since his spirit went to be with the Lord, what is it that fell asleep? Well of course, the only thing that is left is his body. His body fell asleep, so the term sleep is a term that refers to the death of a Christian’s body; his spirit goes to be with the Lord. So the Bible then teaches not souls sleep but bodies sleep. The body falls asleep.

Now the body of a Christian is taken and placed in the grave. The spirit goes to be with the Lord, so when a Christian dies, his body falls asleep, his spirit is just – as a matter of fact; it’s now really alive in the fullest sense, for it is in the presence of the Lord. So the Bible does not teach soul sleep. It teaches body sleep. Now when we read here I do not wish you to be ignorant brethren concerning the ones who are falling asleep, we are therefore speaking about Christians whose bodies are falling asleep, but whose spirit upon the moment of death go to be with the Lord. That of course is how when he comes he shall bring them with him.

But now there is something else that is very appropriate about the use of this term, sleep. The connotation is certainly appropriate, because it is so like the death of a

Christian. A Christian’s death is like falling asleep. Now what does natural sleep suggest to you, apart from snoring? Well of course it suggests to all of us a time of rest. I have been blessed. I can fall asleep in about two minutes, sometimes shorter than that, and I frequently flop on bed at home. Take off my shoes careful to put something on the front of the bed so my feet will not be on the cover. I have someone around my house who doesn’t like that, and almost by the time I get my feet up, I am sleeping. Now that is rest, and I really enjoy it. Sleep suggests rest.

Now when a Christian dies, he enters a time of rest. Rest. But not only that, the term sleep suggests life. That is, when a person is sleeping, he is not dead. If he is dead, he is not sleeping according to our common language. If we say he’s asleep, we infer that he is resting but he is alive, and in my case I give visible sounds of the fact that I am alive. They can be heard – I understand – at considerable difference. In fact, my daughter used to complain when we had a dog many years ago who also slept in the room and also gave sounds of the fact that she was alive, that it was very difficult to sleep on the second story of the house with all of those sounds coming from below. [Laughter]

Anyway, to sleep then suggests life, and of course the Christian whose body has died and has been placed in the grave is with the Lord living in fellowship with him. In fact, the prepositions of the New Testament used to describe that are the prepositions frequently that express face to face confrontation. When I say, I am with someone at a certain place, I use a certain Greek preposition which suggests communion and relationship and fellowship. That is the word that is used when we read absent from the body but present with the Lord. Not there as a dumb spirit, but a spirit that is in fellowship with God that is the kind of relationship that we have with him.

And finally of course, the term sleep suggests an awakening, and in the case of those whose bodies have fallen asleep and have been placed in the grave but whose spirits are with the Lord there shall be an awakening for the body. Now the awakening for the body is the resurrection of the body. That is the awakening of the body.

Incidentally, our term, cemetery, is a term that is derived from the Greek word *koimao*, and specifically the word *koimaterion* which means a place where the sleepers are put -- a cemetery -- so that a cemetery suggests the idea that bodies are sleeping awaiting the resurrection. So contrary to the cults, then, the Bible teaches body sleep, not soul sleep, and in that metaphor of sleep we have a beautiful representation of what it is for a Christian to die.

Now of course a non-Christian, the description of his death is not that of sleeping. It is very striking that this word which is used to describe believers who have died, asleep, is never used of unbelievers. Because while their bodies are placed in the grave and while their spirits are in existence, they are not living in the presence of the Lord, and while they shall have a resurrection so that they may have a body to suffer the pangs of eternal torment, they shall not have a resurrection body like our Lord’s own glorious resurrection body. So that’s a special word for believers.

If you are in the audience and you are not a believer, you cannot say of yourself that when you die you fall asleep in Jesus. You die. May I repeat that; you die. And all of our euphemisms which we use cannot hide the fact that it is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment.

Now then the apostle says, “I want to say to you that you sorrow not even as others who have no hope, for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again even them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” So it’s interesting then to note that when we die and our bodies are placed in the grave and our spirits go to be with the Lord because we abide in Christ, it’s evident since he brings us back with him at the time of the rapture that having died in Christ, we continued in Christ.

Now that’s not a surprise because we know when we believe in the Lord Jesus, we receive eternal life and that eternal life is life that never ends. We cannot lose our eternal life of course; that’s why it is called eternal life. That’s why we believe the Bible teaches the perseverance of the saints, because of the perseverance of the Savior, and he

keeps us in life, so that we have securely life. And having died in Christ we continued in him, and when he comes at the rapture he will bring us with him. In other words the spirits that are with the Lord at the time of the rapture will return with the Lord; their bodies are in the grave but their spirits return with the Lord.

Now we read on for this we say unto you by the word of the Lord. Now I think it is most striking that in the Bible the messages that come to us come as the word of the Lord. I hope you won't be offended by what I am going to say. I intended to say it last week. It probably would have been a little more appropriate, but nevertheless Paul's mention of the word of the Lord brings it to mind again. There is one thing that we Christians always need to remember, because we are so tempted to forget it. And that is that the word of God, used by the spirit of God, is sufficient for all of our Christian life. The word of God is sufficient when used by the spirit of God for all of our Christian life. Now if you run, hither, thither and yon for help, you will sooner or later be disappointed, defeated, disturbed, upset, unfruitful, unhappy, disappointed -- even disappointed in the Lord -- which is the worst disappointment of all. The word of God is sufficient.

Now there are people I think who do not appreciate this. I don't want to say anything against the usefulness and enjoyment of Christian music. I don't want to say anything against the significance of Christian culture, Christian art. There are many ways in which a Christian may fully express the kind of life that God has given him, but I want to say this very plainly and clearly so that you won't misunderstand: the word of God is primary. There are often people who say, but I get such a blessing from music. Now let me say to you I love music too some of my friends don't think so, because I make these little statements like I am making—no I don't hate music I just think it ought to be put in its proper place. I don't hate art; I don't know much about art – but I don't hate art or the finer things of Christian culture. I think they have their place, but they are secondary. You see, God has revealed himself not in music, not in art, not in culture; he has revealed

himself in the holy Scriptures which in turn tells us that he has also revealed himself in the creation. But the authority is in the word of God.

Now the reason that you get something out of music, because some of you are saying, Oh I get so much out of Beverly Shea singing a hymn. Well of course you do. You know why? Because you’re bringing so much to it that you have learned from Scripture, but if you were to get up and hum a tune then you wouldn’t get anything if you had no theology. Now I can just hear a message in song if I know the song, and I know the words of it, I can get a blessing from it. But I’m not getting it from the music; I’m getting it primarily from the word that the music is seeking to proclaim.

Now if music was intended, and art and culture if they were intended, to be put on the plane of the word of God, then the Lord Jesus would have come from heaven and whistled and hummed. [Laughter] Now I had to say something silly like that so you would get the point.

Now the Apostle Paul says this, we say unto you, by the word of the Lord, and let us never forget that the Bible, the special revelation of the word of God, is to have the supreme place in the Christian’s life, and we won’t need the psychiatrist, the psychologists and the others nearly as much if you stick to the Scriptures. I hedged a little there; I don’t think we need them at all unless some unusual things happen. There are some times when some unusual things happen.

Well, “this we say unto you by the word of the Lord that we who are alive and remain.” That is a most interest expression because what Paul literally says is we who are alive and are left remaining – that’s what it means literally, “left remaining.” In other words, it suggests that others have not fallen asleep by accident and that it is God’s will that we be here. We are left by God remaining.

So he speaks then to us who are still breathing. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them who are asleep. In other words, the resurrection of the living will not take

place before the resurrection of those who have died. They will have an equal place in the resurrection and the rapture. Their resurrection will be in the same favorable circumstances as ours.

For he says—now have you noticed how Paul has been using the term, for, quite frequently? For’s are explanatory. Sometimes they give the reason, but the sense is very similar. He has been saying, for, verse 14, further explanation; for verse 15. Now he is going to explain why those who are living will not precede those who are asleep. “For the Lord himself shall ascend 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.” They will not only not be left out, but they shall rise first. Now that’s his answer to the question that was given. They shall have not only as favorable a resurrection; they shall actually be raised first so he is explaining then further.

You know an artist when he paints a portrait, he does what he calls sometimes blocking out the portrait. The first sitting – the first sitting usually; I know so much about this because of course I’ve never painted a picture in my life – the first sitting usually a rather rough sketch is drawn. Now a person cannot sit and look the same way for long. Now I can sit and look handsome for a very little while, but soon my face begins to sag and my features become different, and so if I were sitting for a portrait, I’m sure the artist would have to have me come back over and over again. That usually is what takes place.

I have a friend in Houston. He is a preacher. He has 17 pictures of himself in his house. We have counted them; at least this was a few years ago. He likes pictures of himself, and then I went down not long ago, and I looked and right behind his desk, as I remember in this large room which interestingly enough is decorated to the décor of the Confederate army – which I loved, naturally – Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson and all of them there, you know. [Laughter] And here is this giant portrait of himself right behind the desk. [More laughter] And I said to him how many times did you have to sit for that portrait? He said, oh, many times! enjoying it all I’m sure.

My sister once had her portrait made by a well known artist in the Southeast, so when he came over to be entertained at our home one day in North Carolina, I asked him, because I had been studying this passage, “Mr. Reynolds, what do you say when you sit down with a person for the first time and you sketch that person’s features?”

He said, “Well I call it, establishing the fundamental structure.” Now that is really what Paul has been doing in this passage. He has been establishing the fundamental structure of the teaching concerning the rapture and each one of these verses fills in another detail. He says, I don’t want you to be ignorant concerning the ones who have fallen asleep, I don’t want you to sorrow like others who don’t have any hope. To explain why those who sleep in the Lord Jesus will be brought with the Lord Jesus when he comes for his second coming. To explain, this I say unto you by the word of the Lord that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not be precede those who have fallen asleep. To explain.

As a matter of fact, those who comes with him shall rise first. So he’s just been explaining, putting in further details just as an artist does until finally the picture is complete. In the 16th verse he states the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God. I would say that if we looked at this text without looking at it in the original text, we might think that when the Lord Jesus comes in the rapture in the air – incidentally the term for air here is not the term for the third heavens or the second heavens, but it is the term for the atmospheric heavens, and so the Lord Jesus is going to come into the air which we know as the air, the atmospheric heavens – but we read he shall come with a shout with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God.

Now we would think from reading this perhaps that there are going to be three sounds, but the Greek text is fairly plain there are not going to be three sounds but one sound. Now I don’t have time to enter into the technical reasons why this is so, but I have put on the transparency a simple little explanation of what is involved here. For he

says the Lord himself shall descend with a shout. Now that tells us what the sound is that accompanies is coming.

You will notice there is no word of conjunction between the shout and the voice of the archangel, because the voice of the archangel and the trump of God are explanatory of the shout. He shall come with a shout – it’s the voice of an archangel (that tells us who gives the shout) so the archangel will be responsible for the shouting. And how shall he do it? Well he will do it on the trumpet of God. So what we look for is not a babble of sounds – shout, archangel, trumpet – but a very clear sound, and to translate it, I would translate it like this, “For the Lord himself shall ascend from heaven with a shout such as an archangel would make playing upon the trumpet of God.” So what we then are to hear is a loud, vigorous, vital, trumpet sound which the archangel plays upon God’s trumpet.

Now I say that because some of you might miss it. You might be looking for more noise than is coming, but there is just going to be one clarion trumpet call played by Michael the Archangel, and you’re going to hear it, and you’re going to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Of course at this point, one might ask, well what about the resurrection of the living? Now Paul doesn’t tell us anything about that here; that’s the reason I want to talk about what transpires in the body of the living. You see, he is not concerned with the living. the Thessalonians were concerned about those who had died. So he doesn’t say anything more than the fact that we will be caught up. He doesn’t say anything about the change that takes place in our body. He says they are raised, but we are caught up. He explains that in 1 Corinthians 15 because there that’s the issue at that point.

At any rate, there is going to be a great gathering together. Now he says, we who are alive and remain shall be caught up, and I want to say a word about the word, caught up. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up. Oh I did forget something. The dead in Christ shall rise first. Now what that means is when the Lord Jesus comes

with the spirits of those who have died with him, the first movement in the resurrection is a movement that touches the bodies that are in the graves; the dead in Christ shall rise first. So the first of the movements when the Lord reaches the air or just previous to that is the bodies come up from the grave. The dead in Christ rise first. They participate equally in the resurrection. That’s the answer to their question.

Jim McGinley was a well-known evangelist who was an Irishman. He was a most unusual man. He was one of the most humorous men that ever preached in the 20th century and also one of the most controversial. He preached in London, Ontario for a long time, and he was a man who was strongly opposed to the Roman Catholic Church, having been an Irishman. He had a personal feeling I presume with reference to them, but when he preached in London, Ontario he was such a controversial figure in that city that you could, they told me, walk the streets of London in summertime and you could hear the message that Mr. McGinley (he was on the radio everyday at noon) you could hear the message he preached all over that city in the homes of the Catholics and in the homes of the Protestants as well. He was a very funny man. I have a tape of one of his messages; it’s very funny.

In one of his meetings after he had spoken on the rapture, someone came up to him, a very cultured woman had wondered into the meeting. And she was a very dignified kind of woman, and she came up, and she came up and she wore a *pence nez*, one of those types of glasses – a French word really means “a nose pincher” – and so she wore it and she came up to Mr. McGinley and she said, “Mr. McGinley, the Bible says the dead in Christ rise first. Well, since God is no respecter of persons, Mr. McGinley, why do the dead in Christ rise first?”

Now like a good preacher wanting some time, he said, “What is that you said?”
[Laughter]

She said, “Mr. McGinley since God is no respecter of persons, why do the dead in Christ rise first?”

He said, “Well I suppose it’s because they’re six feet farther down,” [laughter] which is not a good theological reason, but probably got him out of the hole.

In the 17th verse we read about the rapture of those that are alive then, then this indicates that the order is important, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with him in the clouds, caught up together – that’s the biblical justification of the doctrine of the rapture.

Now the rapture is a term that is derived from the Latin translation of this passage. In the Latin Vulgate at this point, when it says, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together, the Latin form is *rapiamur*; we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together. *Rapiamur*, remember is a form derived from the Latin word *rapio*, *rapui*, *raptus*, and *raptus*, the passive participle, is the part of the Latin word from which we get the word, rapture, in English. So rapture is a term derived from the Latin translation of this particular verse.

I mention this because I listened to a tape not long ago by a man whom I respect in many ways, but who was attacking the doctrine of the rapture. And in the course of the attack he made the ridiculous statement, and he was a very well educated man, that there is no justification whatsoever for the term rapture, and that those who believe in the rapture have no biblical justification whatsoever for the term. Well, we could call it as one of my friends calls it, the great snatch – you can tell he is from Campus Crusade – but the term caught up together is the translation of the word from which in it’s Latin version we get the English word, rapture. Rapture is perfectly all right; if you want to call it the catching up, that’s fine. But at this point we have fulfillment of John chapter 13 in verse 3 where the Lord Jesus said, if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive unto myself.

This is the fulfillment of that. The effect on others of the rapture has caused a great deal of curiosity and serious discussion among Christians. What is going to be the effect of the rapture? I don’t know anything in the Bible that says anything specifically

about the effect on the world of the rapture. I am wondering what is going to be the effect on the world. Perhaps the effect of the voice that came to Paul when he met the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road illustrates it, for remember, when Paul heard from the Lord, others heard a sound but did not understand the voice that was spoken.

Perhaps Michael when he gets on that trumpet of God shall make such a sound that people will hear a sound of some kind, but will not understand what it is, and we will go to be with the Lord. I do know this, that they will have an explanation for it. People will believe anything. All you have to do to see that is look at Candid Camera and the kinds of things that happened there and the beliefs that people have.

I know one thing. I wish that it were possible for me to remain one week after the rapture. I have not prayed this prayer because that would be an unscriptural prayer, but you know, I would like to remain one week afterwards so I could attend about a half a dozen liberal churches to hear the explanations [laughter] that are given from the rapture, but I’m sure that comes from my old nature. [Boisterous laughter]

Now it says here that we shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, the atmospheric heavens, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. That is the simplest idea to be with the Lord. I do not know of any better definition of heaven than that. So shall we ever be with the Lord.

And finally the apostle realizing that the hope of the second coming is to influence us morally, says, wherefore – here is the inference that we may draw from this great doctrine of the resurrection of the church – wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Now it is evident I think that the Lord Jesus is a person who has known as well as any other man what it is to experience the sorrow of bereavement. It is a grace that has come from him, that he has lifted the veil covering the future with this beautiful word of the Lord, for he knew the terrible sorrow of bereavement. There is every evidence that Joseph his father had died by the time he was crucified. When he died he knew the

sorrow that would come to Mary and to the apostles. He had been by Jarisus’s daughter at her death. He had been at the widow of Nain’s beir and had seen her weep for her only son. He had stood at Lazarus’ tomb, and there we read in the text of the Greek at that point, Jesus sobbed. Now that’s the meaning of that word he sobbed he knew the sorrow of bereavement and through the word of the Lord given to the apostle, he has given us this beautiful comforting passage for those who have lost loved ones.

Now this passage is for believers. It is not for unbelievers. Unbelievers have no hope at all, and in the context in which the apostle gave us this passage in the context of Thessalonica and in the context of the world of Paul, it must have been a tremendous revelation. Let me read you a letter from Eirene an Egyptian who lived in the 2nd Century AD not long after Paul wrote this epistle to a family that was in mourning. This letter has been discovered, it’s one of the oxyrhynchus papyri letters,

“Eirene, to Tyanophrus and Philo, good comfort, I am as sorry and weep over the departed one as I wept for Didymus and all the things whatsoever it were fitting I have done, and all mine, Epaphroditus and Thumthyan and Philion and Appolonius and Plantus, but nevertheless against such things ne can do nothing. Therefore, comfort thee one another.”

Now if that isn’t anticlimax. Against these things one can do absolutely nothing; wherefore comfort one another with nothing. The apostle says comfort one another with these words; it is the word of Scripture that is the comfort for Christians in time of trial.

Madame Currie and her husband will be forever remembered for the discovery of radium. On April 19, 1906 Professor Currie was run down by a carriage and instantly killed. Madame Currie has a chapter or there is a chapter in the life of Madame Currie which describes her wild grief in one of the most tragic and poignant passages in modern literature. This is what she says, after describing the funeral in which she clung to the

body, she kissed the face of the corpse again and again. She wrote in her diary everyday to the one who had gone, and among the entries are these words,

“Your coffin was closed and I could see you no more. They came to get You, a sad company. We saw you go down into the deep hole, then the dreadful procession of people that wanted to take us away. Jack and I resisted. We wanted to see everything until the end. They filled the grave and put flowers on it. Everything is over. Pierre is sleeping in his last sleep beneath the earth. It’s the end of everything, everything, everything.”

Science, philosophy, culture, all human thought has no hope for the bereaved. But the apostle’s message is a message that comforts and sustains and edifies and quickens and further has moral effect of the life of a Christian. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. May God help us to not only have a curiosity about Scripture concerning the future, but may these great passages of Scripture inform our lives in such a way that a serenity and a submission and surrender to the will of God becomes our experience. Lets bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee Lord for these great works that have come to us from the beloved apostle. We thank Thee for him and for his faithfulness. We thank Thee for this great word which Thou hast given us, and O Father, may it minister to us in such a way that the saints are blessed and the world.

“The Resurrection of the Church” by S. Lewis Johnson
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