

**CAUGHT UP TO MEET THE LORD**  
**(LOOKING FOR THE BLESSED HOPE)**

I Thessalonians 1, 9-10, 4: 13-5: 11, and Titus 2: 13 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

This morning God has placed on my heart the need for all of us, including children and pre-teens, to take notes, and to learn about one of the most important events yet to come. The catching away of the Bride of Christ, the Church is coming soon. None of us know the day or the hour, but we can know when the day is close. If the Lord awakened you this morning and called your name and said, “Are you ready?” You might well ask, “For what?” What if He asked you, “Are you ready to meet Me in the clouds? I am coming soon!” Would you be honest in saying, “Lord, I am ready!?” Are you ready to meet the Lord in the air? Is this your blessed hope? In Titus 2: 13, Paul spoke of this coming event as “looking for our **“blessed hope,”** (our happy, encouraging hope) the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” The word Paul used for **appearing** was **epiphanea**. It means a bright, glorious manifesting or coming of God to man. Paul told us in I Timothy 6: 14 to “keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When Paul was ready to be martyred, he spoke of the crown of righteousness (II Timothy 4: 8) which the Lord, “will award to me on that Day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

In II Thessalonians 2: 1-2, Paul called this appearing **“being gathered together to Jesus.”** We read, “Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to Him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the Day of the Lord has come.” The word Paul used for being gathered-together to Jesus was a word **episunagoge**. It means a complete collection of people assembled-together to worship the Lord. Paul was referring to this appearing of Jesus in the air and His collecting of us—both the dead in Christ and those of us as believers still alive when Jesus comes to meet us in the air. This word **episunagoge** is used only one other time in the New Testament in Hebrews 10:25 where Apollos, Barnabas, or whoever wrote Hebrews said, “Not forsaking or neglecting to **meet together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more, as you see the Day drawing near.” Beloved, this meeting with the Lord, when He appears in the clouds and the dead in Christ rise first, this meeting is drawing near—and God will collect in the air every true child of His, His Bride, both those who died in Jesus, and those still living. What a collection, what an assembling, what a meeting with Jesus in the air!

This gathering together to Jesus in the air, this appearing of Jesus in the clouds, is also called in our text in II Thessalonians 4: 16, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command/shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who

are alive and are left, will be caught up together/raptured together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we always be with the Lord.” This word Paul used for catching us up together or rapturing us is the word **harpadzo**. This word has four distinct meanings, and they all refer to this catching of believers up to heaven to meet the Lord in the air. (1) It means to snatch up, carry off in a military fashion—by force—nothing can stop the Lord. No enemy of God can stop the rapture of the church. Any attempt to stop the Lord by our mighty enemy will be overpowered. No one can stop the Almighty. (2) It means to claim for His own eagerly. The Rapture is Jesus coming to claim us for His own, and carry us, His Bride over the threshold of time into eternity with Him. This means that the One who died to redeem us by His precious blood, and who purchased us out of the slavery of sin, will come to take us away to be with Him. Rev. 3: 10. (3) It means to snatch away speedily. There is a suddenness to the rapture of the church. It will be in a split second, a nanosecond, and all born-again believers will be with Jesus in the clouds. Paul said in I Corinthians 15: 51 that this was a mystery. He wrote, “Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep/die, but we shall all be changed, 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 shall be changed.” 4) to seize and take for oneself, to rescue us from destruction. God will not leave us forever on this sin-cursed world. Recap this. Let me share with you four meanings of what this catching up to Jesus does and does not mean.

**BEING CAUGHT UP TO MEET JESUS IN THE AIR WILL NOT SPARE US FROM AFFLICTION, TRIALS, PRISON, OR MARTYRDOM.**

(I.) If you are looking for a way out of any troubles on earth, forget the Rapture. This rapture of the church is God’s divine prophecy, and it will happen. But there are no escape hatches for saints who want no tribulation, trial, or persecution. Jesus said in John 16: 33, “In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” The word Jesus used is **thlipsis** and it means pressure, anguish, persecution, affliction, and any burdening of our spirits. **Thlipsis** literally comes from the system of making flour. The weight of stone used to crush grain into flour means crushing grinding, and pulverizing grain into flour. It meant martyrdom for Paul and for all Jesus’ disciples except John, who after being placed in boiling oil and lived, was banished to the Isle of Patmos, where God gave him the Revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Any Bible teacher that suggests in their preaching and teaching that God’s clear teaching of the Rapture of His church is a failure to accept suffering for Jesus is denying the Blessed Hope the Bible teaches. You and I may be imprisoned or martyred in our lifetime. What is happening right now in our nation could mean that our freedom to worship and our freedom to preach the Gospel may be taken away. This could happen in 2021. Be ready! 2ndly,

**BEING CAUGHT UP TO MEET JEUS IN THE AIR WILL COME PRIOR TO GOD POURING OUT HIS WRATH IN THE GREAT TRIBULATION.**

(II.) The Bible clearly tells us that God’s wrath is strictly reserved for the wicked and those who will not obey and follow Him. Paul wrote about us before we were saved in Ephesians 1: 1-10. He said we were once dead in our trespasses and sins, sons of disobedience, and “we were by nature, children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” Paul wrote in Romans 5: 9, “Since therefore we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.” In our text today, Paul wrote in I Thessalonians 5: 9, “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” God’s wrath is different from His discipline. God’s wrath (**orge**) is punitive, while discipline is loving. **Orge** means justified abhorrence, God’s passionate vengeance on the wicked. If we are legitimate sons and daughters of God, not bastards, God disciplines and scourges every son He receives to Himself. Hebrews 12: 5-11.

The coming Great Tribulation Moses called it “the day of their calamity— Deuteronomy 32:35. Zephaniah calls it “the day of the Lord’s anger.” (Zeph. 2: 2) Daniel in Daniel 12: 1 spoke of this time saying, “And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.” Zephaniah 1:15-17 speaking of this time said, “A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. I will bring distress on mankind so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung.” Jesus said of this day in Matthew 24: 21, “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.” Paul called this Great Tribulation (a 7-year period) “the wrath to come.” John on the Isle of Patmos in Revelation 3: 10 called it “the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world.” In Revelation 14: 7, we read, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come.”

God will use the Great Tribulation to execute His wrath on those who oppose Him. He will also use this time of His wrath to purge Israel, Ezekiel 20: 37-38, to purge out the rebels, and with 144,000 Jewish witnesses to bring all Israel (Zechariah 12: 10) to look upon Jesus whom they pierced and to open a fountain in the house of David for cleansing. There will be many converted in this day of the Antichrist and the 666, but people will find Jesus, and be beheaded for coming to Him. Revelation 7: 13, 14 asked whom he saw in the long white robes (stoles)? The answer was, “These are the ones coming out of the Great Tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Yet this Meeting in the air will precede the Great Tribulation because this is the time of God’s wrath. Seven times, the Great Tribulation in Revelation 4-19 is spoken of as the day of God’s wrath. We read in Rev. 6: 16-17, where those on the earth will call to “the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who is seated

on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand.” In Revelation 14: 10 speaks of anyone who takes the mark of 666 and worships the beast “will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured out in strength into the cup of His anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.” John calls this time in Rev. 14: 19 the “winepress of the wrath of God.” The seven golden bowls poured out in Rev. 15: 7 and 16: 1 are called the golden bowls full of the wrath of God, and 15: 1 states, “with them the wrath of God is finished.” In Rev. 16: 19, John speaks of Babylon the great being made “to drain the cup of the wine of the fury of God’s wrath.”

Since the coming of the Lord is in two parts, the catching away and Christ’s return, the Bride of Christ caught up to meet the Lord in the air will return with Christ to earth, and Jesus will return on a white horse with the armies of heaven, arrayed in white linen, white and pure, following him on white horses. (Rev. 19: 14) Then in Rev. 19: 15, we read, “From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.” (Armageddon) In Revelation 4-19: 6, there is no mention of the church. In Revelation 19: 7-8, we find the church, protected by God from His wrath at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in Heaven. We read, “Hallelujah! For the Lord, our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready; it was-granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure.” Where will we be during God’s wrath? Two church events in heaven will be: (1)-The Judgment Seat of Christ and Romans 14: 10 states we as believers “will all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ.” (2) The other event is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. (Revelation 19: 6-8)

### **BEING CAUGHT UP TO MEET JESUS IN THE AIR IS A WORD FROM THE LORD; IT IS IMMINENT AND HAS 3 SPECTACULAR SOUNDS.**

(III.) Paul wrote about this catching up meeting with Jesus in the air, saying in I Thessalonians 4: 15, “For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede, or go ahead of those who have fallen asleep (in Jesus).” The return of the Lord is found all over the Old Testament, but when Paul was caught up to heaven, God revealed then or some other moment this special word from God, that Paul called a mystery in I Cor. 15: 51. Beloved, this meeting in the air is God’s blessed hope for His Bride. This coming is imminent. No signs will be given to prepare us for the arrival of the rapture. This catching up meeting could happen before I finish this message. Augustine said of this day, “The last day is hidden that every day may be regarded (as the last day.)” When Jesus returns and we come with Him as He plants His feet on the Mt. of Olives, Rev. 1: 7, we read, “Behold, He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the

earth will wail on account of Him. Even so. Amen.” The Rapture, the gathering of us to Him will be selective, for believers only. John 14: 1-6. “I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there you will be also.”

Now what are these three spectacular sounds at this meeting? It appears only believers will hear these sounds. In Matthew 24: 36, Jesus said concerning that hour that no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” In Matthew 24: 40, Jesus said, “Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.” Some will be taken up, and many left behind. The three sounds true believers will soon hear. (1) **The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command/shout.** (I Thess. 4: 16) The Commander in Chief will shout His command for the dead in Christ to rise and for all living believers to rise in a mighty resurrection and translation. Paul says in I Cor. 15: 53 states, “For this perishable body will put on the imperishable, and this mortal body shall put on immortality.” I am ready for the cry of command. (2) Back to our text-**the Lord Himself will descend with the voice of the archangel.** God will order in His command the voice of the archangel, Michael no doubt, to put this meeting in the air into motion. (3) **The Lord Himself will descend with the sound of the trumpet.** Paul calls this the last trumpet in I Cor. 15: 52. Why? I believe it is because the seven trumpets in the Great Tribulation are not for the Bride of Christ to be waiting for. After the 7-year tribulation, comes the Honeymoon for the Bride of Christ—the 1000-year Millennium. We are pre-millennial. There are four views of the tribulation—pre-trib—before the 7 years, mid-trib-3.5-when the Anti-christ is revealed, pre-wrath—shortly after this, but before God’s wrath is poured out, and all three of those views are pre-wrath or pre-great tribulation. Then the post tribulation view is that the church must endure God’s wrath—all happens at once.

#### **BEING CAUGHT UP TO MEET JESUS IN THE AIR IS GOD’S PROMISE TO ENCOURAGE OUR SPIRITS AS THE DEVIL TRIES TO WIN. (IV.)**

Notice I Thess. 4: 18 and 5: 11. Beloved, God is still on the throne. Our hope is in Christ alone and in His Word alone. The great evangelist, Billy Sunday said, “The Lord does not come to the world at the time of the Rapture, but only reveals himself to the members of His Body. At the time of His resurrection, He was only seen by those who believed on Him. Pilate and the High Priest, and those who crucified Him, did not know that He was risen. So, it will be at the time of the Rapture. The world will not know that He has been here, and they will have no knowledge of Him until He comes with the members of His Body, at the close of the Tribulation.” I close with words from the prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon, “Oh beloved, let us...every morning...get up as if that were the morning which Christ would come. Take this for the guide of your whole life. Act, as if Jesus would come in the act in which you are engaged—and if you would not wish to be caught in that act, by the Coming of the Lord, let it not be your act.” Amen.