

# Caught up to be with Christ

## I Thessalonians 4:13-18

### I Thessalonians Sermon Series # 27

On March 9, 1979<sup>1</sup>, nine satellites stationed at various points in the solar system simultaneously recorded a bizarre event deep in space. It was, in fact, *the most powerful burst of energy ever recorded*. Astronomers who studied the readings were awestruck, mumbling to themselves.

The burst of gamma radiation lasted for only one 10<sup>th</sup> of a second ... but in that instant it emitted as much energy as the sun does in 3,000 years. An astrophysicist named Doyle Evans, who works at the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratories in New Mexico, said the energy being emitted was at a rate of 100 billion times greater than the energy emission rate of the sun. If the gamma-ray burst had occurred in the Milky Way galaxy, it would have set our entire atmosphere aglow. If the sun had suddenly emitted the same amount of energy, our earth would have vaporized. Instantly.

There's more. The satellites were able to pinpoint the location of the burst to a spot in a galaxy known as N-49, which is associated with the remnants of a supernova believed to have exploded about ten thousand years ago. When a star explodes into a super-nova, the outer shell is blown away and the inner core condenses from its own gravity to create a neutron star. That core becomes a single, huge nucleus, shrinking from a size larger than the sun (860,000 miles in diameter) to a compact ball no more than five miles across. Those neutrons are so incredibly dense that one cubic inch weighs 20 million, million pounds. Many astronomers believe the satellite studies will open up a new understanding of neutron stars and other objects in the heavens.

As untrained and ignorant as we may be of the technical side of all this, it does underline the purpose of prophecy. God says, "Turn your eyes away from what passes away and onto the Person about whom and with whom eternity revolves!" The end of the Universe as we know it will be something like this gamma flash, like the Death Star of the ultimate Star Wars-and I have no plans to have anything valuable to me at its premier showing. Send anything you want to last out of range, time, money, people all can be sent ahead!

But let's not overlook Peter's piercing question in verse 11. Facing an imminent execution, the old fisherman lifts his weathered face and looks across the centuries at you and me.

➤ Can you feel his gaze?

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<sup>1</sup> Swindoll, Quest for Character, p. 54.

- Can you see the concern etched in deep lines around his eyes?
- Can you hear his gravelly voice? "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, *what sort of people ought you to be . . . ?* "

Let's learn tonight as we start to look at the end of the universe as narrated by God !

Are we acting like we are waiting for Jesus ?

I'd like you to join me on a journey tonight with two stops. Let's go briefly to a dark, murky place known as the grave and see the activities of the dead... Then let's go to another dark and murky place, the Catacombs and see from the walls a message of hope to inspire our hearts... Turn to our text, I Thess., 4: 13-18 and let me show you what we are studying.

IT'S THE DESTINATION AND HOPE OF THE DEAD IN CHRIST AND THE LIVING IN CHRIST. IT'S YOUR HOPE TOO!

This passage has 5 parts: Because of Christ's coming, because of his promised return we have

- v. 13 We are to be a contrast to the lost
- v. 14 We are to have a confidence that encourages us
- v. 15/16 A coming to anticipate
- v. 17 A catching up to expect
- v. 18 A comfort to share

Now - read v. 13 and let's go on our trip to TWO locations to see the contrast

FIRST - Let's go to the grave on the way to Luke 16 which is the door of the grave standing open. Let me read some tombstones (5):

- "He tells them that they must not sorrow as those who have no hope. In face of death the pagan world stood in despair. They met it with grim resignation and bleak hopelessness.
- AESCHYLUS wrote, "Once a man dies there is no resurrection."
- THEOCRITUS wrote, "There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope."
- CATULLUS wrote, "When once our brief light sets, there is one perpetual night through which we must sleep."
- On their TOMBSTONES grim epitaphs were carved. 'I was not; I became; I am not; I care not.' One of the most PATHETIC PAPYRUS letters that has come down to us is a letter of sympathy which runs like this. 'Irene to Taonnophris and Philo, good comfort. I was as sorry and wept over the departed one as I wept for Didymas. And all things whatsoever were fitting, I did, and all mine, Epaphroditus and Thermouthion and Phillion and Appollonius and Plantas. But nevertheless against such things one can do nothing. Therefore, comfort ye one another."
- Lightfoot said [Greek words] The contrast between the gloomy despair of the heathen and the triumphant hope of the Christian mourner is nowhere more forcibly

brought out than by their monu-mental inscriptions. The contrast of the tombs, for instance, in the Appian Way, above and below ground, has often been dwelt upon. On the one hand there is the dreary wail of despair, the effect of which is only heightened by the pomp of outward splendour from which it issues. On the other the exulting psalm of hope, shining the more brightly in all ill-written, ill-spelt records amidst the darkness of subterranean caverns. This is a more striking illustration than any quotations from literature which could be produced. Yet such testimony is available also.

Why were the Christians hopeful and pagans gloomy?

LESSON #1 Because Christ died we never shall know the horror of separation from God! He experienced it for us.

At death lost people begin to taste eternal horror.  
In life saved people begin to taste eternal life!

So - thru Christ we have a CONTRAST  
Christians' bodies sleep  
Christians' spirits live  
The rest are hopeless in life and death

Now Luke 16:2 -12 - [Only sketch of 6/24/90 AM sermon]

- I. THE DETAILS: Start in v. 22 as - No less a reporter than the Lord of Truth. Christ Jesus here gives a glimpse of the grave thru the door of death! Note these laws of death for lost and saved. His points were:
1. PERMANENCE v.22 Only the body dies, not the soul; Righteous go to bliss; Lost go to torments v.22
  2. CONSCIOUSNESS v. 23 In the grave we are conscious, we can see and remember or recognize people even ones we never met. Intuitive recognition of Abraham who died 20 centuries before rich man and Lazarus. v.23
  3. SIGHT: They can see "far off" - long distances and have recognition of those they knew in their lifetime "saw Lazarus" v.23.
  4. COMMUNICATION: They can speak v.23
  5. SENSATION: They can feel their body's physical desires are still present v.24 like "Thirst"
  6. PAINFULNESS v. 24 In the grave the lost can still experience pain. Note the vivid contrast "that tongue that never lacked on earth calls for that hand that was unheeded at his gate..."
  7. MEMORY v. 25 In the grave events from Earthly life may be recalled. Memory seems to be unimpaired.
  8. HOPELESSNESS v. 26 In the grave there is no escape. "Great chasm" eternally beyond help "none can pass"
  9. HORROR v. 27 In the grave the occupants of the torment want no one else to come it is so bad. Reality of constant torment only drove him to have others flee. [Recent punk rocker said wanted to go to Hell with friends and fun].

10. ISOLATION: No communication from the lost dead to living allowed, the dead have no influence in spirit world v.27
  11. QUALIFICATION: Word of God determines the destiny of all, the rest passes away. v.29 Supernatural not always convince [note Christ's miracle and apostles and prophets only confirmed faith - never produces...]
  12. INTUITION v. 29 Abraham seems to know the events after his life 2166 BC, including Moses 1446 BC and the prophets. Abraham knew history after his death [died 20 cent. B.C.] Knew Moses and prophets 600-1200 years after death.
  13. FINALITY: No one goes back! v.31
- II. What should our response be? The King has spoken. We should respond in three ways: EXPECTANCE, PATIENCE AND PREPAREDNESS.
- A. EXPECTANCE
1. We must remember that it is for us to watch Matthew 25:13 "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. (NKJV)
  2. God expects from us a patient expectancy of instant readiness for eternity. We must always be ready for the last things first thing each day. Why? Because Jesus said Luke 12:35-36 "Let your waist be girded and [your] lamps burning; 36 "and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. (NKJV)
  3. We can't know when it exactly will be! Acts 1:7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. (NKJV)
  4. We can know it is near because the Lord says Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! (NKJV)
- B. PATIENCE
1. Remember James 5:8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (NKJV)
  2. Beware of calculating and speculating. There are equally great and saintly teachers with very divergent views. Remember it is not for us to know!
    - a) Some sad predictions<sup>2</sup>:
      - (1) Luther said the world would end in 1556.
      - (2) Famous Bible commentator John Cocceius said it would be in 1667.
      - (3) Amos Comenius said it would be in 1672.
      - (4) Scientist Isaac Newton predicted the Lord would come in 1715.
      - (5) Noted scholar J.A. Bengal taught it would be in 1836.
      - (6) Beyond those are all the contradictions of the Millerites or Seventh Day Adventists, the recent prophecy hounds "88 reasons for 1988" and then 100 for 1989 . . .

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<sup>2</sup> Erich Sauer,  
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- b) Some sage advice: Eschatology or Bible prophecies about future events should REBUKE DOGMATISM, INDUCE FORBEARANCE AND PROVOKE INQUIRY! Finally Expectance, Patience and lastly -
- C. PREPAREDNESS. How do we prepare? Try answering these three questions:
  - 1. Do you know Christ personally ?
  - 2. Do you serve Christ constantly ?
  - 3. Do you love Christ completely ?

He is coming again ! Hallelujah!

Maranatha - The Lord is coming and we are ready and waiting!