

BIG CHANGES ARE COMING!

I. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

A. With my sermon notes last week I sent out an article by Pastor Skip Heitzig titled, "Bad News, Good News: God's Wrath and Mercy." It's also featured in the current edition of *Decision Magazine*. (Anyone read it?) Skip writes: "I once read a story set in the Wild West of a young man who saved a boy trapped on a runaway stagecoach. The man eventually became a judge and the boy, a criminal. Years later, the criminal appeared in the judge's court, accused of a grievous crime. He recognized the judge and appealed to him, based on their earlier experience, to save him from the death penalty. The judge replied, 'Son, on that day I was your savior. Today, I am your judge' and he sentenced him to the gallows."

B. When Jesus, God the Son, came the first time, it was to save. When He returns, it will be to judge. There's a reason His return is referred to as that *great and terrible Day*. It will be great for those in Christ and terrible for those who are not. John MacArthur puts it this way: "Jesus came the first time in humiliation; He will return in exaltation. He came the first time to be killed; He will return to kill His enemies. He came the first time to serve; He will return to be served. He came the first time as the Suffering Servant; He will return as the Conquering King."

C. When it comes to eschatology, the study of the end times, there are 4 primary views. Each have their adherents with varying interpretations of Scriptures to support their respective theologies. But when it comes to our own personal eschatology, there should be single view: Those who die in Christ will live with Him forever; and those who die, having rejected Christ, will live forever separated in eternal conscious punishment. Having just lost our brother Sam, and realizing how fragile our own lives are, today's Scriptures should encourage us deeply.

D. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NIV) **13 Brothers and sisters, (i.e. Words for believers) we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. (Two types of grieving: With hope and without it.) **14** For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. (**1 Cor. 15:3-4** is our statement of faith: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...") **Back to 1 Thess 4: 15** According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. (Note: There will be people alive when Jesus returns.) **16** For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words. (This event will be sudden, universally startling, loud, visible, public (not secret), great and terrible. It says we'll be caught up in the clouds with Christ and our resurrected brothers & sisters but it doesn't say Jesus will take us away to some other place...)**

E. 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 (ESV) Paul writes believers who are doubting there will be a bodily resurrection. It sheds more light: **51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, (die) but we shall all be changed, **52** in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. (When?) For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (Eternal bodies, akin to Jesus' resurrected body, will be given to those who've died in Christ as well as to those who happen to be alive when He returns.) **53** For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. **54** When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." (cf **Isaiah 25:8**) **55** "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (cf **Hosea 13:14**) **56** The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. **57** But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Victory over sin and death!) **58** Therefore, my beloved brothers (and sisters), be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.**

F. I share the above two powerful, hope-filled Scriptures at almost every graveside service. If these verses fail to instill hope or give us reason to keep on keepin' on while our breaths remain in us, what verses will? But there is more...

G. 2 Peter 3:8-14 (ESV) **8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (That sentence alone should instill humility into every eschatologist. If the Lord happened to say, 'That seems like yesterday' then what He's referring to may have happened a long long time ago!) **9** The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any (of you!) should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (God's delays are rooted in His mercy, love, and wisdom.) **10** But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, (Suddenly, unexpectedly but visibly and loud!) and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies (OV elements) will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (OVs: laid bare; burned up; found to deserve judgment. Some interpret**

these verses with a view toward *annihilation*. Others interpret, *transformation*. Since God has a reputation for remaking, restoring, and redeeming, I lean towards the notion of transformation, though I believe it will include every bit as much apocalyptic fury, fire & force. Either way, **Big changes are coming!** (*I'm sending an excellent theological note from the ESV Study Bible which should prove insightful.*) **11** Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, (**or destroyed**) what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, (i.e. **What kind of impact should this have on those professing Christ, i.e. you & me?**) **12** waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies (**OV: elements**) will melt as they burn! **13** But according to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. **14** Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

H. (Big changes are coming!) So how again are these things to impact us? Impact our minds & hearts? Should they not effect our prayers? How about our study of God's Word? The manner in which we face trials? The use of our time, talent, and energies? Our view of money and stuff? What about our witness and encounters with others? Our private and public demeanors? The way we work and play? And what about the new heavens and new earth? Can you picture the Garden of Eden on steroids?! How awesome will it be to worship God Almighty in sinless, uncorrupted, and unhindered Trinitarian bliss and glory with joy unspeakable?! To experience such unfathomably sweet love-filled reunions? To be dispatched on adventures & missions far and near and beyond comprehension? It will be awesome and then some! (What say you short-timers?!)

I. Each of the three Scriptures I read so far, contain a *therefore*. I learned as a youth, when a verse has a *therefore*, you need to find out *what-it's-there-for*. So considering the promises of resurrection, renewal and renovation, reunions and rejoicing, while basking in the glorious eternal worship and presence of our God, let's re-read those three *therefores*. We'll read them in reverse order:

1) 2 Peter 3:14: "*Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace.*"

2) 1 Corinthians 15:58: "*Therefore, my beloved brothers (and sisters), be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*"

3) 1 Thessalonians 4:18: "*Therefore encourage one another with these words.*"

J. Revelation 21:1-8 (ESV) The Apostle John gives us a glimpse, a sip, a taste of what's coming. These words should instill a sense of Godly anticipation and hydrate our thirst with hope: **1** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. (**Big changes are coming!**) **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. **4** He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." **5** And He who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." (**Big changes are coming!**) Also He said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." **6** And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. **7** The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (**And this sobering verse is for those who reject Christ.**) **8** But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

* Close with Prayer...

[Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff](#)

[1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 \(NIV\)](#)

13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. **14** For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. **15** According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Corinthians 15:51-58 (ESV)

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Revelation 21:1-8 (ESV)

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Article Excerpt by Skip Heitzig

"I once read a story set in the Wild West of a young man who saved a boy trapped on a runaway stagecoach. The man eventually became a judge and the boy, a criminal. Years later, the criminal appeared in the judge's court, accused of a grievous crime. He recognized the judge and appealed to him, based on their earlier experience, to save him from the death penalty. The judge replied, 'Son, on that day I was your savior. Today, I am your judge,' and sentenced him to the gallows."

- Excerpt from Pastor Skip Heitzig's article, "*Bad News, Good News: God's Wrath and Mercy*," *Decision Magazine*, June 2018. Skip Heitzig, Founder and Senior Pastor of Calvary Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. To read Pastor Skip's full bio, go to: http://www.calvaryabq.org/churchinfo_skipsbio.asp

Quote by John MacArthur

"Jesus came the first time in humiliation; He will return in exaltation. He came the first time to be killed; He will return to kill His enemies. He came the first time to serve; He will return to be served. He came the first time as the Suffering Servant; He will return as the Conquering King."

- John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Revelation 1-11*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, p. 35.

Film Clips & Article Links

God's Mercy and God's Wrath Meet at the Cross - Article by Tim Challies

<https://www.challies.com/articles/gods-mercy-and-gods-wrath-meet-at-the-cross/>

What Happens When You Die? All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ

Sermon by John Piper (Audio & Text)

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-happens-when-you-die-all-appear-before-the-judgment-seat-of-christ>

Finding God at the End of Ourselves - Article by Randy Alcorn

https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/finding-god-at-the-end-of-ourselves?utm_medium=feed&utm_source=feedpress.me&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+dg-articles

Bonus Stuff

Isaiah 25:8-9 (ESV)

8 He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. **9** It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, that He might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

Hosea 13:14 (ESV)

14 I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol; I shall redeem them from Death. O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from My eyes.

Isaiah 65:17-19 (NLT)

17 "Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore. **18** Be glad; rejoice forever in My creation! And look! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness. Her people will be a source of joy. **19** I will rejoice over Jerusalem and delight in My people. And the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more.

Romans 8:18-28 (NLT)

18 Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory He will reveal to us later. **19** For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who His children really are. **20** Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, **21** the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. **22** For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. **23** And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as His adopted children, including the new bodies He has promised us. **24** We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. **25** But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.) **26** In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. **27** And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. **28** And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.

Quote by Billy Graham

"Death has two stages, first the separation of the body from the spirit...for a purely spiritual existence, and second, reunion with the body and a glorious resurrection at the Second Coming of Christ."

Quote by Leonard Ravenhill

"Many pastors criticize me for taking the Gospel so seriously. But do they really think that on Judgment Day, Christ will chastise me, saying, 'Leonard, you took Me too seriously'?"

Quote by A.W. Pink

"The first time [Christ] came to slay sin in men. The second time He will come to slay men in sin."

Quote by Martin Luther

"I hope that the day is near at hand when the advent of the great God will appear, for all things everywhere are boiling, burning, moving, falling, sinking, groaning."

Quote by John Calvin

"We must hunger after Christ until the dawning of that great day when our Lord will fully manifest the glory of His kingdom"

Quote by Charles H. Spurgeon

"The fact that Jesus Christ is to come again is not a reason for star-gazing, but for working in the power of the Holy Ghost."

Quote by Oswald Chambers

"The only way to wait for the Second Coming is to watch that you do what you should do, so that when He comes is a matter of indifference. It is the attitude of a child, certain that God knows what He is about. When the Lord does come, it will be as natural as breathing. God never does anything hysterical, and he never produces hysterics."

Quote by C.S. Lewis

"The doctrine of the Second Coming teaches us that we do not and cannot know when the world drama will end. The curtain may be rung down at any moment... This seems to some people intolerably frustrating... We do not know the play... The Author knows. The audience, if there is an audience (if angels and archangels and all the company of heaven fill the pit and the stalls) may have an inkling... When it is over, we may be told. We are led to expect that the Author will have something to say to each of us on the part that each of us has played. The playing it well is what matters infinitely.

Quote by Charles H. Spurgeon

"To my great sorrow, I had sent to me this last week two or three copies of a tract purporting to have been written by myself, prophesying the coming of the Lord in the year 1866. Now, you may expect to hear of me being in Bedlam whenever, by my tongue or my pen, I give countenance to such rubbish. The Lord may come in 1866, and I shall be glad to see Him, but I do not believe He will. And one reason why I don't believe He will is because all these false prophets say that He will. If they said He would not, I should begin to think He would. But inasmuch as they are all crying as one man that He will come in 1866 or 1867, I am inclined to think He will not come at any such time. It seems to me that there are a very great many prophecies which must be fulfilled before the Coming of Christ, which will not be fulfilled in the next twelve months."

Excerpt by John Phillips - Richard the Lionhearted Illustration

One of the most stirring pages in English history tells of the conquests and crusades of Richard I, the Lionhearted. While Richard was away trouncing Saladin, his kingdom fell on bad times. His sly and graceless brother, John, usurped all the prerogatives of the king and misruled the realm. The people of England suffered, longing for the return of the king, and praying that it might be soon. Then one day Richard came. He landed in England and marched straight for his throne. Around that glittering coming, many tales are told, woven into the legends of England. (One of them is the story of Robin Hood). John's castles crumbled like ninepins. Great Richard laid claim to his throne, and none dared stand in his path. The people shouted their delight. They rang peal after peal on the bells. The Lion was back! Long live the king!

One day a King greater than Richard will lay claim to a realm greater than England. Those who have abused the earth in His absence, seized His domains, and mismanaged His world will all be swept aside. Every eye shall see Him, including those who pierced Him.

His coming will be visible. Furthermore, *it will be victorious*. John says, "*And all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen.*"

- John Phillips, *Exploring Revelation: An Expository Commentary*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, p.p. 22-23.

Theological Note on 2 Peter 3:10

The ESV Study Bible

10 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.* - 2 Peter 3:10 (ESV)

3:10 the day of the Lord. God's judgment will not be delayed forever (see note on vv. 8-9). When Christ returns it will be sudden, without warning, like the strike of a **thief**. **The heavens** (the sky) will pass away (cf. Ps. 102:25-26; Heb. 1:10-12; Rev. 6:14) and **the heavenly bodies** (stars, etc.) will be **burned up and dissolved**. There will be no place to hide (cf. Rev. 6:15-16), for **the earth** and every person's **works** on the earth **will be exposed** (Gk. *heurethēsetai*, lit., "will be found," a divine passive meaning "found by God") to God's judgment. Some translations read "will be burned up" (Gk. *katakaestai* because some Greek manuscripts have this wording (instead of Gk. *heurethēsetai*). But the earliest and most reliable manuscripts have "will be found" (Gk. *heurethēsetai*) indicating with this reading that the annihilation of the earth is not taught in this passage. Scholars have debated whether the NT speaks of an annihilation of the present cosmos and the creation of a new universe, or whether it indicates the transformation of the present cosmos, including the earth. The latter seems more likely in light of : (1) the preferred reading of this passage (see above); (2) Rom. 8:18-25; (3) many OT prophecies about the renewal of the earth; (4) Christ's resurrection body being

in continuity with His earthly body; and (5) the fact that Christ's resurrection body is a pattern for the resurrection bodies of Christians (1 Cor. 15:12-58). God seems always to renew, not destroy and recreate, parts of His creation that are marred by sin. See note on Rev. 21:1-8.

- Theological note on 2 Peter 3:10, *The ESV Study Bible*, Crossway, © 2008, p.p. 2422-2423.