

# UNTIL HE RETURNS

## Part 5: It's Going to Happen 1 Thessalonians 4, 5

*"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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words." (1 Th 4:16-18 NIV)*

1. Jesus Himself will descend from heaven — not merely an angel or messenger. "The Lord himself will come down from heaven" (1 Thess. 4:16).
  - Our hope rests in a Person: the Savior who died and rose again will personally return for His people.
  - His return fulfills His promise to receive us to Himself (John 14:3).
2. A commanding heavenly shout will be heard — Paul describes "a loud command," along with the voice of the archangel.
  - Christ's coming will display heavenly kingly authority; this is an event God Himself directs.
  - The passage identifies these sounds without explaining exactly what will be said or who on earth will hear them.

**3. The trumpet of God will sound — a dramatic divine signal associated with Christ's coming.**

→ In Scripture, trumpets often announce a gathering or a significant act of God.

→ Paul connects the trumpet with the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of believers (1 Cor. 15:52).

→ Trumpets were also used in ancient times to announce the arrival of king.

**4. Christians who have died will be raised bodily — “the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16).**

→ Believers who die before Jesus returns will not miss His coming or receive a lesser blessing.

→ Christian hope includes the resurrection of the body, grounded in Jesus' own resurrection.

**5. Millions of graves will be emptied in an instant — deceased believers from across history will be raised.**

→ God can raise His people regardless of where they died or what happened to their bodies.

→ The resurrection is explicitly promised; the number of graves and their visible condition are not described. Cremation.

**6. Living Christians will suddenly be transformed — 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 says believers will be changed “in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye.”**

→ Believers alive at Christ's return will also receive the transformation necessary for life in His presence.

→ This change will be God's immediate work; beyond anything human effort can accomplish.

7. **Mortal bodies will become immortal — believers will receive bodies no longer subject to death or decay (1 Cor. 15:53).**

→ Our present weakness and physical deterioration will not last forever.

→ Jesus will transform our bodies to be like His glorious body (Phil. 3:20–21).

8. **Living believers will suddenly be caught up from the earth — “we who are still alive... will be caught up” (1 Thess. 4:17).**

→ The expression “caught up” emphasizes God’s power to gather His people to Christ.

→ Our confidence rests in His ability to bring us safely into His presence.

9. **Believers will rise into the air — they will be “caught up together... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”**

→ Paul describes a real gathering of resurrected and living believers to meet Jesus.

→ The central emphasis is the meeting with the Lord and the fellowship that follows.

10. **Christians separated by death will suddenly be reunited — loved ones who died in Christ will be together again.**

→ The words “together with them” offer comfort to Christians grieving the death of fellow believers.

→ This promised reunion belongs to those who are in Christ, making faith in Him the essential issue.

11. Believers from every century<sup>1</sup> will meet at Christ's return as they are gathered together.
- Death and the passing of centuries cannot prevent believers from sharing in Christ's coming.
  - The whole company of believers described by Paul will be united around the same Savior.
12. Every believer will see Jesus personally — the great destination of the Rapture is not merely heaven, but meeting the Lord Himself.
- The greatest blessing of Christ's return is being with Christ Himself.
  - The promise that we will see Him should encourage us to pursue purity now (1 John 3:2–3).
13. The entire event will happen with breathtaking speed — Paul says the transformation occurs “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52).
- Paul explicitly describes the change of believers as instantaneous.
  - He does not specify how long every aspect of the gathering will take; we should keep our teaching within what he reveals.
14. For Christians alive at that moment, death will be bypassed entirely — “we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51).
- “Sleep” here refers to physical death; some believers will be alive when Christ returns.
  - Whether we die beforehand or remain alive, our future is secure in Christ.
15. Earthly life could be interrupted instantly — Christians may be working, driving, eating, sleeping, teaching, or going about ordinary routines when Christ comes.

→ Anticipating Jesus' return should encourage faithful service in our everyday responsibilities.

→ Readiness means living to please Him today, rather than trying to calculate the date of His coming.

16. The disappearance of believers could create enormous disruption on earth — transportation, workplaces, families, hospitals, governments, and other institutions could suddenly lose people. This consequence is an inference rather than something Scripture specifically describes.

→ Such scenarios are possible inferences, but Paul does not describe accidents, institutional collapse, or the world's immediate reaction.

→ Keep the lesson's emphasis on Scripture's stated purpose: comforting and encouraging believers (1 Thess. 4:18).

17. The event will completely overturn what appears physically impossible — the dead raised, the living transformed, and both gathered to Christ.

→ The God who raised Jesus from the dead has the power to raise and transform His people.

→ Our hope depends on God's power and faithfulness, rather than the limitations of human experience.

18. Separation between believers and Christ will end forever — Paul concludes with one of the most remarkable promises: “And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thess. 4:17).

→ Believers already belong to Christ, but then they will enjoy His immediate presence forever.

→ The word “forever” assures us that this fellowship will never be interrupted by death.

**19. Grief will suddenly give way to joy — the very people the Thessalonians feared they had lost will participate fully in Christ’s coming.**

→ Christians still grieve, but they grieve with the assurance of resurrection and reunion (1 Thess. 4:13–14).

→ This hope equips us to comfort one another with compassion and confidence.

**20. Everything believers have hoped for concerning Christ’s return will suddenly become visible reality.**

→ Promises now received by faith will become personal experience when we meet the Lord.

→ Christ’s return begins the fulfillment of further promised events; Paul does not say every end-time promise is completed at this single moment.

→ Our response today should be steadfast faith, growing love, and faithful service (1 Cor. 15:58)

## So, What Are We to Do?

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1. **We are to please God more and more** — Keep growing in obedience rather than becoming spiritually complacent.  
*“We instructed you how to live in order to please God... do this more and more.”* (1 Thess. 4:1 NIV)
2. **We are to pursue purity** — Live a holy life, especially in areas of sexual conduct, self-control, and integrity.  
*“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified.”* (1 Thess. 4:3 NIV)
3. **We are to practice genuine care** — Keep increasing in genuine love for other believers.  
*“We urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more.”* (1 Thess. 4:10 NIV)
4. **We are to live peaceful lives** — Avoid unnecessary turmoil, mind your own affairs, and live responsibly.  
*“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life.”* (1 Thess. 4:11 NIV)
5. **We are work faithfully** — Continue doing the responsibilities God has given you. Christ’s return is not a reason to withdraw from ordinary life.  
*“You should mind your own business and work with your hands.”* (1 Thess. 4:11 NIV)
6. **We are to possess hope** — Face death differently because Christians expect resurrection and reunion with Christ.  
*“We do not want you to be uninformed... so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.”* (1 Thess. 4:13 NIV)
7. **We are to stay spiritually awake** — Paul warns believers not to become spiritually careless.  
*“Let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.”* (1 Thess. 5:6 NIV)
8. **We are to encourage one another** — Readiness for Christ’s return should produce encouragement, not fear.  
*“Encourage one another and build each other up.”* (1 Thess. 5:11 NIV)
9. **We are to pray continually and live thankfully** — A life anticipating Christ should remain closely connected to God.  
*“Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.”* (1 Thess. 5:17–18 NIV)
10. **We are to keep our whole life ready for Christ** — Paul’s prayer summarizes the goal:  
*“May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (1 Thess. 5:23 NIV)

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<sup>1</sup> All Old Testament believers will be raised to eternal life. Whether they are raised at the Rapture or at Christ's subsequent return to earth depends on how we understand the prophetic timeline."