

The Trump of God

1 Thessalonians: 4:13-16

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1 Thessalonians 4:13-16 – (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.

v13 – About what shouldn't we be ignorant?

In the few weeks Paul was with the Thessalonians, he emphasized the soon return of Jesus, and the Thessalonians believed it earnestly. This was part of the reason that they were the kind of church Paul complimented so highly.

- Yet after Paul left, they wondered about those Christians who died *before* Jesus came back. They were troubled by the idea that these Christians might miss out on that great future event and that they might miss the victory and blessing of Jesus' coming.

What else did Paul not want us to be ignorant about?

Four times in his letters, Paul asked Christians to *not* be ignorant about something:

- Don't be ignorant about God's plan for Israel (Romans 11:25).
- Don't be ignorant about spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1).
- Don't be ignorant about suffering and trials in the Christian life (2 Corinthians 1:8).
- Don't be ignorant about the rapture and the second coming of Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

How is the church doing in not being ignorant of these things?

Not very well... Remarkably, these are areas where ignorance is still common in the Christian world.

Why was "sleep" used as a euphemism for death here?

Sleep was a common way to express death in the ancient world, but among pagans, it was almost always seen as an eternal sleep.

- Ancient writings are full of this pessimism regarding death:
 - "Of a man once dead there is no resurrection." (Aeschylus)
 - "Hopes are among the living, the dead are without hope." (Theocritus)
 - "Suns may set and rise again but we, when once our brief light goes down, must sleep an endless night." (Catullus)

Christians called death *sleep*, but they emphasized the idea of *rest*. Early Christians began to call their burial places "cemeteries," which means, "dormitories" or "sleeping places."

- Yet the Bible never describes the death of the unbeliever as *sleep*, for there is no rest, peace, or comfort for them in death.

Does the soul sleep between death and resurrection?

Though Paul, using idioms common in his day, referred to death as *sleep*, it does not prove the erroneous idea of *soul sleep*, that the present dead in Christ are in a state of suspended animation, waiting for a resurrection to consciousness.

- To depart from this world in death to 'be with Christ' is described by Paul as 'very far better' (Philippians 1:23) than the present state of blessed communion with the Lord

2 Corinthians 5:8 – We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Why shouldn't Christians grieve over fellow Christians who have died?

For the Christian death is dead, and leaving this body is like laying down for a nap and waking in glory. It is *moving*, not *dying*. For these reasons, Christians should not **sorrow as others who have no hope** when their loved ones in Jesus die.

What kind of mourning should Christians have for their loved ones who die?

As Christians, we may mourn the death of other Christians; but not **as others who have no hope**. Our sorrow is like the sadness of seeing someone off on a long trip, knowing you will see them again, but not for a long time.

- When an unbeliever dies, we mourn for them. When a believer dies, we only mourn for ourselves, because they are with the Lord.

v14 – What is the blessing in believing that Jesus died and rose again?

God will bring with Him those who sleep: We have more than a wishful hope of resurrection. In the resurrection of Jesus, we have an amazing example of it and a promise of our own.

- Jesus will bring the faithful departed with Him when He comes back

Why didn't Paul refer to the death of Jesus as sleep?

In his description of Jesus' death, he did not soften it by calling it **sleep**, because there was nothing soft or peaceful about His death.

Why do we believe that Jesus died and rose again?

Because of the eye-witness testimony of the Scriptures that have proven to be the inspired Word of God.

v15 – What Lord's word is Paul referring to here?

Paul emphasized that this was from the Lord, though we do not know whether he received it by direct revelation or if it was an unrecorded saying of Jesus.

- One way or another, this came from Jesus and did not originate with Paul.
- In no place does the apostle speak more confidently and positively of his *inspiration* than here; and we should prepare ourselves to receive some momentous and interesting truth.

What did Paul want the Thessalonians to know?

That Christians who have died before Jesus returns — **will by no means** be at a disadvantage.

- God will allow **those who are asleep** to share in the glory of **the coming of the Lord**.

What does it tell us that Paul said, we who are alive?

This means that Paul himself shared in this expectancy. It wasn't because Paul had an any promise of the return of Jesus in his lifetime... the doctrine of imminency.

- His anticipation was due to the imminent return of Christ for the entirety of the Church Age.

v16 – What will happen when Jesus comes for us?

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout: When Jesus comes, He will come *personally*. **The Lord Himself will descend** and come **with a shout**.

- The ancient Greek word for **shout** here is the same word used for the commands that a ship captain makes to his rowers with the ring of authority and the note of urgency.

What is this shout?

Apparently, there will be some audible signal that prompts this remarkable event. It may be that all three descriptions (**shout, voice, and trumpet**) refer to the same sound; or there may be three distinct sounds.

Revelation 4:1 – *After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.*

The rapture will not be silent or secret, though the vast majority of people may not understand the sound or its meaning.

Will unbelievers hear the shout of the Lord at the rapture?

When Paul heard the heavenly voice on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:7; 22:9), his companions heard the sound of a voice, but they did not hear articulate words. They heard a sound but did not understand its meaning.

- It may well be that the shout/voice/trumpet sound that accompanies the rapture will have the same effect. The entire world may hear this heavenly sound but have no idea what it means.

What would be the voice of the archangel?

This doesn't mean that the **Lord Himself** is an **archangel**. The only one described as an **archangel** in the Bible is Michael (Jude 1:9).

- Paul means that when Jesus comes, He will come in the company of prominent angels.

What does it tell us that Paul did not designate a specific archangel here?

It is possible that he does not mean that an archangel will actually say something, but simply that the voice that will be uttered will be a very great voice, an archangel type of voice.

What does it tell us that believers are gathered *with the trumpet of God*?

In the Old Testament, trumpets sounded the alarm for war and threw the enemy into a panic (Numbers 10:9 and Revelation 8 and Revelation 9). Trumpets also sounded an assembly of God's people, as in Leviticus 23:24 and Numbers 10:2.

- Here, **the trumpet of God** gathers together God's people.

Where else are trumpets associated with end-times events?

- One is the *last trump* of 1 Corinthians 15:52, which is clearly to be connected with this same trumpet of 1 Thessalonians 4.
- There are also the seven trumpet judgments which culminate at Revelation 11:15
- The trumpet gathering the elect at the Lord's return to earth in Matthew 24:31.

Can this trumpet of 1 Thessalonians 4 also be the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15?

No...

- The subjects are different: here it is the church; there a wicked world.
- The results are different: here it is the glorious catching up of the church to be with the Lord; there it is further judgment upon a godless world.
- Here 'the last trump' signals the close of the life of the church on earth; there the 'seventh' trumpet marks a climax in a progressive series of apocalyptic judgments upon the living on earth.

Can this trumpet of 1 Thessalonians 4 also be the one mentioned in Matthew 24:31?

No... at the rapture the living and dead are gathered and only believers will see Jesus. At His second coming, everyone on earth will see Him.

- The timing is different... the rapture ends the Church Age, the Second Coming ends the Tribulation.

If the trumpet sound at the rapture is the last trump per 1 Corinthians 15:52, what was the first trump?

It was probably associated with the beginning of the Age of the Mosaic Law at Mount Sinai...

Exodus 19:16 – *Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.*

The trumps of God appear to be associated with heralding transition to a new dispensation.

What will be the order of the resurrection of the church?

the dead in Christ will rise first: The prior dead in Christ will not be left out of either the resurrection or the return of Jesus. In fact, they will experience it **first**.

- We will not rise without the dead in Christ

Could the fact that the dead in Christ rise first mean that they were resurrected when they die?

No, from this passage we see that it is at the coming of Jesus for the church that initiates the mass resurrection of His faithful, both living and dead.

If the dead in Christ haven't yet been resurrected, does this mean they currently exist as disembodied spirits?

No, all people are a tri-unity of body, soul and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23) and we will always be body, soul and spirit. Thus, the dead in Christ must have a temporary spirit-body in order to be in the spiritual realm with Jesus.

- We know there has to be an intermediate body from the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16.

What do we know our resurrected bodies will be like?

The Bible reveals a lot about the blessings of our eternal, resurrected bodies. Jesus showed us what we can look forward to when He rose from the dead. Eternal life will not be some ethereal, spiritual existence; we will have physical bodies much like our current ones, but better (Luke 24:39). We will enjoy food just like we do today (Luke 24:41-43). We will not be subject to pain, sorrow, or death (Revelation 21:4). We will have an ability to travel through the spiritual realm to get around this vast physical universe (John 20:19 in light of John 14:3).

Will eternal life be boring?

Hardly... we will be spending eternity getting to better know our Creator-God and He is far from boring. Also, He promised we'd reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12)... we will have plenty of opportunities to express our God-given creativity in exercising the responsibilities He'll give us.

What applications come to mind from this passage?

- Biblical ignorance is a problem in the church today; we should not be a part of that problem.
- Soul sleep is unbiblical; correct those who ascribe to it.
- The Trump of God heralds a new dispensation; anticipate it and be listening for it!