

# Christ is Coming: Be Faithful!

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:51-58

Introduction:

1. 1 Corinthians 15 is one of the great Gospel chapters of the New Testament, containing a succinct summary of the key points of the Gospel.
2. 1 Corinthians 15 is the great resurrection chapter of the Bible. The truth of the bodily resurrection from the dead was under attack even in Paul's day which had grave implications for the resurrection of the dead.
3. In this final section of the chapter, the Apostle Paul is coming to the climax of his argument for the resurrection of the body. He not only continues with a stirring summary of the truth of the resurrection but now also introduces the truth of the rapture of the living saints. This then leads to a call to faithfulness in light of these glorious truths in verse 58.
4. While the rapture of the saints is referred to in multiple places in the New Testament, John 14:1-3, 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 & 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 are the main rapture passages. We believe the Bible teaches a rapture that is:
  - Pre-millennial – that is a return of Christ before the beginning of the Millennium.
  - Pre-Tribulational – that is a rapture that takes place before the start of the 7 year tribulation period.
5. We will now consider this glorious passage under four headings.

## I. THE MYSTERY OF THE RAPTURE (VS. 51)

### A. The Declaration of the Mystery (Vs. 51a)

1. "Behold, I shew you" = their attention is called for as Paul introduces a new truth into the flow of thought.
2. "a mystery" = the word 'mystery' in the New Testament does not speak of something 'mysterious' as we tend to use the word today. Rather, it refers to the unveiling of a truth previously unknown.
3. A good working definition of the word 'mystery' is provided in the Bible itself in Ephesians 3:3-5 "How that by revelation he made known unto me **the mystery**; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) **Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed** unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;"

### B. The Details of the Mystery (Vs. 51b)

1. There are a number of mystery doctrines in the New Testament but in this passage, it is the truth of the rapture of the living saints. The rapture is the two-fold event of the resurrection of the dead in Christ

and the transformation of the living. This is also described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

2. The truth of the resurrection was not a mystery as it had already been unveiled in the Old Testament. But the truth that there would be a whole generation of living Christians who would one day not face death was new truth being unveiled through the Apostle. Its not that this truth came into existence when Paul wrote about it. The truth was there all along in the eternal heart of God but this was His appointed time for it to be unveiled.
3. What a glorious truth is contained in those words “we shall not all sleep”! For all of human history down to the present time, the saints have departed to glory through the doorway of death but there is coming a day when a whole company of living saints will depart this earth through the doorway of heaven. Revelation 4:1 “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.”
4. What a glorious truth is contained in the words “but we shall all be changed”.
  - a. The word ‘changed’ means to transform, to exchange from one thing to another. What a triumph it will be to exchange this dying, decaying, weak, sin laden body for a body “like unto his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21).
  - b. The word ‘all’ reminds us that all true believers will be included. No partial rapture theory here!
  - c. Notice that this is in the passive voice – “**be** changed”. This means that the action is performed by another. We will not change ourselves but will be gloriously transformed by the power of God Almighty.

## II. THE MOMENT OF THE RAPTURE (VS. 52)

### A. The Sureness of that Moment

Note the drumbeat of certainty in these verses.

1. ‘shall’ = occurs 7 times.
2. ‘must’ = occurs twice (Vs. 53).
3. We have Christ’s own personal guarantee that He will come to take his saints home to the Father’s House. John 14:1-3 “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.” This passage is distinct from the second coming references in Matthew, Mark & Luke given during

the Olivet discourse. These words of Christ are given later during the Upper Room discourse just prior to His crucifixion.

4. It is so important in a day when many believers, even within our circles, are losing sight of the imminent return of Christ that we be re-assured and re-affirmed that this event WILL happen and that it could happen at any moment.

### **B. The Suddenness of that Moment (Vs. 52a)**

Two-time references are given to impress upon our hearts and minds the speed and the suddenness of the rapture. The rapture will take place:

1. In a Fleeting Moment – “In a moment”.
  - a. The Greek word is ‘atomos’ from which our English word ‘atom’ is derived. An atom is a tiny unit of matter. A moment is a tiny unit of time.
  - b. This refers to an indivisible moment of time; something like a millisecond (a thousandth of a second).
2. In a Flash – “in the twinkling of an eye”.
  - a. The word ‘twinkling’ was used by the Greeks to describe things like the twinkling of a star, the buzz of a gnat or the quivering of a harp (RWP)
  - b. Someone put it this way: the “twinkling of an eye” is not the blinking of an eye but the sparkling of an eye.
  - c. The point of both time references is that the rapture will be instantaneous.
3. Imagine the scene! A saint suffering on a hospital bed, there one moment, gone the next. A believer at work going about his normal duties in the presence of his colleagues, there one moment, gone the next. A Christian seated at the meal table with unsaved family members, there one moment, gone the next. Whole families disappear – Mum, Dad and children. A Christian lady standing in her kitchen, there one moment, gone the next. A Christian brother witnessing to a lost friend, there one moment, gone the next.
4. The suddenness of the rapture is sobering for the lost. To be prepared for the rapture, you need to be saved now!
5. The suddenness of the rapture is sobering for the saved. Once the rapture occurs, the opportunity for Christian service will be over and the matter of our rewards will be sealed and settled from that moment and onwards. “By and by when I look on His face, I’ll wish I had given Him more”.

### **C. The Sounds of that Moment (Vs. 52b)**

Combining this verse with 1 Thessalonians 4:16, we note the three sounds the believer will hear at the rapture.

1. The Saviour’s Shout (1 Thess. 4:16).
  - a. The Lord Jesus gave a victory shout at the cross when He cried “It is finished.”

- b. The Lord Jesus will issue another shout at the rapture. What He says remains a mystery for us but the word 'shout' according to A.T. Robertson means "to order, command (military command). Christ will come as Conqueror." The Captain of our Salvation will issue the command and we will rise! Perhaps it will be the same words John heard when he was caught up into heaven from Patmos in type of the rapture – "Come up hither" (Rev. 4:1). Whatever the case may be, we will hear and recognise our Saviour's voice.
  2. The Archangel's Voice (1. Thess. 4:16). There is only one archangel mentioned specifically in the Bible and that is Michael the Archangel (Jude 1:9). Whether is Michael or another archangel from heaven we do not know nor are we told the details of what we will hear.
  3. The Trumpet Blast (Vs. 52b; 1 Thess. 4:16)
 

Here it is called "the last trump"; in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 it is called "the trump of God". What is the "last trump"?

    - a. What the last trump is **NOT**. It is not the final trumpet in the series of trumpet judgments in the Book of Revelation. It is a fallacy to confuse the trumpet blast of deliverance for the church at the rapture with the trumpet blasts of judgment for a wicked world in the tribulation period. Revelation was written approx. 30 years after this Epistle. Paul would not be connecting this with the trumpets of Revelation as it hadn't been written yet and would make no sense to his readers. This view is advocated by those who want to put the church in the tribulation period but this is totally wrong. We are listening for the trumpet blast of the translation, not the trumpet blasts of the tribulation!
      - i. 1 Thess. 5:9 "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,"
      - ii. Revelation 3:10-11 "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."
      - iii. So remember believer...
- We're not looking for the hour of temptation but the moment of translation!
  - We're not looking for preservation through but deliverance from!
  - We're not going to be caught in the tribulation, we're going to be caught up before the tribulation!
  - We're not going to be overtaken, we're going to overcome!
  - We're not looking for signs, we're listening for sounds!
  - We're not anticipating the seals; we're awaiting the Saviour!
  - We're not looking for the sounding of the trumpets, we're listening for the trumpet sound!

- We're not looking for the vials, we're listening for the voice of the Archangel!
- We're not watching for judgment; we're watching for Jesus!
- We're not looking for the Great Tribulation but for the Great God & Saviour!
- We're not looking for Jacob's trouble, we're looking for Jesus' triumph!
- We're not looking for the man of sin, we're looking for the Son of Man!
- We're not looking for the deceiver, but for the Deliverer!
- We're not looking for the Antichrist, but for the Appearing!
- We're not looking for the little horn, but for the Lord of glory!
- We're not looking for the beast, but for the blessed hope and the Bridegroom!
- We're not looking for the son of perdition but for the Son of God!
- We're not looking for that Wicked, but for the living Word!
- We're not looking for wrath, we're looking for the rapture!
- We're not looking for the tribulation, but for the Translation!
- We're not going through, we're going up!
- We're not looking for the Antichrist, we're looking for Jesus Christ!

b. What the last Trump **IS**. It is the same trumpet blast that is called "the trump of God" in 1 Thessalonians 4. It is possible Paul was drawing from a military picture that was familiar in his day.

- i. Harry Ironside explains it well, "When a Roman camp was about to be broken up, whether in the middle of the night or in the day, a trumpet was sounded. The first blast meant, 'Strike tents and prepare to depart.' The second meant, 'Fall into line,' and when what was called "the last Trump" sounded it meant, "March away." The apostle uses that figure and says that when the last trump of this age of grace sounds, then we shall be called away to be forever with the Lord."
- ii. John Phillips explains further, "It is the "last" in point of time not the "last" in a sequence. It concludes a programme, an epoch. The programme for the church is terminated by the blowing of a trumpet, as later the programme for Israel is terminated by the blowing of a trumpet. It is the last sound we shall hear on earth, as it is the summons to assemble to meet Christ and to enter into heaven."

#### **D. The Sequence of that Moment (Vs. 52c)**

With reference to 1 Thess. 4, we note the five step sequence of the rapture.

1. The Resurrection of the Departed Saints.

- a. 1 Thess. 4:16 says, "the dead in Christ shall rise first". The departed saints will be a part of this great event! They are not at a disadvantage to the living at the rapture. What a joy it will be to be "caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air".

- b. The word 'incorruptible' means not subject to decay. It is a reference to the glorification of the body. "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." (Phil. 3:21)
- 2. The Rapture of the Living Saints.
- 3. The Reunion of the Saints - "together with them in the clouds".
- 4. The Realization of the Saints – "to meet the Lord in the air".
- 5. The Rest of the Saints – "and so shall we ever be with the Lord".

### III. THE MARVEL OF THE RAPTURE (VS. 53-57)

#### A. The Victory (Vs. 53-56)

The Apostle Paul now issues a rousing victory declaration in light of the truths he has just spoken of. Note the word 'victory' is repeated three times (Vs. 54, 55 & 57). There is...

- 1. The Victorious Glorification (Vs. 53)
  - a. This corruptible must put on incorruption. The word 'incorruptible' means that the resurrection body will be incapable of sickness and disease. This is a repeated emphasis in this chapter. Note the words of Vs. 42-49.
  - b. This mortal must put on immortality. Our bodies are subject to death in this life but after the resurrection and rapture, death will have no mastery over us. "Immortal" means incapable of dying". Immortality is "The quality of never ceasing to live or exist; exemption from death and annihilation; life destined to endure without end; as the *immortality* of the human soul." (Webster) 2 Tim. 1:10 "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and **immortality** to light through the gospel:"
- 2. The Victorious Declaration (Vs. 54-56)
 

Note the 'when' and the 'then'. When this event takes place, death will be dealt its final blow. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26).

  - a. Death is Defeated (Vs. 54)
    - i. The Apostle appeals to two Old Testament quotations to demonstrate that the defeat of death had been foretold.
    - ii. "Paul cites Isaiah 25:8 which is a prophecy of the destruction of the present Gentile kingdoms and the establishment of Christ's kingdom. He also makes reference to Hosea 13:14 where God promises to ransom Israel from the power of the grave." (Cloud)
  - b. Death is Disempowered (Vs. 55-56)
 

Paul triumphantly addresses sin and the grave and pronounces victory over them. For over 6,000 years, since Adam's sin, death

has held sway over mankind but the day is coming when the reign of death will be ended by the Prince of Life (Acts 3:15).

1. The Sin Sting – death came as a result of sin; it is the wages of sin (Rom. 5:12, 6:23). For the believer, this sting is removed, making his death totally different from the unsaved.
2. The Strong Statutes – sin by the commandment becomes exceeding sinful.
3. “Death, sin and the law are a terrible trio for the unregenerate man. The law activates sin and sin activates death. Resurrection does away with all three.” (Gromacki)

#### **B. The Victor (Vs. 57)**

1. The Giver of this Victory – the Father. God is to receive all the glory, thanksgiving and praise for this great victory. He is the One who gives this victory. Death will be defeated through the mighty power of God.
2. The Mediator of this Victor – the Son. This victory is given to us “through our Lord Jesus Christ” who is the Mediator of all of the Father’s blessings to us. Note that this victory is in the present tense – “**giveth** us the victory”. As we walk with Christ and appropriate the power of His resurrection life, we have victory over sin in this present life. The victorious Christian life culminates and climaxes in ultimate victory at Christ’s return.

### **IV. THE MOTIVATION BECAUSE OF THE RAPTURE (VS. 58)**

These glorious truths have practical implications for the lives we live right now as we await the Saviour’s return. This debunks the argument put forward by some that belief in the rapture will lead Christians to sit back and do nothing while they wait for Christ’s return. On the contrary, the truth of the rapture, if taken to heart, will have a purifying, life transforming effect upon our lives. 1 John 3:3 “And every man that hath this hope in him **purifieth himself**, even as he is pure.” Look at the practical exhortation the Apostle now gives in light of the truths He has just outlined.

Take note of the threefold exhortation. There is an exhortation to:

#### **A. Be Steadfast (Vs. 58a)**

1. The word literally means “seated”, indicating that you are settled on the truth (Gromacki). The word ‘steadfast’ comes from the Greek ‘hedraios’, “from *hedra*, seat, chair.” It is translated ‘settled’ (Col. 1:23). The believer is to remain settled in his faith in Christ, like sitting down in a chair and refusing to move. He is steadfast in God’s Word and God’s truth and God’s will and God’s promises. (D. Cloud) It means “fixed, settled, marked by firm conviction and purpose of heart, not easily disturbed by much around that is calculated to disturb.” (J. Hunter)

2. The believer needs to remain steadfast in many areas of the Christian life but in the context of this passage, He needs to stand firm in the truth of the past resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection and rapture of the saints.
  - a. Remain steadfast in the truth of Christ's resurrection. Take the resurrection away and Christianity crumbles.
  - b. Remain steadfast in the truth of the future resurrection of the saints.
  - c. Remain steadfast in the truth of the future rapture of the saints.

**B. Be Standing (Vs. 58b)**

1. The word 'unmoveable' means firm, not easily shifted. The believer needs to be both flexible and firm at the same time.
  - a. **Flexible and mouldable** as God seeks to shape and mould our lives; submitted to the process of sanctification as the Word of God corrects and changes our lives.
  - b. **Firm and unmoving** on the doctrines of the Word of God; contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. To hoist your sail and allow your life to be blown to and fro by every wind of doctrine is NOT a mark of Christian maturity! (See Eph. 4:14)
2. Don't be moved out of the will of God and away from the Word of God as a Christian.
  - Don't be moved by the winds of false doctrine.
  - Don't be moved by the trials of life.
  - Don't be moved by disappointments in your service for God.
  - Don't be moved by the temptations of the world.
  - Don't be moved by the compromised, worldly Christian.
  - Don't be moved by compromised family members.
  - Don't be moved by the attacks of the devil.

**C. Be Serving (Vs. 58c)**

1. Abounding in Service – "always abounding in the work of the Lord".
  - a. The word 'abounding' means to "superabound in quantity or quality" (Strong). It means "having in great plenty; being in great plenty, being very prevalent; generally prevailing." (Webster 1828). The word is translated 'abundance' several times in the New Testament (e.g., Matt. 13:12, 25:29; Mk. 12:44, Lk. 12:15). This is abundant service!
  - b. This is the opposite to the way the majority of Christians approach service for the Lord. Most Christians live for themselves and throw the Lord a few scraps of service to ease their guilty consciences. They are lazy, lukewarm, half-hearted and half-committed in their service. They live for their careers, their money, their houses, their sport and their hobbies and give the Lord the pitiful leftovers of their time and resources, if anything at all. This is not how we should be living in light of Christ's return! Serving Christ should be the great passion of our lives. Service in the local church is not the only dimension of

Christian service but it is a large part of it. After all, we are in the **CHURCH AGE!** That means God's program for this present dispensation is the local church!

- c. There is nothing more thrilling than being a part of the work of God as we await His return. It is more important than everything the world says is important. Do something for the Lord!
  - d. 2 Cor. 5:15 "And *that* he died for all, that they which live **should not henceforth live unto themselves**, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."
  - e. Harry Ironside: "They tell me that occupation with these precious truths that have to do with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ may have a tendency to make people heady and theoretical, and no longer useful in the Church of God here on earth, but I do not know anything that should so grip the soul and put one to work for God as the knowledge of the truth we have just been considering."
2. Assurance for Service – "forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord".
- a. The knowledge of the eternal value of Christian service will encourage us to press on in our service for the Lord.
  - b. Our labour to the point of exhaustion for the cause of Christ is not pointless and empty. The word 'labour' means toil resulting in weariness (Vine). The same word is translated 'weariness' in 2 Cor. 11:27.
  - c. This is a great encouragement as often from the human perspective, our labours can appear to be in vain. Remember, no act of service done for Christ and Christ's glory is in vain!

### **Conclusion:**

1. To the lost – are you ready for the rapture? The only way to be ready is to be saved.
2. To the saved – are you ready for the rapture? We cannot lose our salvation but we can lose rewards. Are you serving and standing or are you being shifted out of the will of God?