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- realizing the power of a life in Christ-

THE LORD COLLECTS HIS BELIEVERS

In these obvious last days, so much is discussed about the time Jesus comes to collect his believers and what happens. But what does scripture really say? Let's take a closer look.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (NIV)

¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷After 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.

This is a key scripture on the subject. First note that the Lord himself descends from heaven. It seems he himself gives out a shout, although what he says we do not know. It may be "Come up here," which is what is said from heaven to the two witnesses in Revelation just before they ascend to heaven. Also there is a voice of the archangel. Again, we are not given what that voice says. And then the trumpet call of God. I would assume this is the sound of the shofar.

After the shout from the Lord, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet blast, verse 16 says the dead in Christ will rise first. So be specific now. Look at the words. They say that those believers who have died will rise first. They shall come back to life. Rise. As Jesus did on the third day. Please note there is no reference in verse 16 as to where these risen believers go.

Now we look at verse 17. The verse begins with an important and overlooked phrase – "After that." The message is that after those who have died rise, believers who are alive on earth are caught up together with the risen dead in the clouds where we all meet the Lord in the air. But this only happens after the phrase "After that." In the King James version, the phrase "after that" is rendered as "then." I ask you to consider this: How much time elapses between the rising of the dead in Christ and our being caught up together with the risen dead in the clouds? Historically I expect all of us have reasonably thought this all happens immediately. But even simple little words in scripture are there for a purpose. They have meaning. The original word in scripture rendered "After that," or "Then" surely means that nothing happens to those of us living until after the dead in Christ have risen. It may also mean that there is time, maybe just a little bit of time, between the rising of the dead in Christ and our and their going to the clouds to meet Jesus. If so, that would mean the risen dead would be alive on the earth. Would they be going around appearing to various people as those from the graveyard did back after Jesus' crucifixion? Remember, in Matthew 27:52-53 how believers came out of their tombs and went into the city and appeared to people? (You may not remember because those verses are seldom mentioned.).

If indeed the risen formerly deceased believers do spend some time on the earth and go about appearing to people, perhaps interacting and talking about the Lord, might this not be a big incentive and perhaps a spur God would use in bringing about an end time revival?

Keep Your Eyes on Jesus!

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1 Corinthians 15:51-53 (NIV)

⁵¹Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—⁵²in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

This is another key scripture on Christ's gathering of his believers. The big point here is how in the twinkling of an eye, at the sounding of the trumpet, living and dead believers are all changed. The dead are raised imperishable and those still alive are changed. The big point is in verse 53, where perishable bodies put on imperishable bodies and mortal bodies put on immortality. In other words, this is all about our getting those glorious new bodies you have heard about. For some reason, the scripture focuses on the dead getting imperishable bodies – and surely their old earthly bodies will have deteriorated and will have proven to be perishable – and thus they get to be imperishable. And those of us still alive but still mortal – e.g., we have bodies that cannot live forever – receive immortality (and no doubt imperishability as well.)

Luke 17:26-30 (NIV)

²⁶“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

²⁸“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

³⁰“It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

In these verses in Luke Jesus describes two historical events that give a clear message concerning his coming to collect his believers. He notes that the days of his return will be like the days of Noah. People were just living life as normal, eating, drinking, getting married; then Noah (and his family) entered the ark, and look what happened. The flood came and destroyed everyone else. Just like that.

Also, as in the days of Lot people ate, drank, bought, sold, planted, built, but then Lot (and his family at God's leading) went out of Sodom. When Lot left, fire and brimstone from heaven came and destroyed everyone in Sodom on the same day.

Jesus concludes it will be like that when the Son of man is revealed. This indicates of course that Jesus' collecting his believers and taking them away will just be in the midst of normal human activities going on. Suddenly the believers will be gone. It also indicates that when those believers are gone, judgement comes on the earth immediately. Why immediately? Look again at the words. The same day Lot went out of Sodom the fire and brimstone came down on Sodom. And the same day Noah and his family entered the ark the springs of the great deep were opened and the floodgates of the heavens were opened (see Genesis 7:11-13).

LOOKING STILL FURTHER AT THE ACTUAL MOMENT

Note that in the account of Noah, as presented in Genesis Chapters 6-7, Noah works for years to build the ark at God's guidance. Then when God tells Noah to get in the ark, he does so and takes his wife and his three sons and their wives – a total of eight. The door is shut by God and the flood comes. In fact, water is already coming when Noah goes into the ark. Now Noah was ready to go. He had had all those years to discuss with his wife and with his sons and their wives, all those years when he no doubt prayed and sought God. They were ready.

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In the fuller account of Lot and Sodom as presented in Genesis Chapter 19, we see that the angels arrive in Sodom at night and early the next day they take Lot and his wife and two daughters by the hand and lead them out of the city. So whatever words they used during the night, Lot was still moving slowly in leaving. Perhaps he was trying to convince other family and friends to leave and he was having no luck. We know from scripture he was unsuccessful in convincing the fiancées of his daughters to leave (Luke 19:14). The angels knew he and his family would be destroyed if they stayed there, so they made them get out.

There is a message for us here. When the Lord sends for us when he is collecting his believers, we must be ready to go then! Think about all we have read above concerning this moment. We have read about how Jesus comes in the clouds and how there is a shout and a trumpet sounding and a voice of the archangel. Elsewhere in Mark 13 and Matthew 24, Jesus describes how he sends the angels out to collect the elect. So while we have all thought we would just somehow be taken away and then suddenly appear in the clouds with Jesus, is it not possible that an angel will suddenly appear at your home or wherever you are and tell you it is time? And as Jesus has advised, if we are on the roof we are not to go down inside the house. Or if we are in the field, we are not to go back for anything.

Jesus' own words indicate there is some decision or action required on our part. Obviously when the angel comes to tell us or we get the word some other way, we have to be ready to go. There will be no extra time and we must go, possibly going with the angel who has brought us the news. Some believers have never seen an angel or perhaps never been in the presence of strong spiritual forces of God. This may be a shock to them. But they must be ready. They must watch as Jesus warns. Even if they think they are dreaming, they should go with the angel.

Now someone might ask, how does a person know this is an angel of God and not an evil spirit? Easy. The Holy Spirit and the gift of discernment will enable the believer immediately to know the angel is from the Lord. If you don't know the Holy Spirit or have not been baptized by the Holy Spirit, ask God for that. Find a born again spirit filled believer and ask him to pray for you to receive the Spirit and to be baptized with the Spirit. Another possible check for you – you can apply John's advice in 1 John 4:2. You can ask if the angel acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Any angel from God will certainly acknowledge this.

Now with all this clear and dramatic scripture describing the gathering away of the saints, of Jesus' believers, of Jesus' CHURCH, when does this happen? The Bible is not specific in that, but there are several verses that point out believers were not appointed to suffer wrath, and that is what is coming on the world during the last of the last days (Revelation 3:10, Romans 5:9, 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9, and Luke 21:36). I would expect this gathering away to happen before the seven year Tribulation begins.

The key point is that the time is near. There is nothing that has to happen from a Biblical prophecy perspective before Jesus comes and collects his believers. Nothing. In Luke 21:36 (NIV), Jesus gave the key recommendation:

Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

So I say to you watch! Be alert! Be ready! And when you get the clear word it is time, then act. Likely that will involve going with an angel.

[I published this article on my blog in 2015. This week God brought it to my attention; obviously the timing could not be more appropriate and so with minimal change we have published it again here in this newsletter!]

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John

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