

# The Last Trumpet

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well Christmas is almost here and I'm wondering if you're all prepared for Christmas for Wednesday. I have a list of things that still need to be done. Icing the Christmas cake, getting the ham and turkey ready, even still buying some Christmas gifts.

So there are still things that I need to be done. And there's lots of preparations to make as we come up towards Christmas. And as the days get closer towards Christmas my list changes and those things that are considered essential are being whittled down so that it's coming down to a shorter list of those things that are essential and those preparations that I can let go.

But despite its busyness Christmas is a great time. It's a time that we celebrate the first coming of Jesus. A time that reminds us of the way that God broke into his dealing and changed the way he dealt with his people by sending Jesus to die on the cross so that our sins can be forgiven.

A change that ushered into this change of God's kingdom. It began in a stable in the little town of Bethlehem but like yeast in dough has had lasting and profound effects that will remain throughout to all of eternity.

And as we think back of Jesus' first coming, we're also reminded of Jesus' second coming, of the changes that will occur then.

[ 1 : 3 9 ] And it's also time to think about being prepared to meet Jesus when he comes that second time. Because when he returns, he won't come as a baby in swaddling clothes but as God in all his power and majesty and all of his glory.

And today's reading looks at that time. It's the 1 Corinthians 15 passage. It can be found on page 936 if you'd like to follow along in your Bibles with me.

And as we come to that time, how about we spend a moment asking God to help us as we look at this time.

I'll pray. Dear God, please help us as we now study your word. Help us to really think about the implications of Jesus' return and what that will mean for us and for our lives that we live now.

Help us to hear your word and to take them into our hearts and our minds. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the passage is speaking about that time, as I said, when Jesus returns, about what it will be like and also about what we will be like.

[ 2 : 5 5 ] It's the climax of the chapter in which Paul's been writing to the church in Corinth about the resurrection. And there had been some false teaching and misconceptions.

And some were thinking that the resurrection had already begun. Some of the Corinthians were living and teaching others to live as though we were living in the resurrected life.

They thought it was a purely spiritual resurrection that was going to happen. And therefore, the blessings had already begun. And there's still some of that sort of teaching around today.

You may hear of it. People say, well, whatever you need because you're a Christian whilst you're a believer, you just have to ask and it will be given to you. It's a bit like asking or treating God as a genie.

But Paul corrects this type of thinking by saying that the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and he takes that as the model for all believers. If Jesus rose in a physical body, one that could be seen and heard and touched, then so too we will be raised and we will need a body like that for eternal life.

[ 4 : 07 ] His rising is the first fruits of what has become for all believers. And it's interesting to note that unlike nowadays, believers in those days didn't have any problem with the resurrection of Jesus, of seeing him as it actually happened.

Even Christians, some Christians today, still say, well, Jesus didn't necessarily rise physically from the dead. But Jesus' bodily resurrection forms the basis of Paul's argument.

The letter was written about 20, 25 years after his death and resurrection, and so there were still eyewitnesses around who could have testified to the fact that they had seen Jesus' risen body.

And that's explained earlier in this chapter back at verse 6. To counteract the false teaching, Paul says in verse 50 that the flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

And he says that nor can the perishable inherit the imperishable. There will be a change. Our present earthly bodies are not going to last for all of eternity. And bodies are subject to decay and weakness.

[ 5 : 22 ] But I'm only too aware as I find myself squinting at the food labels, looking at what the additives are, and the print seems to be getting smaller and smaller and harder to read. And I often think of, why is the lighting looking so dim here?

But I realise, I don't know that they're making too many changes, but it's my own eyesight that's starting to become decayed. And along with ageing and decaying, our bodies are also subject to death.

And so again Paul says that it's necessary for what's perishable to be changed to what's imperishable. Verse 51, then Paul says, listen, I'll tell you a mystery.

And a mystery, Paul uses that term to refer to something that was once hidden and now revealed through Christ. And he says that when Jesus returns, not all will be dead.

There'll be still some believers who'll be still alive when he comes again. But he says that all will be changed, all will be transformed. That is, believers, whether they're living or have died, will be changed.

[ 6 : 30 ] And you may be wondering what this change, how it will take place and what it will be like. We're told it will be instantaneous. In a flash it will be so quick that before you even blink your eye, it will have happened.

A sudden and total transformation will take place, almost as if you're just taking in breath, a breath in. And there'll be no mistaking it.

There's no possibility of Jesus returning here to earth and people not knowing about it. And I don't know if you've ever been asked that question, but I've been asked, you know, how will we know that when Jesus comes?

Or perhaps he has already come. There's no chance of that. We will know for sure. Matthew's Gospel says it will be sudden and unexpected, but when it happens, it will be like lightning, lighting up the sky.

It will be obvious to everybody. Here on all corners of the earth. And his return will have important and decisive results. It will be too late then to start making preparations.

[ 7 : 35 ] And so Jesus warns the people to be watchful and expectant, to be alert and prepared at all times for his coming. It's a serious warning.

There'll be no second chances at that moment. It will be come and gone. It will be there. There'll be no one who will have any excuses though for that day because the warnings have been throughout the Bible.

Jesus' return will be a really vivid contrast to what we saw of his first coming as a baby in a manger. When he comes for the second time, he'll come in clouds with great glory and power, as it says in Mark's Gospel.

And then he will gather his people from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heaven. It will be absolutely spectacular and fantastic. I can remember thinking when I was watching the fireworks for the millennium.

Many of you will remember how fantastic and spectacular that was. And I can remember thinking, if this is so fantastic and this is man-made, what will it be like when Jesus comes again?

[ 8 : 49 ] Because his coming is going to be even more glorious. And when he comes, the trumpets will sound gloriously.

And it was great to hear the trumpets playing, thanks Paul. It was terrific to hear the trumpets and we're reminded of the trumpets that we'll be playing when Jesus returns. And the prophets, Jeremiah, Joel, Zechariah and Isaiah all tell us that trumpets will be part of this great and glorious.

It will be a loud occasion. And then Paul speaks of the last trumpet in verse 52. And he says that at the sounding of this trumpet, the dead and perishable bodies of all believers will rise imperishable.

The mortal bodies will put on immortality. And he's really stressing this. He actually repeats it again in verses 53 and 54. I think it's because it's very common for us to think in terms of a spiritual existence, of being in heaven.

But what Paul is really wanting his readers to get their head around is the fact that it's a bodily resurrection for believers. This is the reality.

[ 10 : 04 ] Jesus' resurrection was a bodily resurrection. As in verse 49 says, Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

What Paul is saying here is that as humans we have been made like Adam and in the time to come we will be transformed to be like Jesus' glorious body.

We'll be changed and yet there'll still be something of ourselves in that change, in that transformed body. After Jesus' resurrection, there was something different about him.

Disciples didn't immediately recognise him. If you remember Mary outside of the tomb, thought he was the gardener. But when he spoke to her and called her name, she recognised that it was her Lord.

And so whilst we will be transformed, there'll be some continuity, something that makes us peculiarly us will still be us in this transformed body. But the good news is we won't be carrying around our ailments and imperfections of this life.

[ 11 : 16 ] The high blood pressure and cholesterol readings will be gone. So too will hip replacements, spinal injuries, birth defects and illnesses of any kind will all be transformed in the twinkling of an eye.

When Jesus comes back and redeems all of creation, it will be a renewed and restored time and earth. As Romans says, the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

This earth, the whole of creation, will be restored to pristine, to its original perfection. But the last trumpet will not announce some journey away to a spiritual place, but it will herald Jesus' return here to earth, to this new and restored earth.

His arrival will mean that death will be abolished forever. The final blow will be dealt to death itself, like the final punch-up delivered to a villain on a movie plot.

When the hero at last, near the end of the movie usually, and after a series of long and drawn-out struggles, where the two have battled it out time and again, and finally the hero gains that victory, delivers that fatal blow, and the cameras fade out with the villain flat on his back, dead, never to rise again.

[ 12 : 52 ] Paul's saying the dictatorship of death will be abolished when Jesus returns. Death will have been swallowed up by the resurrection. And so, as a child, might call out and taunt at a lion's cage in the zoo, with the lion securely locked behind wired cages.

So, too, Paul can taunt death with the words that come from two Old Testament prophets, Hosea and Isaiah, who longed and looked forward to this day.

And so Paul calls out in their words, Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? And he can cry these out in triumph and victory.

Because death's toxic sting, like the sting of a scorpion, will have been removed. Whilst Jesus' victory over death gained on the cross will be consummated at that time.

Sin, the poison that led to death, will also be wiped away. Death is not simply the result of decay, but the result of sin that began back in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve made that first rebellious move, opting for independence, the desire to make their own decisions, to be autonomous from God.

[ 14 : 18 ] Through Jesus' return, sin and the law that was necessary as a result of sin have been overcome once and for all. It was such great and wonderful news.

It's no wonder Paul dips into a note of thanksgiving, a doxology to God, in verse 57, where he says, But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm reminded of these words that were found on an old tombstone that sum up this hope that we too can have as believers.

And on this tombstone that says, The body of B. Franklin, printer, like the cover of an old book, its contents turned out and stripped of its lettering and gilding, lies here, food for worms.

But the work shall not be lost, for it will, as he believed, appear once more in a new and elegant edition, corrected and improved by the author.

[ 15 : 31 ] In light of this wonderful future, how are we to live in the present? I think we can have gained some insights from looking at Paul and his letters.

Here in the Corinthians, he addresses them as, My beloved, despite his misgivings over some of their theology and behaviour at times, despite the fact that they obviously still had many weaknesses and faults, and some even questioned his authority and leadership earlier in 1 Corinthians.

Despite differences amongst them, Paul was able to love and accept them. Because he saw them as sisters and brothers in Christ. It's this love and acceptance that makes a difference to a believer's life.

It's what made a difference to Paul, who, when encountering the risen Lord, before that, he was a persecutor and hater of the Christians, then dedicated his life to the work of the Gospel.

Paul exhorts the believers to the work of the Gospel themselves. Instead of being led astray and spending time listening to false teaching, they're to commit themselves to God's work, to remain steadfast, loyal, unmovable in the hope of the Gospel, to keep on doing the work that's been prepared for each believer to do, to tell others about Jesus.

[ 17 : 00 ] When believers do this and are immersed in God's work and prayer, spending time worshipping together, hearing the scriptures preached regularly, then they will remain on track.

Like a ship sailing the ocean, the navigator needs to look constantly to the compass to make sure that the ship remains on course.

So too for believers, continuing in God's work and his word will keep them from falling aside. When Jesus returns, the parable of the talents is a reminder that people will be called to give an account for the talents, how they've used them, those that they've been given.

And so we're called to keep on working for the spread of the Gospel. Jesus' delay, as we see further on in 1 Peter, is not a sign that Jesus is not coming, but rather it's a sign of God's grace.

Because when he does come, there will be judgment. We're told that two men will be working in a field, two women grinding at the mill. One will be taken, the other left.

[ 18 : 20 ] People will be just going around their ordinary lives, doing the ordinary everyday thing, unprepared for their accountability towards God, not thinking of their responsibilities to him as their maker and judge, right up until the time of Jesus' return.

And by then, it will be too late. But for believers, it will be a great and glorious time. And Paul exhorts his readers to keep on working for the Lord, because this work is never in vain.

For those who believe and trust and have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour, they can look forward to something wonderful, something beyond our highest imagining, to the promise that we see in 1 Corinthians, that what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, God has prepared for those who love him.

And again, in Revelations, in John's vision, we see something of the future that we have as a great and glorious hope, of a time when there will be no more hunger and thirst.

The sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat, for the lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of water, of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eye.

[ 19 : 48 ] This Christmas, if you haven't already done so, I urge you to become prepared for eternal life, for that day, for when that day comes, it will be time of great joy and celebration for believers and so that you will not be found wanting.

Thank you.