

PREFACE

This passage in God's word describes an astounding moment—we believe it to be the curtain-up moment for the final act of the Eschaton. The Rapture (from the Latin for “caught up”) does not mark the beginning of the Last Things; in our next class I will give evidence to show that that took place in Bethlehem. But it does indeed mark the beginning of this drama's final act.

This moment is mentioned in a number of other passages; let's look at just one.

Read Philippians 3:20-21.

Christ Jesus will “transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

Here in the letter to the Philippians is a reminder that this will not be the same Jesus with whom we are so familiar from the gospel accounts. That was the earthly Son of God, described by the writer to the Hebrews as one “who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9).

At the Rapture and resurrection of the dead, it will be this same Son of God, but not the same Jesus. He is now glorified; He, too, was changed from earthly flesh back to His native, glorified state—a state not native to *us*, but our glorified state will be “in conformity” with His. The two will be compatible. I favor the KJV of v2 1:

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.

In a manner of speaking, Christ Jesus has always wanted His followers to be like Him, to live like Him, think like Him. After the Rapture, we truly will be like Him—not deity, of course, but now fully of the same *kind*: glorified. When Christ was in His earthly body, we could easily live with Him. Now we *must* be so “transformed” before we can live with Him in eternity.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-57.

Sidebar: Before we proceed into our passage, I want to pass along a few more thoughts from John MacArthur and others on the use of the word “last” in 52a: that at the coming of the Lord for His church there will be the call of “the last trumpet.” As I said last week, “The phrase ‘last trumpet’ does not mean the final one in a series, but that this trumpet *signals* the End.” I stand by that interpretation, and the comment from MacArthur does not negate it. Nonetheless it is an interesting—and probably true—interpretation.

MacArthur: I do not think that this trumpet necessarily will be the last heavenly trumpet ever to be sounded. It will, however, be the last as far as the living Christians are concerned, for it will sound the end of the church age, when all believers will be removed from the earth.

And David Guzik shares a different perspective from Ironside:

Ironside says that the last trumpet was a figure of speech that came from the Roman military, when they would break camp. The first trumpet meant, “strike the tents and prepare to leave.” The second trumpet meant, “fall into line.” The third and last trumpet meant “march away.” The last trumpet Paul speaks of describes the Christian’s “marching orders” at the rapture.

We begin this session where I think v52 should have begun. A number of our translations (ESV, NIV, NKJV, CSB) at least begin a new *sentence* at this point.

v52^B

...for the trumpet will sound,

As I mentioned in our previous session, while it may be, there is no requirement that this literally be the sound of a brass musical instrument. These words were used in the Septuagint to refer to the ram’s horn, or any wind instrument, blown at temple sacrifices and feast times. The base word in the Greek (*salpinx*) can refer to either the trumpet or the sound the trumpet makes. And it is often used in a metaphorical sense, sometimes referring to the voice of God or Christ.

Read Revelation 1:10.

It is used the same way in Revelation 4:1. “After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.’” Thus it is quite possible that both references to a “trumpet” in v52 could be referring to the voice of Christ coming from the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17). In any case, the idea is of a sharp, attention-getting sound.

and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

It is quite possible—in fact, Paul seems to imply it—that the “trumpet sound” will be the effective means by which the dead are raised. Note, too, that even though he is describing something that will occur “in the twinkling of an eye,” Paul states the events in the same order he did in his first Thessalonian letter; that is, the dead will be raised first, *then* the living will join them.

“Imperishable” or “incorruptible” here means physically undecaying. With the late Alexander MacLaren, however, I believe it possible that “the ethical meaning may be in the background.” We go to our graves morally corruptible; we will be raised to a state that cannot be either physically or morally corrupted. As v51 states, “...we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.” Every believer, whether still alive or dead for two thousand years, will be changed (*made different*). In vv53-54 the apostle, as it were, fleshes this out for us.

v53

For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

A Lampel paraphrase: *That which is “decayable” must be clothed in that which cannot decay, and that which is subject to death must be clothed in that which cannot die.*

Note: Be sure not to read that word “must” as any part of this world’s natural order. It is wholly of divinely ordained necessity. This new “clothing” is all of God.

Pause for a moment to appreciate the epochal power of this moment—which Paul will celebrate with rapturous song in the following verses. Since the earliest scenes of man on earth, sin and death (decay) have been an integral part of every life; for thousands upon thousands of years this has been man’s reality. For those in Christ, however, in this one blinding moment, all that will come to an end. No more sin; no more death.

v54

But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory.”

Here, once again, Paul refers to another “now—not yet” prophecy, this time one from Isaiah and one from Hosea (v55)—both of which were initially fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ Jesus, but still await their *ultimate* fulfillment during the Eschaton.

Read Isaiah 25:8-9.

The astute among you may have noticed that the word “victory” is not found in the Isaiah passage; in fact the NASB shows this by not displaying the word in all CAPS. Is this another instance of Paul taking liberties with his OT quotations? Not really. I will not inflict upon you the tortuous explanation of the tenuous relationship in the Hebrew between “victory” and “forever” or “for all time.” But do note that the KJV uses “victory” in the Isaiah verse. Let it suffice that Paul is not taking liberties, but just reflecting that this use of “victory” has a relationship with the idea of something accomplished forever. Paul has already addressed this in Chapter Fifteen.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:25-26.

In the description of the new earth in Revelation 21, John writes, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death,” which is an encouraging thought, but the NASB softens this by inserting the word “any.” The text is really stronger than that: “there will no longer be death.” It is not just that people will stop dying; death itself will be gone forever, as we see earlier in the Revelation.

Read Revelation 20:13-14.

Here death is personified and follows after Satan himself into the eternal lake of fire.

v55

“O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?”

Please turn to Hosea 13. Paul, quoting Hosea 13:14 primarily from the Septuagint, still shapes the quote for his purpose in his letter to the Corinthians. A survey of v14 across our collection of versions—addressed not just to the rebellious northern kingdom of Israel, which is sometimes referred to as “Ephraim,” but in this instance specifically to the *tribe* of Ephraim—reveals all sorts of words used to translate this verse.

Read Hosea 13:9-14.

Not just the words, but the context for the parenthetical v14 is quite different from how Paul employs it in Chapter Fifteen. We will not take the time to break down the Hosea passage but, nonetheless, it is another instance of “now-not yet” prophecy. Regardless its purpose by Hosea, in which Yahweh *inflicts* death’s suffering and pain upon Ephraim, Paul uses these lines in his letter to derisively *taunt* death. Here is how vv54-55 are paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in his *The Message*:

Then the saying will come true: Death swallowed by triumphant Life! Who got the last word, oh, Death? Oh, Death, who's afraid of you now?

In our next session we will revisit this verse and finish our study of Chapter Fifteen.