

Week of Meetings-01 Next Event in the Prophetic Program

by Dwight Pentecost

The rapture is the instantaneous transformation of believers into the presence of God without the process of death and resurrection, and it will occur at the last trump when God has concluded this present age.

Duration: 52:19

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:15

Topics: "Eschatology", "Rapture Theology"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding the doctrine of our Lord's return. He explains that the purpose of this teaching is to produce a new kind of life in believers. The preacher describes the process of the Lord's return, where both the dead believers and the living believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. He emphasizes that there will be no distinction or privilege between the two groups, as they will be joined into one group. The preacher encourages believers to find comfort in the promise of the Lord's return and to live each day with the expectation of his coming.

Transcript

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye saw or not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain under the coming of the Lord shall not present them which are asleep.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then he which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the cloud to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words." May God add his blessing to the reading of this portion of his words.

Some folks are looking forward to the tribulation. Some are anticipating Armageddon. Some are looking for the beast and the false prophet or the antichrist.

Had that been the anticipation of the Apostle Paul, he hardly could have written concerning the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. For it gives me no joy to

think of living through Armageddon, nor of existing under the iron fist of the beast or antichrist. That to which we are looking as the promise of our Lord is that which we call the translation or the rapture, and when God's time clock has come to that place where he is ready to terminate this age in which we live, that age is going to come to its termination, and the program of this age will begin to unfold as the Lord Jesus appears in the air to take all believers to himself.

It is our purpose to consider together with you this evening something of the promise of our Lord and his Apostles in the word of God of that to which we look forward the translation of the church. I want to begin our study this evening in the gospel according to John. In John chapter 13, our Lord has taken his disciples apart into an upper room.

It is his purpose to instruct them of things that have been, to explain to them that which will shortly take place, and to prepare them for their future in his absence. The Lord Jesus in John chapter 13 and verse 21 has said, "...verily, verily, I say unto you that one of you shall betray me." Our Lord has there revealed the fact of his betrayal into the hands of the Roman authorities. He has told them further in verse 31, "...now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him." And in this glorification, our Lord is revealing his approaching death.

Then when you come down into verse 36, Jesus answered Peter, "...whither I go thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards." And so Peter said to him, "...why cannot I follow thee now?" And in those verses, the Lord Jesus is revealing that not only is he going to die, but that he is going to be separated from the disciples, and they will be with him and will see him no longer. The result of these revelations, and the result of this instruction, was that the disciples were smitten with a severe heart attack, spiritually speaking. And in chapter 14, verse 1, the Lord has to say, "...let not your heart be troubled." Now, there was every reason, humanly speaking, why their hearts should have been upset and disturbed, for the one who had been with them was no longer to be with them.

The one who had provided for them was no longer to provide for them. The one who had been their guide was no longer to be present to be their guide. The one who had empowered them was no longer to be present to empower them in their daily walk.

They were to be left as fatherless, as children who were bereft of a parent. They were orphans. There was every reason why their hearts should have been perplexed when the world that is to take away their Lord will turn its bitterness and animosity against them.

But this spiritual condition our Lord meets in two ways. First of all, in chapter 14, and verse 1, he meets their spiritual heart troubles by a call to faith. "...Ye believe in God, believe also in me." So, the first antidote to their heart condition was faith in God the Father and faith in God the Son, and the second antidote that was to be taken along with this first prescription was faith in his future program.

For the Lord Jesus says, in verse 2, "...in my Father's house are many mansions, or dwelling places. 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." Now, for the moment, I want to emphasize that which our Lord reveals to them in verse 3. He has just talked to them about his absence and about the fact of separation, and the Lord Jesus now looks forward to a time when the absent one will be the present one, when the ones who have been orphans will no longer be orphans, when they who have been separated from the Father's house will be brought into the very presence of the Father.

So, he is looking forward to that time, and it is the teaching on their relationship to him and to the Father that will be the antidote to their heart trouble. He affirms, first of all, in verse 3, "...if I go, and I certainly am going, I will just as surely prepare a place for you." Now, the word translated here, prepare, is not the word which means to manufacture or to make. It is the word which means, as some parts of the South would say, to ready up.

It means to take a place that is now in existence, and to furnish it and equip it to make a suitable habitation for the one who is to be moved into this place. And so, the Lord Jesus is picturing here a place that had been in existence, which he is going to especially furnish and equip and prepare as a suitable place for those whom he has come to take to himself. "...I go, and I prepare a place for you, and I will come again and receive you unto myself." And there the Lord is picturing for us the habitation of an Oriental family.

In the society in which our Lord lives, the houses were built around a large open square or patio. The walls normally were built without any windows on the outside of the square. The only way of entrance into that square was through one single gate, a very massive gate that could be bolted and barred by night as protection against any abandoned or marauder.

Then, inside, there would be a multitude of rooms that would open off this central court. They did not have interior hallways as we think of them today, but they would have a multiplicity of rooms, all of which would open off this court. When a father would receive a daughter-in-law for his son, that father would simply go to one unused portion of that enclosure, and he would wall off another room or two, and that would become the habitation of the son and daughter-in-law.

As their family grew and increased, they would just wall off another section, and the living quarters would expand. It was limitless then, and if he had a number of children it would have been beneficial if he had started with a good bakery, so that there would be enough dwelling places within the family enclosure for each one of the children. Now, when we read of the statement, in my father's house are many mansions, it brings all sorts of concepts to our minds, and we think of a beautiful edifice out in Dallas North, translated into glory and polished up and furnished with a little gold and silver to make it a first-class mansion, but it's isolated from everything else.

But that's not the picture that our Lord has in view here at all. Rather, he is saying that in the enclosure that is the father's house, there will be many, many dwelling places, so that he is emphasizing the unity of the family, one with another and with the father. And when the Lord is speaking here of that place he has gone to prepare, there is going to be no such thing as you comparing your address with mine and make sure that you are in a prestige location, and you're not in the same street with somebody else, or in an area that is on the downgrade, because we're all going to be in the same dwelling place, in the same enclosure, there with the father and with the son.

But it is not that which we especially want to emphasize, but rather our Lord's promise that because he is there preparing a place for us, he has given to us his promise, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also, as it is natural for the bridegroom to keep the bride with him wherever he may be. So, our Lord in his love for us desires us to be with him, and he has prepared a dwelling place as a bridegroom for a bride, that we might be in his presence at home with him forever. Now, our Lord in John chapter 14 has given us only the fact that he is going to come again.

He has given us only the fact that he will take us to himself. Of the program, of the method, of the time, he has said nothing. He has given us the glorious hope that he will come again and that he will take us to

himself.

Now, to get a second step in the New Testament revelation concerning this great program of the translation of the church, will you turn with me into the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians? This, as you are familiar with it, is the great resurrection chapter in the New Testament, where the Apostle Paul, by inspiration, gives to us that which is the central theme of the gospel. In chapter 15, verse 3, he says that I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. Now, what was the proof that he died? Why, verse 4, he was buried.

What's the second fact? He rose again the third day according to the scriptures. What's the proof of that? Why, verse 5, he was seen of Cephas, and then of the twelve. So there are two essential facts in the gospel that the Apostle Paul preached, that Christ died for our sins and that Christ rose again from the dead after the price for our sins had been fully paid.

And the rest of this chapter is an unfolding of that second facet of the gospel. If Jesus Christ died for us but does not live again, if he had not been resurrected, then we do not have salvation at all. Our salvation depends not only on the fact of the death of Christ, but just as really on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle then moves to defend and approve the fact of the resurrection of Christ, and as he moves through this chapter in a glorious way which we cannot go into tonight because it is another field of study, the Apostle demonstrates that not only has Christ been raised beyond any doubt whatsoever, but that we will be raised also. And he shows us that there is no individual who has ever lived from the time of Adam to the end of the millennial age when this earth is destroyed by fire. No man who has ever lived who will not be resurrected.

There are, it is true, two kinds of resurrection, and some will be resurrected to life and some resurrected to judgment. But every single individual who ever lived will be resurrected, and that is a sober and a serious thought. For if the unfaithful and the wicked were left in the grave and were never resurrected, then that would be the end of them, and it wouldn't matter very much what they did about Christ.

If they were blotted out, if they were forgotten, if they simply lapsed into unconsciousness and stayed there forever, then they would miss the blessing of heaven and glory, but they wouldn't be too bad off in that state of obliteration. The Apostle has shown us very conclusively that every individual who ever lived will be resurrected. Now, after presenting the truth of resurrection, the Apostle, in verse 51, wants to introduce us to what he calls a mystery.

He says, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we the living one shall be changed. Now, as perhaps you have been taught before, when the word mystery is used in the word of God, it does not refer to something that is mysterious, that is difficult to understand.

A mystery refers to some truth that has not previously been revealed by God to man. It is something that had been hidden in the counsels of God, which God purposed to do, but he had not previously revealed what its purpose was. Now, the Old Testament has taught us very clearly that every believer in the promise of God, every born-again individual will be resurrected in the glory.

There was nothing new about that truth. So, when the Apostle says, I show you a mystery, he is not referring to what he has been teaching in 1 Corinthians 15, that believers would be resurrected. You can go to Job chapter 19, verse 25 and following, where Job, in the very first revelation given to us in the word of God, says, I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand in the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

Job, who preceded Abraham, had the confident hope of the resurrection through the Redeemer who would one day appear. You can go into Isaiah chapter 26, verse 26, or Daniel chapter 12, verse 3 and following. Those Old Testament prophets state very clearly that the righteous would be resurrected into glory and would enjoy the presence of God forever.

The day that in Psalm 16 affirms the same truth concerning Christ, thou would not suffer thine holy one to see corruption and give the promise of the resurrection. It was not then resurrection which was an unrevealed truth that is now being revealed to man. But what is the mystery? What is the new revelation? The new revelation was the fact that some believers would be translated into God's presence without coming through the avenue of death and resurrection.

Down to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 51, as you began to read Genesis and read right straight through the Old Testament and through the New Testament down to that point, you would say there's only one way a person can get into glory, that is by physical death and then physical resurrection. For there had been not the slightest hint that any individual would ever get into God's presence apart from that process of death and resurrection. I grant it, and you will observe that we do have the case of Enoch and Elijah in the Old Testament who were translated without seeing death.

But God never followed the translation of Enoch by saying there's coming a day when all believers like Enoch will be caught up. God knew all the time what he was going to do, but he didn't take those people into his confidence as to what his program was. And when Elijah was translated, and the double spirit of God's portion fell on Elijah, even Elijah had no idea that God one day would instantly catch up every believer on the Lord Jesus Christ as Elijah had been caught up.

That was a purpose of God hidden away in the recesses of his own council, but now in his will God reveals to the apostle Paul the fact that the hope set before believers is that we shall not all sleep, and by sleep I'm not referring to what happens on a warm night after a big dinner, after a strenuous weekend when you feel sleepy in church. He is not talking about physical sleep, he is talking about believers' death, and he is saying I want to teach you a truth that never has been taught before. We shall not, we believers, shall not all come into glory by the prophet of dying, and then coming to glory by resurrection, but we shall all be changed.

Now, here is the new truth that there could be a transformation into the presence of God out of this body of corruption, into an incorruptible body, out of this mortal body, into an immortal body without the process of death and resurrection. And so, the apostle Paul, by inspiration, is giving to us this new method by which God will bring one whole generation of believers into his presence. He tells us when this will happen.

It will happen, first of all, in verse 52, instantaneously. No process involved. There will be an instantaneous transformation, for it will take place in the twinkling of an eye.

That word twinkling is not the word blinking of an eye. That's pretty fast. We wouldn't have much time to do anything if it took place in the blinking of an eye.

This is even faster than that. It has reference to that sudden flash of light that may pass between two individuals, that instantaneous, indivisible unit of time in which there is that flash of recognition that will go from one to the other with no lapse of time whatsoever. The apostle says this is going to be that instantaneous in the twinkling of an eye, and it will take place at the last trump.

Now, the last trump, as the apostle uses the term here, has reference to that moment of time when God will have concluded this present age in which we live. It will be that moment of time when the last member has been born again and has been joined by the baptism of the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. It will be that time when the bride of Christ has been completed.

It will be that time when the father will say to the son, son, it is time for you to return and to bring to yourself that bride whom you have purchased through your own blood. There is not the faintest hint any place in the word of God as to when that time will be. God has not given us one single sign to tell us when the last member will be brought into the body of Christ.

It is entirely possible, as far as we understand the word of God, that I may preach to you this evening in the spirit of God may convict some sinner here who never has received Christ as Savior or is in need of a Savior, and before I could finish this sermon he would say in his heart, I accept Christ as my personal Savior, and I'd never get to finish this sermon because God would say, that's the last one, son, go get it. And we'd be translated in a moment in the twinkling of an eye that that last sermon for the program of God on earth will have been completed. And then the apostle said, we shall be changed.

Changed from this body of corruption, verse 53, into an incorruptible body, and this mortal, that one subject to death, shall become deathless, as is translated in that moment of time into the very presence of God. And the apostle Paul has built on that foundation which the Lord laid in John chapter 14 in his promise, I will come and receive you to myself. And now Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 has told us a little bit of what the program will be, that we may be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Now I want you to turn with me, please, to the passage that we read as our scripture in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 13-18, where the apostle gives to us yet more detail concerning this translation or the rapture of the church. Now, there was a problem that the apostle Paul was writing to me. The apostle had spent, as near as we can figure out, only about three weeks in Thessalonica.

Not very much time, is it? Now, if you were to go to a group of raw idol-worshiping heathens, deep in rationalism, in idolatry, how much would you figure on getting accomplished in three weeks? Well, the apostle, first of all, got a bunch of them converted, and then he began to teach them. And you know, there are some folks who say, don't teach prophecy, leave it alone, that's certainly not for babes in Christ. But these Thessalonians certainly weren't beyond spiritual babyhood, but they'd only been saved a few days, and the apostle Paul told them what fact, that the Lord was coming.

He had told them of the hope that was before them, and from that moment of time on, they had been looking every day for the Lord to come. Then a strange thing happened. One of the brothers in Christ died, then another, then another.

How many? We don't know. Some little time had gone on, and physical death had come into that assembly, and they began to be upset. They were somewhat worried.

You know, after I've tried to teach seminary students, I have a crack at them over four years, I find at the end of four years there are a couple things they don't know yet, and a couple things I've told them that they're a little confused about. I'm not surprised that these believers were a little bit confused after just three weeks. They just didn't have it straight.

They said, here are our brethren who were looking for this translation and looking for the Lord to come just as much as we were, and they have died. Now, when the Lord comes and takes us to himself, aren't they going to miss some of the blessings? Aren't they going to be left out? What about these people who died in Christ? Won't we who are alive on earth when he comes have a head start? Won't we be able to grab off the chief mansions, the best mansions, and they'll come along at a later time and they'll just sort of take what's left? If there were two different groups who went to be with the Lord, one by resurrection and one by translation, it would suggest to us that there would be division throughout all eternity, for some got to be with the Lord by one method and some by another method. And it was entirely conceivable that those who are alive and are translated would go to a different compartment or a different place from those who had been resurrected.

And so, here is one who has lost a loved one, and he says, why, the Lord may come today, my loved one has died, and in the coming of Christ will I see that loved one? Will we be together? Will we be united, or will the fact that that loved one has died mean that we will be in separate places? Glorified, yes, but in separate places for us. You see, they hadn't grasped the truth of John 14. They thought in my Father's house are many what? Mansions, and they thought they might live on two different streets in glory because they got their two different methods, and they hadn't understood that our Lord didn't say many mansions.

He said many apartments. And so, the apostle wants to write to them. He wants to straighten them out and give them comfort and consolation as they are looking for the coming of our Lord.

So, he begins to write in verse 13 and says, "...I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep." Now, when Paul says, I don't want you to be ignorant, that expression always means they were ignorant, and he didn't want them to keep on being ignorant anymore. And so, he says, I'm just writing to dispel your ignorance. Now, if I called you ignorant, you'd get mad, but I don't think Paul worried that much whether you called, or whether you mind that he calls you ignorant.

So, he just says, "...I would not have you to be ignorant, either, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye fall or not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and we certainly do believe that fact, even so them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with another." The first point of his comfort and consolation is that there will not be a single believer on whom death has laid its hands who will be left in the grave, or who will be forgotten when the Lord Jesus Christ comes. We sing sometimes an Easter hymn, Death Cannot Keep Its Prayers.

Why? Because Jesus Christ is victor over death, and I submit to you that, if at the coming of Christ, or at the resurrection, the body of one single believer were left behind, Satan would have won a victory in that one area. And I would go further, and I would say that if you have been unfortunate enough to lose a finger, and in the resurrection that first joint of that finger were left behind and not resurrected, Satan would have gained a victory. Now, I grant you it wouldn't have been much of a victory if it's just that, but it would be a victory.

So that, the Lord is sure, the Apostle Paul is showing us here that in the resurrection, them which sleep in Jesus, God absolutely must bring with him. Why? He is the victor. Now, what's the process? And, beginning at verse 15 on down to verse 17, we have the climactic revelation concerning this line of teaching, the process by which the church meets the Lord in the air.

This we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain under the coming of the Lord shall not... Now, change the next word in your English text. It should read, precede, or go before, or the commonest English I can think of is, have a head start. That's exactly what he means.

Or, if you take all those who are in the grave, and then all those who are alive on the earth, it would seem as though the living one certainly would have a little head start anyway on those who have died. The Apostle says, when we go to meet the Lord, the living one shall not have a head start on those which are asleep, for this is the process. The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the archangel, with a trumpet of God.

I have to stop on those phrases that are given to us there, the shout, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet of God. They can be taken in two different senses. The word that is translated here, shout, is the word in Greek that was used for the command of a military leader.

As one might stand at the head of a great battalion that is all ready to go into battle, and the leader would stand up and say what? Forward march! It's an authoritative command to move, and the word translated here, shout, is the shout of a military commander who is moving out the troops that are following after him. The voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God. Now, the archangel, or the voice of the archangel, is interesting to observe here, because when God gives commands, and when God would accomplish his program, he frequently uses angelic ministers in that program.

The law was given through angels in the Old Testament. Angels ministered to Christ at the temptation, and angels were with Christ at the time of his trial and crucifixion. And God gave a command to the angels, and that through the chain of command and angelic host from the archangel down to the angels, there would be the repeating of this command.

And then when he says the trumpet of God, the trumpet in the Old Testament was used for one of two things. First of all, it was used to summon Israel to battle. In the second place, it was used to summon Israel to worship.

Now, I see two possibilities, and it may include both of them. The shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, may be the command of God to the angelic host that they are to go and are to engage in battle with Satan, and they are to wrest from Satan's control every body of every believer to demonstrate the complete victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over death. Or, this may be a shout and a voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God addressed not to the angels but to the believers to summon them to that great assembly in worship and praise and honor and glory.

In glory itself, the word addressed to believers. Not the command, go and liberate, but the command, come unto me. But here is this authoritative word that sets the whole program in motion, and in verse 17 we find the next step.

We have had, in verse 15, the resurrection of the dead believers, and then following that, in verse 17, you will observe the word, then. After the resurrection of the believers, we which are alive and remain shall be

caught up together with them in the cloud. Now, I want you to get the picture.

Our Lord has been sent by the Father to this earth to bring all living and dead believers of this age, the church, into his presence. When the Lord gives the authoritative shout, the graves will be opened, and every believer in Christ in the grave, the body of every believer who has been in the grave, will come forth. And then, as the second step, while those bodies are being caught up, we which are alive will be caught up, and together we shall meet the Lord in the air.

Underline that word, together. What does it show? That before either group meets the Lord in the air, they are joined into one group. No difference, no distinction, no privilege for one over the other.

The two, the dead resurrected and the living translated, will be joined into one group, and they shall meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words. What's the comfort? There will be no separation, there will be no division, there will be no distinction, there will be no privilege for one group over the other group.

We shall be united together and with one another, and then we shall be united together with our Lord, to be with the Lord in the air. So, what will be the effect of this translation on the earth below? It would be interesting if we had a lot of scriptures that we could point to to show, for as I understand scripture, it seems as though it makes no effect whatsoever. It has no, it makes no impression on the multitudes of lost ones who are left on this earth to go to the great tribulations.

Their hearts have been hardened against Jesus Christ, they have rejected him as Savior, and when they see this great sign, and I believe it is a sign that cannot be hidden, for there will be multitudes who in an instant of time are absent from the usual rounds and habits of life, yet they can shrug their shoulders and pass it off and say, so what? And when the gospel is proclaimed during the tribulation period, it will fall as on dead and deaf ears, because our hearts have been hardened against the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood is proclaimed as the basis of salvation for the sins of the world. Yet what will it mean for us? There's an interesting note that I observe whenever I read passages that have to do with this translation of the church, that no place as far as I have been able to find it in the word of God does it ever say that Christ is coming to take us to heaven. No.

Every time it speaks of Christ coming for his bride to church, he is coming to take us unto himself. Here it is again in 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 17, "...we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be in heaven." Is that what your Bible says? No. So shall we ever be what? With the Lord.

You go back to John in chapter 14, and as the words come from the Lord's lips himself, what does he say? "...I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you unto the place I go to prepare for you." Is that it? No. "...I will receive you unto myself.

The glory of heaven is not the gold of the streets, nor the jewels of the gates, nor the splendor and the beauty of our eternal habitation. The glory of heaven is the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." We are not looking for an event. We are not looking for a program.

We are looking for a person, and we can live day by day, hour by hour, and moment by moment with the expectation that the Lord may come at any time. As we spoke of this last evening in our first introductory message, we tried to point out to you that this whole teaching, the doctrine of our Lord's return, was

revealed to us in Scripture to produce a new kind of life. Husbands, if your wives stood looking over your shoulder every moment of every day, I dare say there are some things that you wouldn't do that you normally do.

Why? Your husbands were around the home all day long and stood looking over your shoulder. Some things would be different, and I'm sure the children would say, the young people would say, if my parents stood and looked at me every moment of the day, there are a lot of things that I did today I wouldn't have done. The presence of a person is the greatest deterrent to manifestations of sin in the flesh.

When God would deter the child of God from the paths of sin, how did he do it? By promising the imminence of his appearance, that he might come at any moment of time. Let me say to you, if you are here without Jesus Christ this evening, that which we have been speaking to you about from the Word of God is not just some far-off truth, something that may happen generations from now. It is a revelation from the Word of God that may take place at any moment.

Before I could pronounce the benediction tonight, the Lord Jesus Christ could come to take the redeemed to his house. Before you awaken in a new day, the Lord Jesus Christ could come to take every believer to his house. It will happen in the moment, in the flash of an eye, too late to prepare to meet the one who has come.

And, I would invite you, if you are here without Christ, to settle the question now to accept Jesus Christ as a personal Savior. If you do know Jesus Christ, I wonder if you've ever considered how different life would be if you really believed that the Lord might come at any time. I've often used as an illustration the story which I heard a long time ago, but has brought the truth home to me repeatedly.

It was a story told of a young man who went from Philadelphia in the days when the western border of our colony was in the region of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The great west and the southwest, unexplored and unsettled. This young man left the comforts of Philadelphia to go out and homestead in the area of Fort Pitt, which is now the city of Pittsburgh.

Going out there, he had cleared a tract of land, he had built a cabin, he had left in Philadelphia, and he had promised he would send for when he was established there in that wilderness frontier. About the time that his cabin had been made ready for occupancy, and he was ready to send for his fiancée, he was asked by the authorities in Fort Pitt to represent the government and to go on an expedition out into the wilderness to the west. It meant leaving his cabin, his caverns, the home that he was establishing.

He was familiar with the law of the land of that day, for the law realized that many people would set out to homestead, but who would be turned back because of the vicissitudes and trials of life would abandon their claim. So, if a claim were left unoccupied, it became the possession of the first individual who moved in and possessed it. This young man did not want to forfeit all the labor that he had put into this cabin, so he sent back to Philadelphia and asked his fiancée to come and to move into that cabin and possess that cabin and occupy it for him.

The day that she came and moved in to occupy that cabin, he left to go into the wilderness to the west to accomplish that for which he was being sent. But, he left with the promise that the day that I return will be the day of our wedding. She was to occupy until he should return.

Now, how do you suppose that young woman spent her days? Is it unreasonable to think that she would get up in the morning and she would go about the regular duties in the cabin there with this consciousness today, my beloved may return? And when she would bar the cabin doors and shutters at night, it would be to go to bed with a thought that perhaps before a new day breaks, my beloved will return and according to his promise, it will be the day of our wedding. She went about her duties occupying his possession until one day she looked out and from the west she saw the familiar form of her beloved as he had returned. And according to his promise, the day of his return was the day of their wedding.

Our Lord has said to us, believers, occupy till I come. Lift up your heads for your redemption draws nigh. We shall not all go by the avenue of death, but we shall be translated to meet him in the end.

And with John we would say, even so come, Lord Jesus. Our Father, may the Spirit of God receive fit to reveal to us this precious truth that we can live each day looking for the one who will take us up to be with himself. May this truth transform our lives so that we might walk in the light of his return.

Give us the comfort that this teaching brings to us as it promises us a blessed reunion with every child of God. Give to us, our Fathers, a purification to come from living in the light of our Lord's return. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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