

Last Days Conference 1970 the Apostle Paul

by Neil Fraser

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being prepared for death and Christ's return, and the need to understand the prophetic program and eschatology.

Duration: 47:29

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, Hebrews 2:13, Revelation 19:6, Revelation 19:11

Topics: "End Times", "Second Coming"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by describing a tremendous burst of praise that starts in heaven and spreads throughout creation. This outburst of praise is in response to the announcement of the final victory over evil and the reign of the Lord God. The sermon then discusses the wedding of the bride, which some believe takes place during the tribulation while the bridegroom rejoices in heaven. The speaker emphasizes the importance of focusing on the Son of Man and his return to earth, as well as the glory and honor he will receive from God. The sermon also mentions the coming wrath and the book of Revelation, which tells the story of the wrath that is to come through judgment.

Transcript

Good morning. I hope you've had a good rest and you're ready for the last great day of the Feast. Now shall we read 2nd Timothy, Chapter 4, please? And this is the time when we preachers have got to watch us.

2nd Timothy, please, Chapter 4, Verse 6, For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth it is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me, and the cloak that I left at Troas with Carpas, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, and especially the parchments. And you'll notice at the beginning of verse 21, Do thy diligence to come before winter. You know, it's very interesting and instructive to see what was before the Apostle Paul at the end of his life.

As I'm sure you know, 1st Timothy, and Titus, and 2nd Timothy, in that order, I'm told, are the last communications which the Apostle Paul had to an individual before his death. I think the last written communication to a church was a letter to Philippi, and if so, we see that both in Philippi and in these

pastoral letters, the Apostle Paul faces three possible alternatives. And it's good for us, as we face the odd and fraud month of this year, and perhaps longer, that we face those three same alternatives.

I find that in writing both to Timothy and to the church at Philippi, he faces the possibility that he might die. Even as he writes, he's in a Roman prison, and he doesn't know the hour when he'll hear a step in the corridor, and the grating of a key in the lock, and the door swung open, and he'd be taken out, out into the blinding sunshine, which must hurt his eyes after his long confinement in the almost total darkness. And he'd be led out through the streets of the city to the jeers of the populace, for they're always ready to agree with Rome, and to be commanded to lay down his head on a block when there would be the swift gleam of the neck, and his head, that wonderful head, would roll away from his body.

He faced that possibility. Here he says, the time of my departure is at hand. Notice the term he uses, my departure.

They tell me it's a nautical term, a term that's used for the setting of the sails of the ship as it goes out into the sea. The apostle did not view his death as a cessation, of being, as a sleep in which there was no knowledge of either happiness or the other. He rather viewed it as a going out from the bindings and trappings of this present life, and going out in with full sail to a better country.

The time of my departure is at hand. Writing to the Philippian church, he said, I'm on a straight betwixt to having a desire to depart. Here's the word again, to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.

He faced the possibility of his death. You and I should face the possibility of our death in 1971. You're not morbid because you take in that possibility, and you're not brave because you deny the possibility of it.

You may not go as far as Sir Walter Scott, who, on the day of his marriage, arranged for his funeral. But each of us should say, I might die this year, and then say, Lord, teach me to number my days that I may apply my heart unto wisdom. If you're like me, you're always projecting your best intentions into the future.

No, I'm not reading my bible as I should, but I'm going to. No, I'm not praying as I know I ought to pray. My praying is not a farce, it's a farce, but I'm going to do better.

No, I'm not investing in the Lord's work with my money as I know I should. I have so many things that call for my money, but I'm going to in the future. No, I know I'm not the witness I ought to be for Christ, but I'm going to in the future.

How do you know you're going to have a future? It might be later than you think, both for you and for me. Don't always be projecting your best intentions into the future. You might die this year.

So might I. How nice to know that if that comes, it is a setting of the same. It's going out. When Peter speaks of his death, he doesn't call it deceased, or it's deceased in our authorized version, but the word there is exodus.

And what exodus was to the children of Israel, going out from bondage into liberty. Peter says, I will endeavor after my exodus, that you have these things in remembrance. But then the apostle Paul says the possibility that Christ might come.

For in the next sentence he says, there's laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day. And not to me only, but also to all them that love his appearing.

You mean you're still loving his appearing, Paul? Good.

Writing to Titus about the same time, he says, looking for that blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. And writing to the church of Philippi, for our citizenship is in heaven, for whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. So you mean, Paul, that although you do not know the day when you might die, at the same time you're still looking for the Lord from heaven, and that he still might come in your lifetime? Yes.

Now, when you read what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 about the coming of the Lord, you would suppose that he expected to be alive when Christ came. For he puts himself in the class of those who would be alive. He says, when Christ descends from heaven, mother, shout, the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we who are alive.

And he puts himself in the class of those who would be living when Christ came. From which you might deduce that the apostle Paul fully expected Christ to return in his lifetime. But against that is the point that five years later, he wrote to the Corinthians and put himself in the class of those who would be dead when Christ returned.

If you doubt that, read 2 Corinthians 4 and 14, where he says that, well, we'd better read it. I might get a good time for you to write down one of those questions anyway. And don't forget, you're supposed to have the questions already when Mr. Pell gets through.

2 Corinthians 4, 14, knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also, shall raise up us also. He's put himself in the class of those who would be dead. Now, does that mean that Paul had given up the possibility of Christ coming in his lifetime? No.

It means that nothing can be adduced from the writings of Paul as to his personal expectation. Nothing can be adduced, definitely, from the writings of Paul as to his personal belief that he would be alive or dead. And 2 Corinthians follows 1 Thessalonians in time about five years.

But you can't escape the implication that the apostles wrote their letter to the churches. They wrote to them in terms which lead the churches to expect that they might see Christ return in their lifetime. Writing to the first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle says, ye came behind in no gift, awaiting the coming, awaiting the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Writing to the church of Philippi, I've already quoted, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. And to the Colossians, when Christ who is our light shall appear, then shall we also appear with him, we also, we also shall appear with him in glory. And then we have the Thessalonian Epistles, and then we have the quotation from Titan for that blessed hope, and so on.

Language means anything, you would suppose, that the apostles were making the churches believe in the possibility of the return of Christ in their lifetime. Now, when you read the last chapter of the Gospel by John, you will know that it's wrong to say that Jesus Christ might have returned any day after Pentecost. Some people in their zeal for the subject would tell us that Christ might have well returned any day after Pentecost.

That's not so. It's not so because Peter was told that he would live to be an old man, and that he would die. Now, if you doubt that, let me quote it to you.

In the last chapter of John, the Lord said to Peter, when you were young, you girded yourself, but when you are old, another shall gird thee, and carry thee whether thou wouldst not. This he said, signifying by what death he should glorify God. Peter knew that he would die.

Now, Peter may not have grasped implications of the Savior's words at the time, but when he writes one of his letters, he says, knowing that I must shortly put off the step. Peter knew that he was going to die. Now, in that same chapter, John 21, Peter said to the Lord, and what shall this man do, indicating John? And the Lord said, if I will that he carry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me, and let me read this.

Then went that saying abroad, that that disciple should not die. But, John is careful to add, nevertheless, Jesus did not say that he would, but if I will that he carry, what is that to thee? Nevertheless, then went that saying abroad, the disciples believed that John would linger on until Christ returned. We know that Christ did not return during the lifetime of John.

However, when Peter would be conceivably an old man, there was given to us through the Holy Ghost the Thessalonian letters. You see, the difference between the first and second letters to the Thessalonians is this, that the first letter is written to correct the notion that those who had died in Christ, whether by martyrdom or naturally, the notion that having died they would fail to participate in the glorious event, the glory of Christ's return. The first letter was written to show that, whether living or dead, they would not fail to participate in it, for the dead in Christ would rise first.

Those who were living would be changed and caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Now, the second letter to the Thessalonians was written to correct the second error, and that was that those who even now were suffering because of their testimony, were in trouble and tribulation, that that meant that the day of the Lord was already come. You see, and Paul wrote the second letter to show that the present persecuted plight of the church was not proof of the day of the Lord, for, said he, that day cannot come except to be a falling away first, except to be an apostasy first, if that's the meaning of it, and the men of sin be revealed.

Now, the difference between 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Thessalonians 5, I shouldn't be surprised if Brother Phelps might take up chapter 5, or certainly would prefer to. The difference between these two chapters is that the chapter 4 refers to the day of Christ, and chapter 5 to the day of the Lord, and that there's a great and fundamental difference between these two chapters. Now, those who contend for the church going through the tribulation contend that this supposed division between chapters 4 and 5 does not really exist.

For, they say, there were no chapter divisions when the New Testament was written, and we read in chapter 4, the Lord shall descend from heaven with the shepherd, the Lord, and then he says, now concerning the day of the Lord, it doesn't say. Now, it's not too much to say this. If chapter 5, and mark it well, if chapter 5 is a mere continuation of chapter 4, nothing can save the church from going through the tribulation.

Why not? Because that day can come, said the apostle in the second letter to the Thessalonians, except there be an apostasy first of the men of sin, believe me, you see. It's fundamental to our knowledge to see if there's a distinction, a series of distinctions. I hope we'll have pointed out before the end of this morning a series of distinctions between chapters 4 and chapters 5. If Raphael doesn't do it, I'll do it myself.

All right, so the church is thought that, but as I say, John died and Christ had not come. Now, what had the Lord himself to say about his return? Did he make any such distinction between the dead and Christ rising first, and the living changed? I think he did. He said to Martha, I am the resurrection and the life.

He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. 1 Thessalonians 4 is the further amplification of the Savior's words.

Now, our Savior taught, in two parables at least, that he would be gone a long time. In a parable of the talents and of the powers, he indicated that his coming was like a traveler going into a far country and then coming back again. And, when he journeyed into a far country in those days and came back again, he wasn't flying as I did on Friday, 575 miles an hour.

He indicated a long time, and then he said in his second parable, and after a long time, he returned. Now, how long is a long time? Oh, you say, it's a variable quantity. Right.

Now, our Savior has been gone a long time, 1900 years. Now, sometimes, you brother, I'm sorry to say this to you, but sometimes your wife goes into a store, and you're waiting for her, and the poor soul has only been gone two hours. You know where I'm going to stay next? The poor soul has only been gone two hours, while you stand outside.

And, when she comes out, what do you say? Well, you've been gone a long time. Oh, remember, she could be gone 1900 years, and still be just a long time. In fact, if she's just gone two hours, you're lucky.

You see, when she comes out, you ought to say, thank you, dear. You certainly did that very quickly. You're a gentle man.

Anyway, a long time. Now, when, as I have said, Peter was conceivably an old man, and knew not the day when he might depart this present life, the time was right for such a revelation as we have, and was given to Paul in the Thessalonian epistles, in which, in every chapter, as we say, he mentions the coming of the Lord. And, the Thessalonian epistles ought to be carefully studied in this regard.

Now, in the other epistles, as well as Thessalonians, the Holy Ghost, through Paul, did not reveal all at once the facts about the coming of the Lord. For instance, when you read 1 Thessalonians 4, it says that the dead in Christ shall rise first, and we shall be caught up. But, there's not a word as to whether we'll have any new body or not out there.

You have to wait five years until he applies it in the Corinthian epistles. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. I'm not suggesting the church didn't know it for five years.

I'm just saying that, in the New Testament, we are not told until then. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. 1 Corinthians 15.

But, even then, we are not going to want. We will be changed. You have to wait until the last communication to a church to find out, work into what will be changed.

Our citizenship is in heaven, for whence also we look for the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change, who shall fashion anew this body of humiliation and fashion it like unto the body of his Lord. Now, that's a good enough introduction to the subject, perhaps, this morning. How many things would arise.

I think Brother Phil needed a whole day on this subject, and not just one. And, I said to my brother and pal, just before I got up, do you know what I'd like to see amongst us in this country? A gathering of all of us, and as many other brethren as could get away, to make a detailed study for about a week or two on the whole question of eschatology, on the whole question of the prophetic program. Wouldn't that be good?

To go over it again and confirm our faith that there's a rising tide in England and elsewhere, that the church is going to go through the tribulation.

In some places, it's a mark of scholarship and progress to teach and believe the church is going to go through that tribulation. Personally, I do not believe that. And, it might be good to have such a prophetic conference, addresses given, discussions made, and a book written afterwards about those addresses and about those things, that we might be once more confirmed in our faith.

I commend this to the message, however brief, that I've just given. Dealing with the yellow card, maybe you came in a little late. We'd just point out to you that there are some yellow cards in the pews, and these are for writing down questions that you might have, and your questions will be answered from God's Word by our brethren, who will form a panel after we hear from our next speaker.

And, just before we hear from Mr. Powell, I wonder if we could turn to 406 for one verse. You'll notice this hymn starts off with, The Son of Man in Triumph Rose. Then, Jesus walked with his disciples, and then he went back to his father's home, and as we know, he is coming back again.

Let's stand, please, and we'll sing verse 4 of 406. Open your Bibles, please, to the book of Revelation, chapter 19, verse 1. And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven saying, hallelujah, salvation and glory and honor and power unto the Lord our God. Verse 11.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he that sat upon him was called faithful and true, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. Chapter 20, verse 4. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them. And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands.

And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. There are three ways in which we suffer for our sins. First of all, when we sin we sow a seed and reap a harvest, a bitter harvest.

Whatsoever man soweth, that shall he also reap. Secondly, when we sin we serve a master who pays wages, and the wages of sin is death. Third, when we sin we sin against our creator who created us for his glory.

We rob him of his glory, and we receive his wrath. Our brother quoted a verse in Thessalonians. We have in the last verse of the first chapter two comings.

We have the coming of the son from the father's heart to bring children to the father's home, but while the son of God is coming a second time, God sent his son into the world that we might be the sons of God. He's sending his son into the world to bring the children home. He's bringing many sons to glory.

Behold, I am the children whom God has given me. That will be the presentation when he comes and takes us to our heavenly home. But wrath is coming.

Jesus has delivered us from the wrath to come. The book of Revelation, beginning with chapter six and ending with this chapter, is the story of the wrath that's coming. We have the church on earth in chapters one to three.

We have the church in heaven in chapters four and five. The final scene where all the universe, everyone that has breath, praises our blessed Lord and Savior. How will that be brought about? By judgment.

And from chapter six to chapter 19, we have three series. We have side views that we can put in, but that is the story. The story of the seals, the story of the trumpets, the story of the vines or the bulbs.

In the story of the seals, we have a bitter harvest that man has sowed, and the harvest is inevitable. Natural developments. Man creates for himself the miseries that are coming upon this earth, but in the series of the trumpets, we have hell let loose, and man gets a little taste of what awaits him forever when there are days of hell upon earth.

And men will seek death, and it avoids that. But more fearful than the harvest, more fearful than the wages, is the wrath of God. And just as God's wrath was poured out at Calvary, those who have not taken refuge where the fire has been will be in the wake of that storm.

And it beggars description. When the wrath of God is poured out upon a world that rejected his son, and the very words used at Calvary are written in this book, it is finished. After these things, I want to suggest that there's no grander chapter in the whole Bible than chapter 19 of the book of Revelation.

It's simply unparalleled. It's a prophetic view unrivaled for grandeur and for significance. After these things, what? What's the first thing? A tremendous burst of praise that begins in heaven, and then it reaches out to the most bounds of creation.

Why is there this outburst of praise? Verse 6, the last verse, is an announcement that tells us the occasion for this praise, its final victory. The stronghold of the opposition, the metropolis of evil, has fallen, and the Lord God Omnipotent reigns over a once rebellious world. No wonder they sing.

What follows that? The display of heaven's best and fairest, the wedding of the bride. Some of my good brethren would have the bride down here in the throes of the tribulation, while the bridegroom is rejoicing in heaven. Observe.

Absolutely. Thank God we have been spared and saved from the wrath to come, and it's joy to come, the joy of the bridegroom welcoming his bride to the joys of heaven. And so we have the display of heaven's best.

It's heaven's happiest moment, the presentation of the bride. It's linked to the sorrows of Calvary, for she's the bride of the land. It's the marriage of the land.

But, the next scene is the coming of the bridegroom warrior, where he's going to bring the bride into her inheritance, and he's going to bring her into the honeymoon which will be 1,000 years. At the wedding, John the Baptist will be the best man. He said so.

I haven't a bride, but I'm the friend of the bridegroom, and my joy is complete when I see how happy he is in having the bride. And the Lord said he's the best man. There will be guests at that wedding, and happy are those who will be present at that wedding.

Happiest of all will be the bride. But then we have the coming of the bridegroom warrior. He has carried the bride across the threshold, and now he brings her with him into the inheritance.

And we have the king presented in all his glory, and in all his majesty. As crowned, he appears to a startled world. He came once in grace, he comes again in glory.

And when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory. And then what? Following that, we have the fearful end of all his enemies, because he comes as the warrior. He comes riding a white horse, and not on the coast.

He comes with a sword at his side. He comes in power, he comes in glory, he comes in judgment, he comes with fiery indignation to execute the word of God, not now in grace, but in judgment. His earthly people will be saved in that time of judgment, as Israel was saved when the hand of God was heavy upon Pharaoh.

And it'll be the time of Jacob's trouble, but he'll be saved out of it. And after we have that vision of the fearful end of all the enemies, and all the powers of earth and hell are arrayed against him, it's not by fire and not by sword, but it's by sudden death that he meets them all. For the remnant were slain with a sword of him that sat upon the horse.

Which sword proceeded out of his mouth? By his word, he created the universe. By his word, he fills heaven with redeemed souls. By his word, he will accomplish the judgment of all his enemies.

He is the word of God. He created as the word, he redeems as the word, he is judged as the word. God expressed, God speaks some lines.

There's no knowing God apart from our Lord Jesus Christ. And then we have the most fearful scene. The lake of fire receives its first inhabitants.

God never made hell for man. Hades, we have in the Bible, it's unfortunate that it's translated hell. No one is in hell yet.

No one is in the lake of fire. But the first inhabitants will be received in that lake of fire, the leaders of the opposition. And from open rebellion to eternal wrath, that's the sixth step.

Finally, we have the crowned Christ in the rain, chapter 20. I saw thrones, and there were those sitting on those thrones, and you can go back to Daniel 7, 9 and 22 to discover who's there. The people are the most high, the saints are the most high, and the people, the saints are the most high.

And the redeemed of Israel, those spared during the reign of Antichrist, and the saints from heaven unite in that kingdom. God is going to give his son a thousand. Man has had his day for six thousand.

God's going to give his son the final thousand, a recompense for his suffering and for his suffering. And by his matchless grace, we are united to him and share with him the glory that is his. And the final chapter in the history of this world, before a new creation, a new heaven, which we have in the following chapter, is the millennial reign of our Lord Jesus.

And when I see thee on the throne supreme, all creation, the vast universe uniting and acknowledging that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father, I'll ever thank you. But in matchless grace, he reached down and saved his soul. And I trust that since he gives me the unspeakable privilege of sharing his reign, that I will have grace to share his rejection and his reproach.

Now, I'm just going to give you an outline of his coming in glory, and sit down because I want to leave as much time as possible for the discussion. But I saw heaven open. It opened before, and God from heaven saw his son here in this scene, and his purpose in man was fulfilled.

My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. He said, this is the only time heaven can see anything worthwhile on earth. And all heaven's gaze was fixed upon one man.

And then he opens heaven, and he says, let the gaze of all earth be heavenward. There's only one sight worth seeing, my beloved son, crowned with glory and honor at my right hand. And then he's going to open heaven, and the glory of God is going to shine from heaven and dispel the powers of darkness that rule the night, and it's going to flood the world.

And the glory of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. What a day that will be. Darkness vanish to eternal night, and the light that shines from God's beloved son, redemption's low ray, will flood the earth, and there will be days of heaven on earth.

God's people have prayed for. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. I long for that, don't you? The rebellion that we find round about us will culminate in that final rising against the son of God.

And the white horse of chapter six will carry the whole world along with him until the man on the white horse from heaven meets him. And don't question the outcome of that conflict. Our man wins.

We're on the winning side. And that's why he comes in that white horse, symbol of conquering. And the heavens are open.

The rider, he's faithful. He wants witness for God. He's true.

He's the man God can trust. He's righteous. Earth, that issue with God.

Righteousness is in heaven now. The world put him on the cross. God put him on the highest place in the universe.

Who's right? God is right. Righteousness up there. It's all wrong in the world.

Everything's wrong in the world. And the spirit of God has come into this scene to convince the world of righteousness since they rejected God's son and he exalted him. Whose side are you on? The world or Christ? If you're on the world, you're all wrong.

If you're on Christ's side, you're all right. But righteousness is in heaven now. Righteousness is going to reign when Christ comes.

Righteousness will dwell throughout the countless ages of eternity. And his eyes want to escape that gaze. He's crowned, but not with thorns.

Behold him now with that crown. Royal robes shall soon invest thee. Royal splendors crown thy brow.

Christ of God, our soul confess thee Lord and sovereign even now. We have the mysterious name, incomprehensible infinite. Don't you ever try to make our Lord fit your little measure of Him.

I want to emphasize this. Our Lord Jesus said, No man knoweth the Father, but the Son, and he to whomsoever he reveals him. No man knows the Son, but the Father.

Period. There have been many, many sad times in the church when they try to scrutinize this person, and describe, and define, and divide. When it comes to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, he has a name that's incomprehensible, infinite.

One of the very best worship hymns that we have is, Worthy art thou, O Son of God. Only one can comprehend it. Only one, and that's the Father.

He's clothed. He's clothed with the ramskins dyed red, for that self-sacrifice in the power of which he went forth to the cross, to the power in which he will go forth to the throne. His name, the Word of God.

The Word of God in creation, the Word of God in incarnation, the Word of God in preservation, the Word of God in judgment. And what is the one word that describes it all? It's the preface to this book, Behold, He Cometh.

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