***Restoration of the Earth, No. 1
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This morning, we begin the subject of the restoration of the earth. This is segment number 1, based on Romans 8:18-21.

**Suffering vs. Future Glorification of a Christian**

That part of the human race which has been spiritually born again constitutes the children of God on the earth today. Most of mankind, of course, falls in the category of children of Satan, because most of mankind are rejectors of Jesus Christ and His provision of salvation by grace apart from any human doing.

While in this world, the children of God experience many sufferings in body and soul. No small part of that suffering is directly due to the Christian's position as a child of God and as a servant of Jesus Christ. And so, the Apostle Paul has declared to us in Romans 8:17 that the believers in this world who suffer with Jesus Christ will also someday share His glory. That is, they will reflect the brilliant light that constitutes the surrounding of God which is the reflection of His essence, His deity in all of its perfections. We Christians will someday reflect that same glory.

So, all human suffering must be viewed in terms of the future if we are to have a proper perspective of it. But unless you understand this and learn this now, when the time of crises comes into your life, when the time of tragedy comes, you will not be prepared to meet it. All human suffering must be viewed in terms of the future relative to that suffering if we are to have a perspective upon it. A painful trial of some kind will in time be resolved with great joy and be forgotten. We have to look in terms of what God is ultimately going to do with the present crises. A terrible loss in our lives now will disappear in eternal gain later in the future and in reunion. Some loss viewed only in terms of the present will often appear to us to indeed be the end of the world. And when people cannot take the crises time and the suffering time in stride in their lives, especially Christians, it is because they are not connecting their present sufferings to God's future glory and God's future resolution of that problem.

In verse 18 this morning, we have a comparison now following upon that statement of the Apostle Paul. Paul says, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Paul begins this new section with the word "for," which, in the Greek Bible, looks like this, the word "gar." This is a conjunction, and what this tells us is that it is introducing a further explanation of the last statement which was made in verse 17 about the fact that we who suffer with Christ are going to also be glorified together with Him. Paul says, "Now, let me tell you a little more of what I mean when I say that."

He says, "For, I reckon..." The word "reckon" is the Greek word "logizomai." "Logizomai" means "to consider." The word actually connotes a strong assurance, a strong conviction, something which cannot be questioned. When you see "logizomai," it means there's no doubt about what he is referring to. It's a true statement.

We have this same word used, for example, in Romans 3:28, where says, "[Therefore we logizomai] therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." A man is justified by believing in Christ apart from any human doing, and you see, in that verse, it's very clear that there's no question in his mind. He's not doubting that may possibly be wrong. When he says "logizomai," he means, "I am absolutely certain." So, it is significant for us to realize that Paul is now going to make a statement to us that he considers to be absolutely true.

In the grammatical structure, this is present tense, which means that it's always Paul's constant conviction. He doesn't fluctuate on this. It is active in its voice implication. That means he personally holds this conclusion. It's indicative mood; it's a statement of fact. Paul is firmly convinced about this. What he's convinced about, he introduces with the Greek word "hoti," which means "that." "For I reckon THAT," introducing what he is certain about relative to Christian sufferings.

And then he introduces the idea of suffering with the Greek word "pathema." This is the word that the Bible uses for general afflictions which befall people. And so, he's talking about just all kinds of sufferings that a Christian can experience: his body breaks down, he loses his job, his kids turn out bad, somebody dies, all of the disappointments and tragedies that are involved in personal, human suffering.

And Paul says, "I reckon - I am absolutely certain - that the sufferings of this present time." The word "present" is the Greek word "nun," and "time is the Greek word "Kairos." "Kairos" is one of the words for "time" in the New Testament, and it indicates a specific period of time, a very distinct, boxed-in period of time. It refers here specifically to that period of the church age. From the day of Pentecost to the rapture is the period of time he's talking about. That's what he means by "this present age." And he said, "I am absolutely certain" that all of the tragedies and sufferings that come into our lives in this present time period, this time slot of the church age, it's the same period which is referred to in Galatians 1:4 as, "this present evil age." It does not refer to simply the time being of one's life, you see. He's going beyond it. He says this whole time period of the church age.

And if we go back, you know how great has been the suffering of Christians, the enormous persecutions that Christians have suffered, the terrible tortures that Christians have undergone at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church and other pagan institutions. Well, he says, "none of that," he's not just talking about you right now but he's talking about this whole gamut that is our heritage as Christians with suffering. It's an era in contrast to the era of the resurrection of the Christian.

He's not merely talking about the suffering now and then when you die how all your sufferings are removed. You have a terrible disease now, you die, you go into the Lord's presence, there is now joy and release from that and all that suffering is passed. No, he's talking about more than that. He's talking about the whole era of Christian suffering that we face during the church age, and then following this time, when the church age is over, something else happens. So, he's saying, this whole era of suffering we have as Christians from first in the church age is nothing to be compared with what is going to come after the rapture, after the church age is over.

The sufferings of the church age, of course, include the rejection and persecution of Christians because of their devotion to the Lord Jesus, the suffering of Christians because they witness to the gospel, the sickness we experience growing old, the death we face, the mental distress, the emotional strain, the times when you can't make up your mind you find yourself with volitional incapacity, the social tensions of being abused and rejected, disappointments in people after you've made a hard effort (like being a Sunday school teacher, and then the parents say, "Stuff it!" and they don't bring their children out to be instructed by that preparation).

Parents who are so disoriented that they think that there's something better in life to teach their children than attending Sunday school or attending training union or attending a youth club meeting. And I've got experience, because I've been through this four times, and I can assure you that my kids understood right from the first that only the things of God got first choice. And it was their responsibility to pass their schoolwork, for example. And they're going to be in great trouble to pass their schoolwork. And they understood that they were not going to pass their schoolwork at the expense of their spiritual training.

When it came time for club meeting, they knew they were going to be there. No place else on God's earth except there. If they had homework that they hadn't handled, that was their problem. If they gave them a problem in their grades, that was their problem, but they were not going to solve it at the expense of God's work and of God's preparation in their lives.

I'm amazed how such a simple little principle eludes parents. And we have come to that terrible suffering time upon children when parents are asking their children for advice on whether they should attend a club meeting, whether they should attend a Sunday school, whether they should attend training union. Indeed, we have been engrossed with a madness even upon the minds of parents, of Christian parents, and it is a reflection of the suffering of our age upon us.

So, all of the treachery, the loneliness, the material privations, the poverty, the fear of the future that holds the hearts of people, the deceit of people, the low standard of living, the demands of Christian service in weariness and unremitting pressures and that we don't drop out because the demands are there, and the pressures are there, and suddenly we find that our backs are pushed to the wall. We make plans, and then a crises arises, and we have to step in and fill the gap, and we have to hold the battle line. All of that is part of this suffering that we face and which we'd like to just chuck overboard and get rid of.

Now, the Lord says through the Apostle Paul, "Be very much aware of the fact that the sufferings of the present time are not something," and he uses that word "ou," which is that strong Greek word in the Greek language which means, "absolutely not worthy," "axios." The word "axios" had the idea of "weight." It does not have the weight. The idea here is that the sufferings of the Christian and the sufferings of Christians have experienced since the day of Pentecost through the ages are not heavy enough to outbalance something else.

And what you should view this word here as is the condition of a balanced scale, where you have two pans here, and there's something in this side, and there's something in this side. In one side, there's suffering, and the Apostle Paul says, "There is nothing you could put on suffering that is going to slam that side of the balance to the floor. Nothing. Because what is on the other side always far outweighs the suffering part." And, of course, as we shall see in a moment, what's on the other side is the glory that we shall see before us.

And so, he says in verse 18, "The sufferings of the present time are not to be compared [we have to add the words "to be compared" to fill out the sentence] with." This is the Greek word "pros" which is the Greek preposition with means one face facing another face, face-to-face. And so, he's saying that there is nothing on the suffering side that has to face over here to the other side that is worthy to be compared with the glory, and that's the "doxa," the brilliance of the essence of God which we shall reflect.

The Greek word actually has another word, it has this word "mello," "mello," which means "to be" or "about to do." It's a future thing. We translate this as "coming." There is nothing that can outweigh the balance side of glory which is to come. And what this is referring to is that future glory that we shall have in heaven. Present tense: it's always true. This glory itself, it's active voice; it's coming. Participle: it's a spiritual principle. The time reference here is the future resurrection of the Christian when he will come into his personal glorification.

So, the glory of the Christian in the future is going to far outweigh all the sufferings of the other side of the scale that we experience now. And it is the suffering, he says, which shall be revealed. This is the word "apokalupto," which shall be manifest, it's going to be revealed. It's in the aorist tense, which means it's a single event. It's in a passive voice, which means you can't do this to yourself. You won't glorify yourself. God will do this to you. And it's infinitive, which tell us that it's God's purpose to put you in this kind of a brilliant light.

This revelation to the Christian of divine glory is something that you and I will experience, not merely see. This will be a glory which shall be revealed in us - we personal Christians. So, our future glory far outweighs any load of suffering that we may experience now. And that's why I say whatever the trial, whatever the tragedy, whatever the suffering, whatever the sorrow is now, unless you tie that to the future, you will not be able to see it in a proper perspective. 2 Corinthians 4:17 says, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

**Creation's Longing for Redemption**

Then, in Romans 8:19, the Apostle Paul presents a great expectation. Again, he begins with that Greek preposition "gar," translated "for," because it's going to now introduce more information about the anticipated glorification of Christians which he has referred to in verse 18. It ties the coming glory to something else now. It ties it, to the effect, on the world of nature in which man lives, a world which is under divine curse. Paul is reinforcing the point he has made in verse 18 that the Christian's suffering on an earth which is under God's curse is nothing when compared to the future glory in heaven.

So, he says "For the earnest expectation." And here we have one of those long Greek words, "apokaradokio." This word is made up of three words: from "apo," which means "from;" from "kara," which means "head;" and from "dokio," which means, "to look." Now, when you put the word together, you've got, "from head to look." Now, that makes sense, doesn't it? To look from your head, from head to look. What it is saying, what it comes out meaning, it's creating the image of a person who is looking down the road, he's leaning over a fence or looking out of the window, and he's eagerly looking down there for something. It's a beautiful word, it's exactly what it describes. The words put together mean "stretching your neck out to look." And in some translations of your Bible, they have translated that way, "stretching your neck out to look." And your head is straining to look out there down the road for something that you are eagerly anticipating.

This word "apo" at the first of the word, that preposition, stresses also your focus on this alone. It's a word that says nothing else holds your attention. The only thing that you're concerned with. People are talking around you; you don't hear them. People ask you questions; you don't hear them. You're straining out there looking eagerly down the road for something.

And it says that there is an earnest expectation of this kind on the part of creation. That's "ktisis." The word here refers to that product of God's creative work which is described in Genesis 1 where it describes to us how God made the world. He's talking about the world of nature about us. There is a great suffering in the world of nature which is under God's curse because of Adam's sin.

And, we are seeing and hearing about some of that suffering taking place in Mexico City now, the disruptions within the world of nature. And as you remember in Genesis 3 beginning at verse 17, we read, "And unto Adam he said, 'Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.'" Now, he probably did not fully realize what that meant, because up to this time, Adam not only had a green thumb, he had a green whole ten fingers green. Anything he touched grew beautifully. There was no problem. There were no weeds. There were no bugs to contend with that were killing off what he was growing. Everything was super in that environment.

Then, in verse 18, God says from now on, "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face [thou] shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

So, there's the historical occasion when the ground, the earth, was cursed because of man's sin. When man sinned, the suffering extended to all of the area of irrational nature, to plants and to animals. So, all of nature, Paul says, is eagerly stretching its neck out looking down the road for something that it wants. So, nature, we know, has shared in the penalty of Adam's sin, and it has shared in that penalty through no fault of its own. The Bible is clear that what has happened in the natural world is a consequence of sin.

Isaiah 24:6 says, "Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth [that curse pronounced in Genesis 3], and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left." Jeremiah 12:4 refers to this same thought, "How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? The beasts are consumed, and the birds; because he said, 'He shall not see our last end.'" So, it is clear that nature has a curse upon it not through something it did but because of what man did. But nature, Paul says, is eagerly looking down the road for something as the result of that curse which was placed upon it. And furthermore, Paul says, creation has this earnest expectation, and then he said, "it waiteth for."

And here again is another one of those long words: "apekdechomai." "Apekdechomai" is also made up of three words. Here, we have that same preposition "apo," which means "from." We have another preposition, "ek," which means "out from," and then we have "dechomai," which means "to receive." "To receive out from." And the concept there, receiving connotes something that one is eagerly waiting for. Again, the "apo" is intensified, so it connotes waiting for something with eagerness and with determination. Waiting eagerly to receive something and you never tire of waiting for it. This is present tense, the constant attitude of nature. It is active in its effect; creation itself is waiting. It's a statement of fact.

What's it waiting for? For what the world calls "the manifestation." The "apokalupsis." "Apokalupsis" means an uncovering. It connotes revealing something to the senses. Creation is straining its neck, looking for something determinately, without giving up, something which it is waiting with eager anticipation. It's waiting a revelation, an uncovering, a revealing of something about who? The sons, the "huios" of "theos." The sons of God. The sons of God are we who are members of the body of Christ, believers in the church age. The body of Christ in contrast to the Old Testament Jews and the Old Testament theocracy.

Please remember that Christians and Jews are not the same thing. That's why we don't go back to the Old Testament and take a passage of scripture and say, "Here's what you should do as Christians." I hear this by radio preachers all the time. They have no sense of dividing the Word of God rightly. They're forever finding some Old Testament passage, usually it's on how to promote money, and they go to an Old Testament passage and they use that and they try to impose it on Christians. And Christians who know better immediately reach over, and they turn the radio off, turn to another station, and they don't give them a dollar. They are undeserving if they are that ignorant of grace, of even being listened to.

What the Word of God says is that there is a great contrast between we who are now the sons of God in contrast to those who were the Jews under the Mosaic theocracy. And the word "sons" is used because it stresses our legal adoption and so our right to have a part in this manifestation. What is the manifestation? All of creation is looking for the manifestation of the sons of God. It is the manifestation at the end of verse 18. "The glory which shall be revealed in us." That's what all of nature desires: to see the time when Christians will come into the glory of God reflected in them. Why? Because at that time, the curse is removed from nature.

1 John 3:2 says, "Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see him as He is." And we will be like Him in the glory that surrounds Him. So, creation looks for the glorification of the Christian, because that's when it shall be released from its own divine curse.

Romans 8:21 says, "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." It is at that point in time that we are going to have our full and finest moment of freedom as human beings when we come into the glorification that is ours at the point of the rapture. Now, the Bible again is very clear in saying that there was a time when the earth's curse is going to be removed. In Isaiah 35:1, we read, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom like the rose," which is an expression here on the part of Isaiah that things are going to be changed from the terrible status in which they are now under God's curse.

Earlier, in the book of Isaiah, chapter 11, beginning at verse [9], we read, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." And then, it goes on to describe previously. It begins at verse 6 how the animal world shall be changed. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and the little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den." Poisonous snakes. All of these things change. The reasons snakes kill you now is because it's a curse upon the earth. The time will come when snakes will not do that.

In 2 Peter 3:10-13, we have the declaration that there's going to be a new heaven and a new earth, and Revelation 2:11 stresses the same thing. The point of all this is the world of nature is bound up with the future of the believers of the church age. It is not bound up with the destiny of the unsaved; they are going to spend the eternity suffering in hell. Nature is going to be released from its suffering and restored to its pristine beauty and perfection in the glory of God that will be revealed in Christians at the point of the rapture.

**Jesus Preparing a Place for Believers**

So, the glorification of all of us is an event that is greatly exalted since it also dramatically changes the effect of God's curse. Creation looks forward to the day of the believer's glorification, and that indeed is a gratifying thought to us all. That event of the believer's exaltation is an event that the Lord Jesus referred to in John 14, the first three verses, when He was about to leave to go back to heaven. He was preparing His disciples for what was coming. In John 14:1-3, we have some of the most important verses concerning the event that leads to the glorification of the Christian.

The Lord Jesus says, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. [The reason their hearts were troubled because He indicated that He was about to leave them.] In My Father's house [which is in heaven] are many apartments: if it were not so, I would have told you. [And] 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, the scene here is the night before the crucifixion. They are all gathered in the upper room. The disciples are awed, and they are on edge, and they are sad because they know that something terrible is coming. They know that the Lord says, "It's all over, boys. We're not going to be walking around teaching and working together anymore because I'm moving to a new stage, and I'm going to leave you. And so, the Lord is preparing them for the age which is to come, the church age, which they knew nothing about. And Jesus announced to them that soon He would separate Himself from them.

In John 13:33, He says, "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me: and as I said unto the Jews, 'Whither I go, ye cannot come;' so now I say to you." Now, after three years of the enormous ministry that they had shared together, this was discouraging information. "I'm going someplace, and this time, I can't take you with Me." So, they were in confusion. Peter was himself very reluctant to accept this, as you will notice in verse 36 of John 13, "Simon Peter said unto him, 'Lord, whither goest thou?' Jesus answered him, 'Where I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.'" Peter said unto Him, "Lord, why can't I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake!"

So, Peter was very upset at the thought that the Lord was going someplace to depart from them physically where they could no longer be associated with Him. And, for this reason, they were troubled in heart. And so, the Lord says to them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. I understand your love for me. The departure of a loved one always troubles our hearts. It is a sad moment."

And so, the Lord sought to encourage them by saying to them that where he was going was to his father's house, which was heaven. "And in heaven," He said, "are many apartments. These apartments need to be furnished. I am going up there to prepare them, to furnish them." After all, as they would later discover, He was their bridegroom; they, as the church, were to become His bride. Now, this is a clear contrast with the Old Testament expectations of the disciples. On Old Testament ground, they expected Him to come as an earthly king. They expected Him to set up a kingdom on His earth. They expected Him to rule on David's throne. They expected to join Him in that authority. But here was something different.

**The Rapture and the Second Coming**

He said, "No, I'm going to come back. I'm going to take you back to heaven with me, and our separation will be only temporary for now." So, the Lord indicated to them in verse 3 that He would come back after the place was prepared. And 1 Thessalonians tells us that this meeting that He describes here is to take place in the air. And from there, the Christians are to go directly into the Lord's presence. So, the Lord said, "I'm going to come. I'm going to take you with me to be with me in the air, and then we're both going to go up into heaven to those apartments together that I have prepared for you." That's why this passage is so important.

Notice again, John 14:3, "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." And where the Lord is is here in heaven, and that's where He says He's going to come to take them, to bring them back to that point. You see, He doesn't come and meet them on this earth and immediately begin the kingdom. We know from other scriptures that that isn't the order. For we find in other scriptures that when the Lord returns to the earth, there are many born again people who are in natural bodies. All these people are glorified bodies. They're bodies are ready for heaven. They're bodies which will never sin, bodies which will never die.

So, where are all these people going to come from who need to be on earth to go into the millennium in their normal human bodies, reproducing children, the normal experiences of life? Well, the place that happens is once the Christians are gone, the seven years of the tribulation begin. And during that period, the 144,000 evangelists lead many Jews and Gentiles to be born again so that when the Lord returns at His second coming, which is different from the rapture (this is the rapture here), when He comes at the second coming, bringing us with Him, He will find on the earth many born-again people in their natural, unglorified bodies who will then go into the millennium out here for the thousand-year kingdom. And they will repopulate the earth at that point with a new humanity.

So, when the tribulation begins, the Christians are gone. That means everybody left on earth is unsaved. When the millennium begins, all of the unbelievers are put to death; they're sent into hades. So that when the millennium begins, that means that everybody is born again. It begins at a perfect time.

Now, at this point in time, right here is when the glory explodes on all of us. That is when we meet the Lord in the air, and it is at that point then that the final stages of God's judgment are executed on this earth. And then, beginning in the millennium, earth itself finally gets to see as the Christians return, earth looks up (treating the earth, treating nature as a person), and it sees the glory coming. What creation has been stretching its neck out, looking down the road to see, determinately, expectantly, not giving up hope, it finally sees as we come in that magnificent description in the book of the Revelation of the Lord returning with all of the saints in great glory. Then, nature itself is directly affected. It is directly changed. And, at that point in time, the curse that is upon this earth is going to be released. Now, this is, for some of us, be an experience that comes through death. For many of us, it will be an experience where we never die.

In 1 Corinthians 15:51, Paul writes, "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep [that is, we Christians shall not all die], but we shall all be changed." We Christians will not all experience death, but we're all going to experience this glorification. And, he says it's going to happen, "In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: the trumpet shall sound, the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we [that is, we who are alive] shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." Those who are dead must put on resurrection bodies of incorruption. Those who are alive must put on glorified bodies of immortality.

So that this is described as a mystery, which means that it was something that was brand new. Christians have never been told this before. Now, the fact that people would be raised was not a secret. Job 19:25-26 tells that. Isaiah 26:19. Daniel 12:2. Many passages in the Old Testament told us that people were going to be raised back to life. But that some people would never die, that they would go to heaven without ever going through death? Now, that was something that was absolutely amazing. And it was that experience that we Christians are destined for. The rapture of the church, some of us alive when it happens; those who have died, been in the graves, will be raised from the graves to go up with us.

The great passage that describes all that is 1 Thessalonians 4, which is the detailed background of the time of our glorification that all of creation is looking for. In 1 Thessalonians 4, we close with these verses, beginning with verse 13. The problem with the Thessalonian church was simply this. It seems that the Apostle Paul was in this church for about six weeks. During that time, we can tell from the letters that he wrote them that he had a great deal to say about prophecy and about the future and about where the church was going and about the subject of the rapture. These people were very excited over the fact of the rapture. Can you imagine going up to meet the Lord in the air? It was such an exciting thing that Paul had revealed to them.

But something started happening in the congregation. A brother here would die. A sister here would die. A loved one here would die. And the question came up in their mind, "Oh, I'm so sorry, my wife missed it! My father missed it! My little son has died and missed the rapture! Is that the case, Paul?" And so, they wrote Paul and said, "Are they out of it now?" And that's why Paul writes this chapter and says, "No, no, no, you've got it all wrong." The earth which is looking for release from its curse at the point of the Christian's glorification is going to include the glorification of all those believers who have died as well. Here is the procedure of this great migration to heaven. Nobody is to be left out.

So, in verse 13, Paul says, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep [which is the way the Bible speaks about Christians who have died, because it's a peaceful condition], that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again [we have an example of a man who has been resurrected and is in heaven], even so them also who sleep in Jesus [Christians who have died in the Lord] will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep. [Actually, he says, "You don't have to worry about those who have died. They are first in line! You people are the ones who are disadvantaged. The people who have died are first in line! Those of you who are alive are going to have to wait."]"

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout [the military command, "Move out!"], with the voice of the archangel [he who will sound off the Lord's command to move out], and with the trump of God [which will be the summons from the Lord to gather unto Him]: and the dead in Christ shall rise first [they'll come popping out of those graves all over that cemetery in perfect condition]: Then [Paul says, in verse 17] we who 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 with the Lord."

At that point, we resurrected Christians join the Christians who have been in the graves, and we form one body. Together, we meet the Lord in the air, and at that point, we change the mortal bodies with all their scourging elements into glorified bodies that explode with the brilliance of the light that reflects the essence of God. It is at that point right there that our glory takes place, and then creation sees it at the second coming and rejoices because at that point, all of the earth begins to have its curse removed, and all of the ugliness of animals and all of the difficulties in nature are moved. And all of the violence of nature, the forces of nature, are brought under control by the God who restores it all.

Verse 18 says, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." It was a reunion with loved one that was certain, it was sure to occur, it was going to follow at the point of our meeting the Lord in the air after He has finished preparing the apartments for us and returns for us.

Now, when will He return, He will return at the point when the last Christian has been won to the Lord, when the last Christian destined to be part of the body of Christ has been brought in, and then the signal will be given. The Father will turn to His Son who is now sharing His throne and say, "Son, the last believer is in; the body of Christ is complete. It is time for you to go down and bring them all up here." And Jesus will get up from the throne, move down, retrace the path that He followed from the Mount of Olives going up to heaven, and suddenly we meet Him in the air. We are glorified, and the result is that creation gets to experience that wonderful release from the curse which is upon it.

That, you see, is the background of what Paul is saying when he says in Romans 8:19, "For the earnest expectation of the creature [determinately] waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God." That event is a great event for us. It will put everything back in focus. It will be the epitome of the moment of joy for us, and it will be reflected in release of all of creation from the curse which is upon it. What a happy day for us all to look forward to.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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