The Lord’s peace and joy to you!

John 14:6

*Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.*

There are so many in the world now who claim that there are many ways to get to heaven. It may be doing good works. It may be believing in whatever god you want to. A popular saying is that “all roads lead to heaven”.

The above verse makes it very clear that this is not the case. There is only one way. There is only one way to heaven and that is through Jesus Christ.

Isn’t it arrogant of us as Christians to claim that there is only one way and that Jesus is it? No, it’s not arrogant, because it is the truth. If a building has only one door and no other entrances, it is not arrogant to say one must access the building through that door; it is the truth. Truth is not changeable because it is inconvenient, it remains the truth regardless.

Jesus is the truth. He is the One who gives eternal life. He is the way to heaven.

Believe this Christian, hold fast to Jesus. Don’t let yourself be fooled by the world.

In Christ’s love

John

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3-14-21

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (2)

We began looking at these verses last week and we saw that the young Thessalonian church had some questions. They obviously knew that Jesus was coming back to establish His kingdom here on earth and they knew that it could happen any time. The problem was that some of their brothers and sisters in Christ has already died. They didn’t know what would happen with them when Jesus made His return.

Paul reassured them that those who were already asleep in Christ would be just fine. He reminded them that Jesus Himself had died and then had risen from the dead. Jesus was a type of first fruits; so, all those Christians who had died would rise from the dead just as Jesus had done. He admonished them to grieve as those who had hope. Not like the non-believers who had no hope for their loved ones who had died. In fact, as Paul went on, he explained that they would even get there before those who were alive at Jesus’ return.

We considered the first part of verse 15, which is so important. It establishes that this information comes directly from the mouth of the risen Lord Jesus. These things that Paul is telling us have special weight and we are to take them to heart. These things will happen and they will happen just as we are told here in the Bible. This is literal; there is no allegory here. When Jesus comes back, a lot of interesting, unprecedented things are going to take place. It will be quite a time for we who will be involved.

Paul continues by saying, “*we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep*”. As we discussed last week, the souls of those who are asleep will already be with the Lord. But here, Paul is saying that when Jesus comes back, their resurrected bodies will get to go to Jesus first. Not only will the dead Christians not miss anything, they get to be with Jesus before those who are still alive.

Try to picture that; if we are still alive when Jesus comes back, by the time we get to Him, He will already be surrounded by millions of Christians who have their resurrection bodies. Will they all be just suspended there in the air? Will they be standing around on clouds? Will they be mounted on white horses like it talks about in the book of Revelation? Don’t know. It doesn’t say.

As an aside, in this verse, Paul uses the term “*we*”; as in “*we who are alive and remain*”. Those who want to attack the Bible will use this verse. They will say that by using “*we*” Paul thought that he would still be alive when Jesus returned. Since this didn’t happen, Paul was wrong and therefore, the Bible has an inaccuracy. Paul was saying “*we*” because he happened to be among the living at the time he wrote this letter. Later in this letter in chapter 5 verse 10, Paul says, “*whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him*.” In this verse Paul makes it clear that he might be still alive or have died by the time Jesus comes back. Once again, there is no error in what the Bible tells us.

In verses 16 and 17, we have a glimpse of what will happen when Jesus returns. Again, it is very important to see that there is very little information here. There are very few details. If we consider other parts of the Scriptures, we can pick up a few more details but we must be very careful that we don’t jam things together that don’t really fit. Unfortunately, this takes place a lot. Many articles and books are written about the details of Christ’s coming that can’t really be proven or are complete fantasy. This leads to a lot of confusion.

Very simply: Jesus will show up in the sky, it will be noisy, the bodies of the dead Christians will rise from wherever they are, then the Christians who are alive will be brought to Jesus in the air and we will all be with Jesus forever. This is the sequence of events that will take place at the Parousia. And this information is given by the Lord Jesus Himself, so we know it is true and that it will happen. Also, we will participate. We can confidently explain these events to others; there may be questions, but what happens is clear.

Now, it wouldn’t be fair for me to leave these verses without some more information and insight. By looking at Scripture throughout both testaments, we can safely add some information and detail to these verses. Verse 16 starts with “For the Lord Himself”. Jesus is the One who will come from heaven to gather His people; He will not send a representative of some kind. Jesus wants His people with Him and He is coming to get them. This is comforting; the King is coming in person for His people, to remove them from all the suffering and pain of this life. We will be safe with Him forever.

Jesus will descend from heaven. That’s where He is now. Acts 1:9 tells us, “*And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight*.” This is called the ascension and is one of the foundations of Christianity. Jesus ascended into heaven some forty days after His resurrection. (Indecently, two verses later, the disciples are told that Jesus will come back in the same way they saw Him leave, just like we are told in 1 Thessalonians.) Romans 8:34 tells us plainly, “*Christ Jesus is He who died, but rather, was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us*.” So, Jesus is in heaven now, with God the Father, and He is interceding on our behalf. But He will leave heaven and come for us, when the Father says it is time.

There is going to be a lot of noise. Apparently, Jesus will shout. He has something to say and the voice of God will ring out over all the earth. We aren’t told what He will say, but a good guess is that He will be calling the bodies of the Christian dead out of their grave.

We can’t help calling to mind the account of Jesus’ friend, Lazarus. Lazarus had been dead in a tomb four days. There was no doubt that he was dead and that decomposition had even begun. But Jesus stood in front of the tomb and ‘*He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out*!”’ Lazarus came out, very much alive and with no signs of decomposition. This shows the creative and life-giving power in the words that God speaks: It was in the Garden of Eden, it was in the ministry of Christ, it will be evident in His return.

There are some interesting things to note here. Why did Jesus call Lazarus by name? In those days, tombs were used to bury several people. If Jesus had simply called “come out”, they would have all come out. At His return, Jesus will shout, presumably to call His people back to life. Will He call each by name? He knows our names; the very hairs of our heads are numbered. In John 10:3 it says, “*To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep listen to his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out*.” Or will it simply be that “*the sheep follow him because they know his voice*.” Perhaps, when the dead hear the voice of their Saviour, they will recognize it and come to Him.

Another thing is the stone covering the tomb. Before He called Lazarus out, Jesus had them roll away the stone from in front of the tomb. Jesus called Lazarus back to life, it wasn’t a resurrection. He had to have the stone removed in order to come out. Jesus experienced a true resurrection. We know from the Bible that He was able to enter rooms that had locked doors; the solid walls made no difference to His resurrection body. The stone of His tomb had been rolled away so the women and the disciples could see in, not so Jesus could get out.

This is why it is not a problem if Christians are asleep in a coffin, in a vault, and six feet under. Their resurrection bodies will come right through everything and head straight for Jesus. It doesn’t matter what condition their bodies are in; God’s creative voice can overcome any condition to make them new.

When Jesus comes back, we will hear the voice of an archangel. Who knows what this might mean? Very little is said in Scripture about archangels. There is this verse and there is verse 9 in the book of Jude. In Jude, we learn of an archangel named Michael, who is especially assigned to watch over Israel. He is the only archangel that is named and it is possible that he is the only one. Regardless, his voice will be heard throughout the earth.

Then there is the trumpet of God. The trumpet of God is most notable in the book of Exodus, when the Israelites had gathered around the base of Mount Sinai and heard the ten commandments from God. At the time, there was thunder and lightning, smoke, and a great cloud on the mountain top. At the same time there was a loud trumpet sound. All this together caused the people of Israel to fear and they asked Moses to speak to the LORD for them. For us, this will be a wonderful sound; the sound of our redemption finally coming for us.

As we have talked about before, be sure that you are not deceived. When Jesus comes back, it will not be something that takes place in a small area that only a few people will see. It will be a worldwide event. Jesus says in Matthew 24:30, “*And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory*.” There will be no question about who Jesus is when He comes back.

This warning is necessary because there have been and there will be many who claim to be Jesus. In Matthew 24, Jesus warns us of several things that will take place. First, people will tell us that they know where Jesus is; that He has come back and they know where to go see Him. These people are not to be believed. There are those who will claim to be Christ or a prophet from Christ. The scary thing is that they will be able to perform amazing signs and wonders. These signs and wonders may even seem to be good things. But if they claim to be Jesus they are lying.

Don’t let yourself be fooled. As Jesus says in Matthew 24:27, “*For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be*.” We won’t need television or the internet or cell phone recordings to know that Jesus has come; it will be visible to the eyes of everyone.

When all this happens, *the dead in Christ will rise first*. This is the true resurrection of the saints who have passed away. This is when their bodies will be made new and like Jesus’. We don’t know what our resurrection bodies will be like exactly. As we are told in 1 John 3:2 “*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is*.” When Jesus appears, when He comes back and brings the dead back to life, their resurrection bodies will be like His. But for now, we don’t know what all that means. That is a wonderful experience that awaits us; to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, without any problems and without sin.

They will rise *first*. The dead in Christ will rise and meet Jesus in the air before those who are alive. Paul has been very clear that those who have already passed away will not be at a disadvantage when Jesus returns. If we are alive when Jesus comes back, our loved ones in Christ will get to Him first and be waiting for us. What a reunion it will be.

It is also important to note that the dead *in Christ* will rise first. We know from Revelation 20:11-15 that there will be another resurrection. All those who have died outside of Christ will also come back from the dead to face judgement. These too, will have a physical body, but they will not experience Christ for eternity. These face a horrible eternity, away from the presence of Jesus, and paying the penalty for their sins themselves.

We have been considering the joyous fate of those who are dead in Christ at His return. Next Sunday, Lord willing, we will consider those who are still alive and what we ought to be doing now.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for this reminder that You are far more powerful than death. Death cannot hold us when we belong to You. Once we are Yours, no-one can snatch us from Your hand. You hold the universe, yet we do not slip through Your fingers.

Lord, You gave us curiosity and it is good. But in our fallen state, it can lead us into searching out wonders that we are not yet meant to know. Help us to be content with the things in Your word that You have revealed to us; those things that we can hold as doctrine and provide for us a knowledge of Your will.

Thank You for the description of Your return so that we will not be deceived. Your word tells us that the false Christ’s to come will be very convincing. May Your Holy Spirit shield us from believing them; remembering that Your return will be like nothing we can even imagine.

In the most holy name of Jesus we pray

Amen