Message for the LORD’S DAY morning, April 3, 2011
Christian Hope Church of Christ, Plymouth, North Carolina
by Reggie A. Braziel, Minister

In The Twinkling of An Eye
I Corinthians 15:50-58 (New King James Version )

Please turn with me in your Bibles to today’s scripture text in
I CORINTHIANS 15:50-58.

READ: I Corinthians 15:50-58

P R A Y E R

Introduction

In recent years we have seen a number of TV shows developed around the
plot of MISSING PERSONS.

- There was the CBS Show: “Without A Trace.”

- And FOX BROADCASTING’S: “Vanished.”

- And now on the INVESTIGATIVE DISCOVERY CHANNEL
there’s “Disappeared.”

Headlines about people who vanish rivet our attention.

- Amelia Earhart went missing July 2, 1937 and seventy four years
later we are still fascinated by her mysterious disappearance.

- Famous jazz musician and big band leader, Glenn Miller was
enroute to play for the troops in Paris when the single-engine
aircraft in which he was a passenger disappeared over the
English Channel . The plane and those aboard have never
been located. They simply vanished. Glenn Miller is still
officially listed as “missing.”
D. B. Cooper, Jimmy Hoffa, Natalie Holloway, and little three year old Madeleine McCann, they were all here, then they simply vanished and have never been heard from since. Reason tells us such disappearances were likely the result of “foul play.” But until proof is given these “vanishings” remain a mystery.

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According to our scripture text, as well as other New Testament writings, a time is coming when this very thing is going to happen on a massive, global scale. A day is coming when millions of people are simply going to vanish from the face of the earth without a trace.

Let’s see what the apostle Paul teaches us about this.

First, Paul gives us………

I. A Word of Enlightenment (vs. 50-53)

1. In the verses immediately preceding our text this morning, verses 35-49, Paul has been describing the difference between the mortal bodies we have now and the immortal bodies we will all have in heaven.

2. In verse 50 Paul tells us we cannot go to heaven in these earthly bodies made of flesh and blood. In other words, you and I cannot go to heaven like we are now. Well if we can’t go to heaven in these mortal bodies, how do we get into our immortal bodies?

3. Paul enlightens us on this in verse 51………

   “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed---- “

4. We all love mysteries don’t we? Paul is telling us a mystery! The word Paul uses for mystery refers to “the secret counsels or hidden things of God.”

5. Paul is revealing a wonderful promise here and that is some Christians will never experience death. If Jesus comes while you and I are still living, we will never, I repeat, we will never die.

   The LORD will simply “change us out of these old clothes, these old bodies, into our new, heavenly bodies.”
6. Notice in VERSE 52 how quickly this will happen.

v. 52 “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

Paul gives even greater detail in I Thessalonians 4:16-18……..

16 For the LORD HIMSELF will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in CHRIST will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be “caught up” together with them in the clouds to meet the LORD in the air. And thus we shall always be with the LORD.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

7. Paul is referring to the event many have come to know as “the Rapture.” While the term “rapture” is not used in the New Testament, the term from which it comes is used.

It is the Greek word “harpazo,” which means: “to lift, to snatch up, to draw up, to catch up, to rapture.”

Brothers and sisters, you and I need to understand that this is the next event on God’s prophetic calendar. Not one single thing has to happen before the LORD comes to get His Church.

Illustration: I pointed out in our Wednesday night Bible study on Revelation recently that we see a foreshadow of this in the lives of two Old Testament characters.

In Genesis 5:24 we read where “Enoch walked with God then was no more.” Enoch simply “vanished” from the earth without a trace.”

Then in II Kings 2:11 we read where the prophets Elijah and Elisha were walking along when Elijah was suddenly carried away from the earth by a whirlwind. It all happened “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.”
8. Paul reveals four things about this glorious event.

(A) First, it will be a SUDDEN event.

The word Paul uses for “moment” in verse 52 is the same as our English word atom. It refers to something that is indivisible. It speaks of the smallest amount of time imaginable.

That phrase “in the twinkling of an eye” refers to an action that happens so fast it can’t even be measured in time, like one flap of a humming bird’s wing, one buzz of a gnat, one twinkle of a star.

One blink of our human eye takes just \(\frac{1}{10,000}\)th of one second. In other words, when Jesus comes He will instantaneously raise the dead and change the living. It will not be a process. It will all happen so fast it will all be over before we even realize it has begun.

YES, THE LORD’S RETURN WILL BE A SUDDEN EVENT!

(B) Secondly, it will be a SELECTIVE event.

Notice the words “brethren” in verse 50, and the words “we” and “all” in verse 51. To whom is Paul referring? He is referring to all Christians.

When Jesus comes He is not coming for everyone. He is only coming for true Christians who accepted Him as their LORD and SAVIOR.

He is not coming for all “good” people. He is not coming for all “moral” people. He is not coming not coming for all “nice” people. He is coming only for HIS PEOPLE! Every TRUE CHRISTIAN!

THE LORD’S RETURN WILL BE A SELECTIVE EVENT!
Thirdly, it will be a SATISFYING event for those who are saved.

**v. 52 b**  *For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

God is promising us there is coming a day when all who died as Christians will be “raised incorruptible.”

To be “raised incorruptible” means to be raised with a body that is incapable of death, disease, decay or decomposition.

- All those who died with cancer will be raised with a cancer-proof body.
- All those who died with heart disease will be raised with a body that is heart disease free.
- All those who died of old age will be raised with a body that will never age.
- All those who died with bodies badly broken in accidents or burned up in fires will be raised with bodies that are without deformity or scars.

As for the living, Christ’s return will mean never being taken from this world by cancer, heart disease, stroke, old age, accident or tragedy.

As Paul says, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades (grave) where is your victory?” (vs. 54b, 55)

**YES, THE LORD’S RETURN WILL TRULY BE A SATISFYING EVENT FOR THE SAVED!**
Fourthly, it will be a SAD event for those who are left behind.

If you have read “Left Behind” books or watched the “Left Behind” movies you may have been led to believe that those who reject Jesus now will be given a “second chance” after the LORD takes His Church out of this world. There is not one verse of scripture that supports this teaching, in fact, just the opposite.

I want you to listen very carefully to the apostle Paul’s warning in II Thessalonians 2:9-12.

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (II Thessalonians 2:9-12 NKJV)

Dr. David Jeremiah comments: “Just as death terminates the day of possible salvation for those who reject Christ, so does the Rapture of the Church. Those who have heard the Gospel message and have rejected it will be given a “strong delusion” during the Tribulation. The day of grace will be over for them. There is NO SECOND CHANCE. Be warned: You had better not wait to become a Christian. The Bible says “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation.” (II Corinthians 6:2 NKJV)

The truth is, every single day the LORD delays His return is one more chance for those who have heard the gospel to accept Jesus Christ as their LORD and SAVIOR. Every day the LORD delays is one more day of mercy.....one more day of grace.....one more day of opportunity, before it is eternally too late!

Yes, when Christ comes again “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” it will be a sad, sad day for those who are left behind. Family circles will be broken forever! Husbands and wives will be separated from each other forever! Parents and children will be separated forever! Oh what a SAD, SAD DAY that will be for those who are left behind!
And because this will all happen “in a moment, in the twinkling
of an eye,” there will be no time to say final goodbyes……
no time to make one last phone call……no time to send one last
e-mail……no time to enjoy one final meal!

And what makes this even more sad is that it didn’t have to
end that way. If only those lost loved ones and friends had
accepted Jesus Christ as their LORD and SAVIOR they would
be going with their Christian loved ones instead of being
left behind!

Paul has given us a WORD OF ENLIGHTENMENT, now in VERSE 58,
he gives us ..................

II. A Word of Encouragement (vs. 58)

1. What Paul has told us in verses 50-57 is for every true Christian,
Christ’s return is a WIN-WIN situation!

   -If we DIE before Christ comes we will be RESURRECTED
   from the GRAVE with a brand new heavenly body that
   will unite with our SPIRIT the split second Christ comes!

   - If we are still LIVING when Christ comes, these old earthly
   bodies will be “changed” into heavenly bodies in a split
   second and we will rise to meet the LORD in the air.

2. Until that glorious day comes, Paul encourages us to do three
   things in this 58th verse.

   (A) First, we are encouraged to be FIRM till the
   Lord comes! (v. 58a)

      v. 58 a “be STEADFAST, IMMOVABLE!”

   This is not the time to be “wishy-washy” in your faith or
   half-hearted in your commitment!

   This is not the time to be “straddling the fence” or
riding the middle of the road spiritually.

Now is the time to decide if you are for JESUS or against JESUS! Now is the time to take a firm stand for the Lord and work out your salvation with “fear and trembling!”

-If you are going places you wouldn’t want to get caught when Jesus comes, STAY OUT OF THOSE PLACES!

-If you are doing things you wouldn’t want to be caught doing when Jesus comes, STOP DOING THOSE THINGS!

-If you’ve got habits that would cause you shame when Jesus comes, GET RID OF THOSE HABITS!

(B) Secondly, we are encouraged to be **FRUITFUL** till the Lord comes! (v . 58b )

v. 58 b  “always abounding in the WORK of the LORD. “

Let’s break this “fruitful work” down into three areas:

1. We must be “fruitful” in **EASING** the **BURDENS** of others.

   Jesus clarifies this for us in Matthew chapter 25, beginning in verse 35 and following..........  

For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

“The righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’ (Matthew 25:35-40 NKJV)
We must be “fruitful” in **EVANGELIZING** the **LOST**. (Matthew 28:18-20 NKJV)

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

Once the LORD takes us from this world we will never have another opportunity to talk to our lost loved ones and friends about Christ again. This is why we must talk to them NOW!

We must be “fruitful” in **EDIFYING** our fellow Christians.

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord and of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4 NKJV)

We are encouraged to be **FIRM** until the LORD comes!

We are encouraged to be **FRUITFUL** until the LORD comes!

(C) And thirdly, we are encouraged to be **FAITHFUL** until the LORD comes. (all of vs. 58)

v. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the LORD, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the LORD.

Sometimes we may get discouraged living the Christian life. We may wonder if it is truly worth it. Paul is reminding us that when Christ comes, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” we will realize it was not in vain!

For that day when Christ comes again will be a day of resurrection,
a day of reunion, and a day of reward! So until that glorious day, stay faithful and true to the very end!

C O N C L U S I O N

Illustration--- One night an elderly man fell asleep in his chair and his wife went on to bed. At the stroke of midnight, the old clock chimed off its familiar 12 chimes partially awakening the old man from his sleep.

But then the clock chimed thirteen……then fourteen…..then fifteen. The startled old man got up out of his chair…….shuffled down to the bedroom and shook his wife. He said, “Honey, wake up, wake up! Its later than its ever been! “

Brothers and sisters, “Wake up, wake up! Its later than its ever been!” Christ could come back at “any moment, in the twinkling of an eye!”

Its time to GET READY and STAY READY so when Christ comes, WE’LL BE READY!

When He comes in the clouds descending,
And they who loved Him here,
From their graves shall awake and praise Him
With joy and not with fear;

When the body and the soul are united,
And clothed no more to die,
What a shouting there will be when each other’s face we see,
Changed in the twinkling of an eye.

Changed in the twinkling of an eye.
Changed in the twinkling of an eye;
The trumpet shall sound, the dead shall be raised,
Changed in the twinkling of an eye.

-Hymn by the late Fanny J. Crosby