Sermon Series: Things to Come
Sermon Title: The King is Coming

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 -- But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Opening: Last week, in our preaching series called **Things to Come,** we talked about **what happens when a person dies.** We saw that the souls of unbelievers go immediately to Hell while the souls of believers go immediately into heaven. **You can listen to that message on our website at riverridge.online.** Some people might be wondering why we are dedicating several messages to the end times when we can't alter God's plan in any way. Perhaps we should focus on the here and now where we can do something about changing the trajectory of our lives before we enter eternity? **Well, here are a couple of reasons I've chosen to focus on the things to come**.

First, it helps us right now … (1) by giving us the assurance that God is in control of everything; and (2) by focusing us on what's really important (loving God and loving others).

Second, it will help us in the future … by giving us HOPE and PEACE as we navigate a world that is increasingly corrupted by sin and where Christians are not celebrated. AND DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE VALUE OF HOPE AND PEACE TO HELP PEOPLE GET TROUGH THEIR MOST TRYING TIMES!

Did you know that in 2020, during the height of the covid outbreak, Bible searches soared online, and a record number of people turned to Scripture for passages addressing fear, healing, and justice. The popular **YouVersion Bible App** saw searches increase by 80 percent that year, totaling nearly 600 million worldwide. Isaiah's assurance to "do not

fear," was the Bible App's top verse globally in 2020. It also ranked as the No. 1 verse in the US, India, South Africa, the Netherlands, and the Philippines. In Ghana, the top verse was Philippians 4:8 ("Do not be anxious …"), and in Kenya, Romans 8:28 ("in all things, God works for the good …"). **YouVersion founder Bobby Gruenewald** said, "***Through every hardship, people continue to seek God and turn to the Bible for strength, peace, and hope. While 2020 was a year so many say they'd like to forget, we see it as a year to remember how God used the Bible (App) to help so many people who are searching for answers***."

Now this morning, I want to talk about **the rapture of the church**. The word is not actually found in the Bible. Rapture is **the Latin translation** for the word that means to be "caught up." It refers to a sudden, irresistible act of carrying off by force. From our text for this morning, we see that ***the rapture is the sudden removal of God's people through HIS powerful, divine activity out of this world***. It is talked about in several New Testament passages including …

- **John 14:1-3 -- "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."** Notice two things in this passage: **(1) Jesus said that He would go LITERALLY (as opposed to symbolically) and BODILY into heaven and that His plan was to return for His followers after making preparations for them;** and **(2) When Jesus returns He will take His followers to His Father's house in heaven. THIS PROMISE WAS NEW TO THE DISCIPLES. THEY ANTICIPATED REIGNING WITH CHRIST ON THE EARTH, NOT FIRST GOING WITH HIM TO HEAVEN.**
- **1 Corinthians 15:51-52 -- I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a MYSTERY: We will not all sleep (die), but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.** The word **"mystery"** refers to **a newly revealed divine secret that WAS NOT KNOWN in the past. WHAT COULD THAT MYSTERY BE? It can't be referring to the fact that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. They understood that our bodies will turn to dust when we die (Genesis 3:19 – dust you are and to dust you will return).** It has to be what follows the word **MYSTERY.** Paul says that **SOME BELIEVERS ON THE EARTH WILL NOT EXPERIENCE DEATH (SLEEP) BUT BE CAUGHT UP WITH THE LORD IN THE CLOUDS TO BE WITH HIM AT THE FIRST RESURRECTION WHICH WE CALL THE RAPTURE.** That

idea was not even considered in the past! It was an entirely new revelation from God. ***NOW LET'S LOOK AT WHAT* 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18 *SAYS ABOUT THIS VERY IMPORTANT PROPHETIC EVENT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.***

The Three Sounds of the Rapture. These will be audible sounds that it seems everyone including unbelievers will hear but only for a short time. And while they probably will be heard by people everywhere, it may well be that only Christians will understand the words spoken and the event to which they point. That seemed to be the case in **John 12:28-29** when God's voice spoke from heaven to Jesus after He prayed, "**Father, glorify your name**", saying "**I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again**." Scripture says that the crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "**An angel has spoken to him**." **In either case, it doesn't seem that they fully grasped what was happening**. NOW, WHAT ARE THOSE THREE SOUNDS THAT WILL ANNOUNCE THE RAPTURE?

- **Christ's Shout (Verse 16 -- For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command). Jesus will issue a summons to the church.** We don't know what content of the shout will be. But it's clear that Christians will understand and obey it.
- **The Voice of the Archangel.** This has to be Michael who is given the same title in **Jude 9**. In **Revelation 12:7**, we're told that Michael commanded the forces of God against the forces of the devil in heaven. So perhaps something similar will be happening during the rapture. Since Satan is the Prince of the Power of the Air, it may be that Michael will be on hand to protect the saints of God as they pass through the enemy's territory.
- **The Sound of the Trumpet of God.** Throughout the history of God's people, He has used trumpets to call His people to assembly. The blast of this particular trumpet will summon the church of Jesus Christ to heaven!

If you're wondering what it will be like, think about this: On **August 27, 1883**, the Earth let out a noise louder than any it has made since. It was **10:02 a.m.** when the sound emerged from **the island of Krakatoa**, which sits between **Java and Sumatra in Indonesia**. It was heard 2,000 miles away in **Western Australia** and even 3,000 miles away in **the Indian Ocean Island of Rodrigue**s. In all, it was heard in over **50 different geographical locations**. Think just how crazy this is. It's like being in **Boston** and clearly hearing a sound coming from **Dublin, Ireland**. Travelling at the speed of sound (about 761 mph at sea level) it takes a noise about **four hours** to cover that distance. This is the most distant sound that has ever been heard in recorded history. So, what could possibly create such an earth-shatteringly loud bang? *A volcano on Krakatoa had just erupted with a force that*

tore the island apart, emitting a plume of smoke that reached 17 miles high. This explosion created a deadly tsunami with waves over a hundred feet in height. In all, it is estimated the death toll was between 36,000 and 120,000 people. The British ship *Norham Castle* was 40 miles from Krakatoa at the time of the explosion. The ship's captain wrote in his log, "So violent are the explosions (estimate to be at 172 decibels) that the eardrums of over half my crew have been shattered. My last thoughts are with my dear wife. I am convinced that the Day of Judgement has come." We don't know how many decibels Christ's shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God will make, but whatever it is, it will be sufficient to call every Christian from anywhere in the world to meet up with the Lord during the rapture.

The Meaning of the Clouds in the Rapture (Verse 17 -- Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air). This could, of course, refer to literal clouds or it could to THE PRESENCE AND GLORY OF GOD as it did in the past. Remember that, during the day, it was a cloud that went before Israel to guide them during their exodus from Egypt and a cloud that covered the mountain of God (Sinai) when Moses ascended to receive the law from Yahweh.

The Participants in the Rapture.

- **Jesus.** He is the most important participant. We're told that the Lord, Himself, will come for the church. He is not going to send an angelic messenger or one of the deceased prophets of old (Elijah, Isaiah etc.). Jesus will personally and bodily come down from heaven to bring His church home to glory.
- **The Church.** Or we might say more specifically, ALL those who are in Christ. This does not include anyone who merely gives lip service to our Lord but falls away during a time of testing or temptation. Only true believers in Jesus who have been baptized into His body by the Holy Spirit whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free according to **1 Corinthians 12:13**. NOTICE THAT THIS INCLUDES BELIEVERS WHO ARE ALIVE AT THE TIME OF THE RAPTURE AND BELIEVER'S WHO HAVE DIED. IN FACT, PAUL MENTIONS CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE DIED BECAUSE SOME WERE WONDERING IF THEY WOULD MISS IT BECAUSE THEIR BODIES WERE DECAYING IN THE GRAVE. Paul's answer – absolutely not!. They, like those who are still living when the rapture occurs, will receive a resurrection body that is imperishable and immortal (**1 Corinthians 15:51-53 -- We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the IMPERISHABLE, and the mortal with IMMORTALITY). (Review: So far we've talked**

about <u>the 3 sounds of the rapture</u> (Christ's voice, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God), <u>the meaning of the clouds in the rapture</u> (the presence of God) and <u>the participants in the rapture</u> (Jesus and Christians dead and alive at the time).

The Results of the Rapture. There are at least three important results from the rapture.

- **Christ will have fulfilled His promise to come back for His own** (**John 14:1-3**). Remember that He promised His followers that they would enjoy unbroken fellowship with Him in His Father's house. The rapture is the event that brings about the fulfillment of His promise.
- **Our salvation in Christ will be completed**. Salvation means that we are saved from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and when we go to be with the Lord, the presence of sin. **Romans 8:23-24** says, "**And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved**."
- **The unity of all true believers will be accomplished**. The truth surrounding the rapture was meant to bring comfort to believers who had experienced separation from loved ones who also followed Christ. The rapture will reunite us in heaven!

There is at least one additional question about the rapture which is, "When does it take place?" Next week, as we look at the tribulation period, we'll answer this question as it relates to the timing of the events the follow it. For now, let's close with 3 reasons why the rapture could happen today and what we should be doing to prepare for it.

Here are THREE REASONS why the rapture could happen today.

- **No signs will precede the rapture.** Nothing in God's prophetic program must take place as a prerequisite to it. Christ's return for His church is imminent. This is another way of saying that It could happen at any moment.
- **No one knows when it will occur (except the Father).** Listen to these words from our Lord in **Matthew 24:36-41 -- "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left**.

- **Almost no time will elapse when it happens**. **1 Corinthians 15:51-52 -- Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed**. A well-known pastor tried to explain how long a twinkling of an eye is. He said it refers to the amount of time it takes for light traveling 186,000 miles per second to be reflected on the retina of one's eye.

The BIG QUESTION is, "What should we be doing now so that we're ready for the rapture when it happens?" Titus 2:11-13 tells us what to focus on: For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to <u>live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age</u>, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

- **Think clearly**. This is what the word means that is translated as **self-controlled**. It implies that we should be **sober-minded** and not intoxicated by the things of this world, but focused on the things of God.
- **Act rightly**. In **1 Corinthians 15:34** we're told to awake to righteousness (same word) and sin not. Christians must always be busy doing the next right thing before God.
- **Trust completely**. This is what godly people do. They live in such a way that our entire lives are an act of reverence and worship to God because He is worthy of our absolute faith and trust.

Conclusion: While on a South Pole expedition, British explorer **Sir Ernest Shackleton** left a few men on **Elephant Island**, promising that he would return. Later, when he tried to go back, huge icebergs blocked the way. But suddenly, as if by a miracle, an avenue opened in the ice and Shackleton was able to get through. His men, ready and waiting, quickly scrambled aboard. No sooner had the ship cleared the island than the ice crashed together behind them. Contemplating their narrow escape, the explorer said to his men, "***It was fortunate you were all packed and ready to go***!" They replied, "***We never gave up hope. Whenever the sea was clear of ice, we rolled up our sleeping bags and reminded each other, 'The boss may come today***.'" NOT A BAD WAY FOR ANYONE TO LIVE, IS IT? ALWAYS BE READY KNOWING THAT THE BOSS (OUR MASTER) MAY COME TODAY.