

# Series: The Church

THE YEAR OF THE BIBLE

## Sermon #4: The End of the Beginning

Revelation 19:11-16

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- November 29, 2020

Hey, good morning, Grace Covenant! Thank you for coming. I hope you had ... some kind of Thanksgiving. Another holiday with a new set of definitions ...

Thanks for joining us in your living room or wherever. Glad you could come today. We finish up on our Year through the Bible. Congratulations, Grace! We did this. This is crazy, right? A whole year of going through the Bible, reading through it, and then studying through it in the pulpit together ... Wow. You know, and no better year to do that than 2020.

We're going to look today at the end of the beginning, the return of Jesus Christ.

When I was supposed to get married—September 14, I think, is the right day in 1985—Melinda and I had spent the whole summer, three months, apart from each other living in different states doing different things. And I just wanted to be with my bride.

We flew in pretty much the week before the wedding ceremony and occasionally ran into each other with the various pre-wedding events. It was a hard week. And then we got married on a Saturday at 7:00 pm. We should have been married at 7:00 am. I wanted to be with my bride.

At 7:01, the wedding hadn't started yet and I thought, *What is taking so long here?* And then at 7:05, I'm in a panic. I'm thinking, *You know what? The more time she has, the more chance she has to pull out of this thing and realize what kind of trouble she's getting into. Let's get going. I want to see this bride.* At 7:06 that party got started.

I want to tell you, my brothers and sisters, that Jesus Christ wants to be with His bride. And every moment that goes by, every minute that passes, is an expression of His patience so that none would perish; so that everyone would have a chance to be part of that bride—that bride, His church. He's coming back for His church. He wants His bride.

Today I came here to just encourage you—to give you courage. And that courage is based on this truth, that Jesus is coming back. He's coming back for His bride and He's coming

back to judge and to rule His creation. This passage we look at today is the end of that garden story and the beginning of a new story, the reign of Jesus Christ.

## **The Importance of the Second Coming**

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ is an essential doctrine, a foundational conviction for the believer in Jesus Christ. It is mentioned three hundred times in the New Testament alone—three hundred times. And there are multiple applications or consequences for believing in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. But today, we're looking at this one—to encourage you; to give you courage to do the will of God. It is a bedrock conviction that Jesus Christ will return to judge and to rule all of creation.

## **The Rapture**

Now the Second Coming of Christ we read a lot about in the Book of Revelation. But before that happens—years before the Second Coming of Christ—there's a thing called the Rapture. It is Jesus coming for His bride, Jesus coming for the Church. That happens ahead of time. I want to tell you more about that right now. A lot of what we know about that is found in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. And the Book of Thessalonians is written for the particular purpose of telling people about the Rapture, that coming for the bride. And the reason was that the people of Thessalonica were assuming that Jesus would return in their lifetime. And then He didn't. And so, the survivors were concerned about their brothers and sisters that had passed, and they were wondering, *Are they going to miss out? The people that have gone to sleep, the people that have died before us as followers of Christ, are they going to miss out on Jesus' return?*

And so, one of the reason Paul writes Thessalonians is to say, *No, no, they're not going to miss out. Everybody that is a follower of Jesus Christ is going to be part of this. No worries about that. Those who have, quote "fallen asleep" will enjoy the same thing we have.*

## **1 Thessalonians 4:13-16**

**Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.**

And that's what I want to read you here in 1 Thessalonians 4. It says, "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who fall asleep in death so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who grieve without hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again." Boom! Foundation. "And so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep with Him. Now this is according to the Lord's word. We tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, and with a voice of an archangel and with a trumpet call, and the dead in Christ will rise first."

This whole doctrine is built on this declaration of Jesus Christ who died and rose. It says that we are "in Him"--those who had fallen asleep "in Him." When a person puts their faith that Jesus Christ died for their sin and was raised for inheriting His righteousness, we are in Christ in His death, we are in Christ in His resurrection. And ultimately, we will be with Him in our ascension. But Paul is saying here that when a person is in Christ, even the word "death" is more like "falling asleep." It's a transitional state. It is just a passing thing.

**His death makes our deaths sleep, and His Resurrection makes our sleep calmly certain of awaking.**

**--Alexander McClaren**

I love this quote by McClaren. He says, "His death makes our death sleep. And His resurrection makes our sleep calmly certain of awakening."

### **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**

**For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.**

Oh, He's going to awaken us. Here's what it looks like, verses 16 and 17: "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven and with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God, the dead in Christ will rise first." And then after that? "Then we who are still alive and left will be caught up together with Him in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever."

### **1 Thessalonians 4:18**

**Therefore encourage one another with these words.**

And how are we supposed to respond? Let me just read it, verse 18: "Therefore encourage one another in these words." I told you I came here so that you might be encouraged, that you would have courage.

The two times this is talked about in chapter 4 and chapter 5 of 1 Thessalonians, it ends with "so be encouraged and encourage one another."

### **Outline of Jesus' Coming**

It says right here this coming of Jesus Christ for His church, this Rapture, the Second Coming, begins like this. Let me just give you the outline. It begins like this. The Lord Jesus Christ himself will come down from heaven.

## 1. Jesus Comes Down from Heaven

When Jesus ascended, He was on the Mount of Olives. It's in the Book of Acts. And as He was ascending to heaven, an angel said, "This same Jesus who was going before you is going to return the same way." So the way He ascended is the way He'll return.

So, one day the Father turns to the Son and says, *Go get her. The fullness of the Church is complete.* And so, Jesus will rise from the right hand of the Father and He will order an archangel to join Him. And He will somehow summon this great archangel who will cross the gulf between heaven and earth. And when He goes there will be this loud command, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet of God will blast, and He will make this declarative statement, and the dead will rise first.

What do you suppose that declarative statement, that command, will be? No one knows. But I bet it's something like, *Come my bride. I've waited. Come to me.*

## 2. The Dead in Christ Will Rise First

And those who were dead will rise first. It says in the Bible that when a person dies and they're a follower of Jesus Christ, they are absent from the body but present with the Lord—in the presence of the Lord, like right now. They don't have a glorified body. They're in some other state somehow. And Paul is saying that those people that have died before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, in the presence of the Lord, absent from the body, do not miss out. As a matter of fact, he says they get to go first. They go first. They explode from the ground somehow from the graves and from the oceans and they get that glorified body and they meet Jesus in the clouds. While that's happening, soon after, the Rapture takes place.

## 3. The Rapture

And the idea of the Rapture is where it said in the passage, "We who are still alive and left will be caught up together with them in the clouds." "Caught up"—that phrase in Latin is the word *rapto*. It means "to seize, to carry off." We will be seized from the ground and carried off.

When will this happen? No one knows. In this passage itself in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, it says that you'll be able to tell, like you'll be able to tell when a pregnant woman is starting labor pains. Does anyone know those stories? When does a woman's water break? I'll tell you

when—the time you least expect it and the most inconvenient time. That’s when it happens. And that’s kind of the idea here. It’s going to happen anytime.

How does this happen? The dead are raised and those that are living are caught up in the clouds. I don’t know. I mean, I do not know how that happens. I don’t think Paul knows how that happens, because Paul says, “According to the Lord’s words . . .” He’s saying what I’m saying: *He said so, so it’s going to happen. He didn’t tell me how, so I’m not sure I’m supposed to care.*

But he does say this. We are seized up in that moment. We are seized up and away from the torment of this life, of the crippling memories and sorrow and the heartaches and the weaknesses that we have in this life. Just picture an eagle cut loose from chains that hold it back from the way it was designed and what it was meant to be. That’s the new us—caught up in the clouds. The dead and the raptured are in glorified bodies in the clouds with Jesus. Be encouraged.

#### **4. The Dead and the Raptured Are Now in Glorified Bodies**

Glorified bodies—bodies that aren’t cursed or damned or bent or maimed—bodies that have freedom from illness and sickness and addiction. Minds that can grasp the wonder of God, eyes that can behold His beauty and not be blinded, ears that can hear perfect worship towards the King, tongues that can only speak truth and encouragement, and hearts big enough and holy enough and true enough and loving enough to grasp the fullness of Yahweh. There we are in these glorified bodies.

#### **Application: Be Encouraged**

I stopped this weekend and thought, *Be encouraged*. I thought of parents who have children with special needs. I just went straight to those parents who live their lives day to day. Sometimes when they venture out they’ll live a week at a time. But they can’t plan too far out because there are too many variables and it gets dark too quickly. And this passage says that there will be a day when you meet that son and you’ll see your daughter in the way they were designed to be. Be encouraged. And that child that has lived every single moment of its earthly existence in angst, incapable of expressing love and truth and gratitude towards you—now they’re free. They’re free. Some of you will have to be introduced to your own child. They will have changed that much. Be encouraged.

And those who have gone before us ... My mother died entirely too young. It's like whenever we have a special event, I'll say to Melinda, "Mom's still gone." And she'll say, "Yep." But on this day, she'll be introduced to the granddaughters that she never met. And those of you that have had parents or grandparents pass and the last memories you have of them are suffering what appears to be pointless agony for extended time—you can stop with those memories. Start today because of tomorrow, because of this day. You be encouraged.

## **6. The Bride Will Be Together at Last**

### **1 Thessalonians 4:17**

**After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.**

It says that the bride will be together. Look what it says verses 17 and 18: "After that, we who are still alive and left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air so that we will be with the Lord forever." This is the reunion of the Church. This is past, present, and ultimately, the future of the Church. All of us across time and distance and language and culture and race—all of the creative expressions of what it means to be human—all of that, all of those differences—but one common thing: we love our groom, Jesus the Christ. And we meet Him and we see Him. We see Him, the one to whom we have prayed ten thousand prayers to; the one to whom we have sung hymns of worship; the one that we have felt at times is in the room with us; the one who we felt like was distant from us, that had left us, but had never left us, never forsaken us. We'll see Him. We will behold Him. We'll all be there.

Are you encouraged? It should give you courage to live your life like you will never die, because you won't. This is how it ends if He returns after our death. He says, "Be encouraged by this."

## **1 Thessalonians 5:9-11**

**For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>10</sup> He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.**

Look how chapter 5 ends in this explanation of the Rapture. He says, “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as, in fact, you are doing.”

We’re supposed to look at this truth that’s found in the Books of Thessalonians and we’re supposed to encourage one another by knowing that whether we’re asleep or we’re there when it happens, we’re going to be just fine, thank you.

## **The Second Coming of Jesus**

Jesus is coming back for His bride. He loves His bride. He wants to see His bride. It’s called the Rapture. It happens years before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. That Second Coming is the return of the King. That’s found a lot in the Book of Revelation.

**When the author walks on the stage, the play is over.**

**--C. S. Lewis**

C. S. Lewis wrote this about the Book of Revelation: “When the author walks on the stage, the play is over.” There’s another day when the Father turns to the Son and says, *Enough. Enough violence and enough suffering and enough sorrow. Enough starvation and enough evil. Enough time. This is over.* And Jesus returns, and He won’t need shepherds to tell people that He’s here. And He won’t be disguised as a little baby wrapped up in a poor couple’s cloth. Oh, He’s going to come, and everyone will know.

Listen, you can study the Book of Revelation, and it is difficult to understand. But the things that you can understand, the things that you can be certain about are these: that Jesus will



triumph, He will be victorious, He will judge the living and the dead, and He will rule and reign forever. All the wrongs will be made right—all of them. Every careless word will be given account. That's what the book says.

### **Revelation 19:11-12**

**I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and wages war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him that no one knows but He himself.**

In chapter 19 it talks about His physical return. In chapter 19, verses 11 through 16 or so—it's a beautiful passage—we'll read some of it right now. "I saw heaven standing"—*I saw all of heaven* is what he means—all of heaven standing "open and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called Faithful and True. And with justice He judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him and no one knows it but himself."

He has crowns. It's funny, in the Book of Revelation, Jesus is collecting crowns. In chapter 12 He has seven crowns. In chapter 13 He has ten crowns. In chapter 19 He has many crowns. He's taking over. He's the King of kings. Now He has many crowns.

And evil is finally dealt with. Why does evil exist at all? I don't know. We're able to get comfort in knowing that God can make even good things come out of evil for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. But why evil? And why the devil? Why is it even here? It's hard to answer that question for sure. But in Revelation 19, it seems that one reason that evil exists is to show the power of the glory of Jesus the King when He comes on that great white horse and He rides into creation and He's the greater rider still.

There's a great line in *Robinson Crusoe*—Robinson Crusoe, you know, is stranded on an island and he picks up a native there, his good man Friday. And his good man Friday becomes a believer in Jesus Christ. And Robinson is teaching him the survey of God's reign in the world, His bringing the kingdom to all of creation, like we did. And then somewhere in there, good man Friday says, "Well, why doesn't God just destroy the devil?" And Crusoe answers the right way and says, "Oh, God will destroy the devil." It happens right here in the Book of Revelation.

Be encouraged. The history of man appears to be the history of evil. But according to chapter 19 in the Book of Revelation, that comes to an end. It's not for long.

### **Revelation 19:13-15**

**He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God. <sup>14</sup> The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, clean and white.**

**<sup>15</sup> Coming out of His mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.**

Read along with me here. It says, "He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God. And the armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses as well, and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of His mouth is a sharp sword with which He strikes down the nations. And 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty."

His robe is dipped in blood. What blood? The blood of His enemies? I don't think so. The battle hasn't started yet and the army is still clean. Some say it is the redemptive blood of Jesus Christ. He's coming back in this robe, it's covered with His blood to remind everybody He's okay, He's back. Some commentators say that the blood His robe has been dipped in is the blood of the martyrs because He's coming back to take account of that. He's coming back on a great white horse and a robe dipped in blood.

And it says He has a sharp sword of judgment. And He's not yielding it with His hand. It says it's coming out of His mouth because His words will speak and do the work for Him. When He speaks, it is spoken.

It says, in summary here, this is the high point of the human history, of the human storyline. All of a sudden Jesus appears and He comes to judge the world. It says, "He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." Smug men and women who have violated fellow men, the holiness of God, and the nature of how we were meant to be, die pleasantly without regret in palaces running kingdoms. And we think, we wonder, *Will there be justice?* And Revelation says there will be—a final accounting. And it will be true and it will be sure.

There's a story of Julian the Apostate. He was the emperor of Rome in 360 or so. And he was pillaging and burning his way to Persia. And as he did, he was famous for his persecution of the Christians. And some of his violent army got hold of an old saint and they were just making sport of him, trying to prolong his life and prolong his death as they tortured and tormented him and abused and teased him. And one of the men grabbed him in his blood, gasping for breath, and said, "Where now is your carpenter God?" And that saint said, "My carpenter God is building a coffin for your emperor."

Jesus Christ has been building coffins. And He will be collecting crowns. You should be encouraged. You should have courage.

**Revelation 19:16**

**On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written:  
KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.**

Here's the last verse in this section. It says, "And on His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." And all God's people said, Amen.

**Then and Now**

Are you encouraged? I hope you're encouraged. Because this is a new story. It is a different story. It's not a story of a king riding a donkey; it's one of Him riding a brilliant white war horse. Jesus who was once rejected and despised—every knee will bow. He was mocked and slandered; and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. We'll be there. We'll be glad to do that—bow our knees and confess this thing to be true. Jesus himself who remains silent during His accusations, His beatings, His crucifixion—oh, He's going to speak now. And He'll have a sharp sword in His mouth and He will judge and rule. And when He speaks the heavens and the earth will quake. He had a crown of thorn and now it says He has many crowns. And we're going to see this, my friends. We're going to witness this someday.



Listen, some of you might not know this. I want to tell you about the architectural design of our church. When you look at the outside of our church you'll see a prominent crown coming out of this building. And it is not a crown of thorns; it is a royal crown. In the original design, we were going to have a cross in the courtyard for all of our members to see. But in the final design stage, Ray Anderson, our executive pastor and king of the design team, said, "No, we have a crown. Let's put a cross outside. And let's not make it an empty cross to remind us of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have a crown. Let's make it an iron scepter."

So, there it stands, an iron scepter with three crosses on one of the higher points in two counties so that all the people that drive by would know that He died and rose again, but He's coming again. He's coming again.

And so, friends, when you're driving down this highway and you're going to work, you be reminded of that. You be encouraged by that. But when you're driving and you're going to the hospital for you or for someone you love, you be reminded of the truths that are found in the Bible about Jesus being the King. When you're driving by this building and you see that crown and that scepter, would you please reflect on Revelation 19? On your way to funeral, know that

Jesus is King and He's coming back for His bride, and those who died will be the first to be raised, and those that are with Him will gather with Him in the clouds and we'll watch—the bride will watch with the groom as the groom returns a second time to make things right. You should be encouraged.

The Book of Revelation was written to the Church during the rule of Rome in an era of persecution where Rome was trying to drown the Church in its own blood. And while we don't live under great persecution, we live in a time that most probably will be getting worse. And we return to this truth, that God is sovereign. He has a plan, He has the power to make the plan happen, and we are part of that plan by being His bride. That gives us hope. That gives us endurance. Do not grow weary in doing good, for if you persevere, there will be a season where you're going to love that harvest. You'll be bringing it to your King. So, lift high your hearts, Grace. Lift high. His kingdom will come. His will *will* be done on earth as it is in heaven. And all God's people said, Amen.

Here's what I'd like to finish our time with. You know, we started in January in the Book of Genesis and here we are in November in the Book of Revelation. And so, what I'd like to do is to show you how there's a plan and there's a sovereign God who has the power to make the plan come true.

We'll do what's called a responsive reading. I'm going to read the first line and you'll read the second line back to me. And what we'll be doing is looking at a comparison and contrast between the first creation story and the second creation story, the first garden and the last garden.

Would you join me by standing? This is going to be difficult—you're a smaller audience and you're wearing masks. So, to quote G. K. Chesterton, "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing poorly." So, you at home, stand up. If you can hold hands with someone, would you hold hands with them? And would you be encouraged? Be encouraged.

**"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (1:1).**

***"I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (21:1).***

**"The darkness He called Night" (1:5).**

***"There shall be no night there" (21:25).***

**"God made two great lights (sun and moon)" (1:16).**

***"The city had no need of the sun or of the moon" (21:23).***

**“In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (2:17).**  
***“There shall be no more death, nor sorrow” (21:4).***

**Satan appears as deceiver of mankind (3:1).**  
***Satan disappears forever (20:10).***

**Walk of God with people interrupted (3:8-10).**  
***Walk of God with people restored (21:3).***

**Initial triumph of the Serpent (3:13).**  
***Ultimate triumph of the Lamb (20:10; 22:3).***

**God multiplies sorrow and pain (3:16).**  
***“There shall be no more pain” (21:4).***

**“Cursed is the ground for your sake” (3:17).**  
***“And there shall be no more curse” (22:3).***

**Man’s dominion broken in the fall of the first man, Adam (3:19).**  
***Man’s dominion restored in the rule of the New Man, Christ (22:5).***

**First paradise closed (3:23).**  
***New paradise opened (21:25).***

**Access to the tree of life disinherited to Adam (3:24).**  
***Access to the tree of life reinstated in Christ (22:14).***

**They were driven from God’s presence (3:24).**  
***“They shall see His face” (22:4).***

They shall see His face. We’ll see His face in the clouds and then we’ll see His face for eternity.

Would you join me in a word of prayer?

*Lord, we celebrate. We celebrate that You are a sovereign, powerful God; that You know all things and You can do all things. You are all loving and all capable. You are a simple God that is more than a sum of the parts. And You have chosen us to be Your children, Your heirs.*

*“And now if we’re Your children and heirs--heirs to God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.” And so, Lord, we “consider that our present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be*

*revealed to us. We know that all of creation has been groaning with birth pangs right up to this present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit who lives inside of us, we groan inwardly as we await eagerly for our full adoption as sons and daughters in glorified bodies.” Redeem these bodies. “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We don’t even know how to pray, but we are grateful, Lord, that Your Spirit intercedes for us when we have no words to speak in the middle of our groans. You search our hearts.” You know what is true. Let the Spirit of God continue to intercede for us that we might know the will of God. (Romans 8:16-26)*

*Here’s a call.*

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race that is marked out for each and every one of us. Let’s fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, the scorning and the shame. And now He sits down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him, Jesus, who endured such opposition from sinful men.” Help us to keep that in mind so that we “will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Hebrews 12:1-3)*

*Let us be a church that is filled with courage. Let us encourage one another in knowing that You are sovereignly powerful. We are grateful. We are so grateful. We worship You. You are our King, King of kings, Lord of lords, collector of crowns, builder of coffins. Oh, we long for that day.*

*We pray this in Jesus’ name. And all God’s people said, Amen.*