

Having the Correct Change at the Rapture • By Dr. David O. Dykes
1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Have you ever been caught without the correct change? When I was in seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, I would often drive up further north to preach in some of those pioneer Baptist areas around Cleveland, Ohio, or Detroit, Michigan. And I recall one evening driving back late after I'd preached on a Sunday evening, it was probably about 2:00 AM in the morning. I stopped at a 24-hour filling station on the Interstate to get a Coke. And they had vending machines, but the only thing I had in my wallet was a \$20 bill. Now that's a miracle in itself that a seminary student would have a \$20 bill. I didn't need gas, but I just went to the guy who was taking the money there at that 24-hour gas station and asked for change. And this guy looked at me and he didn't even smile. He said, "We don't give change here." And I wanted to say, "I grew up in the South where everybody's friendly and polite and nice. And you mean you're not going to give me change for a \$20 bill?" I kind of had my mouth and taste buds all ready for a Coke. So I walked back to my car and I pulled the gas nozzle out, stuck it in my gas tank and I pumped 5 cents of gas. I calmly walked back over there and fled that \$20 bill and without saying a word and he gave me \$19 and 95 cents. I went and got my Coke and got on my way. You know, it's tough sometimes to be caught without the correct change, but the change I'm talking about today and the change that the Bible talks about has nothing to do with money. When Jesus comes back to rapture the church, the Bible says we're going to be changed. Now, if you are a Christian, you'll undergo the correct change. But if you're not a Christian, there'll be no change in your life. Although there will be a terrible change in world conditions. And you will wish after that point that you had been saved. First Corinthians 15:50-58 says:

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, 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, 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. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves

fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

I want to point out four things about the second coming of Jesus Christ. And those of you that know me know that I love to talk about the second coming of Christ.

I. THE MYSTERY

First of all, I want us to notice the mystery. It is mysterious what happens to a person when they die. And that's why in verse 51, Paul says, "Behold, I tell you a mystery..." Now, when most of us think of mysteries, we think of Sherlock Holmes OR Alfred Hitchcock or John Grisham or something like that. But in the Bible, the word "mystery" denotes A hidden truth that is now revealed. And so Paul says what happens at death is not something that's impossible to know. It's just something that has been heretofore hidden. But now I'm going to reveal it to you. He says, I'm going to show you what's going to happen when a person dies. And so he reveals the mystery. Now there are two aspects to this glorious mystery.

1. At Christ's return sleeping Christians will rise

Of course, when I say sleeping, I'm talking about those who have physically died. Look at verse 51. The Bible says when a Christian dies, their soul immediately goes to be with Jesus in heaven, but their body is just put into the grave. And the Bible says it's such a peaceful experience it's kind of like sleeping. You may be interested to know that our English word "cemetery" comes from the Greek word for sleeping. And so every time you drive by a cemetery, you can look over there and you can say that the bodies of those Christians are sleeping. The Bible says what happens to the body of a Christian after it's dead is really not very important because God is going to change it, when he comes back...whatever's left of that body.

Our resurrection body is going to be like that of the Lord Jesus Christ. What about Christians that were killed or died five or 600 years ago? What's left of their body. Nothing. What about Christians who are burned? And there's nothing left except ashes? What about Christians that are lost at sea and the fishes have eaten what was left to them? I mean, there's nothing there. Energy and matter are never lost in this universe. When Jesus comes back, he'll just have to speak the word and suddenly all of those molecules and atoms will come together for a resurrection body.

Now, the earliest Christians were terribly confused about this. If you have been to the city of Rome, you visited the catacombs underneath the city. That's where the early Christians used to have worship. And you know what they did with the corpses of Christians that died? They wrapped them up and stuck them there in the walls. And you can see today where the corpses were placed. You know why they did that? Because they were so confused. They were afraid that those Christians who had died, if something happened to their body, that Jesus couldn't resurrect it.

And that's why Paul is trying to clear the air. He's saying it doesn't matter what's left because Jesus is going to raise them and change them. Instantaneously.

Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founders of our nation was a printer, a scientist, politician, ambassador, etc. He wrote his own epitaph. And if you've seen his grave there in Boston, you've read these words before. This is what he wrote about his body before he died: The body of Benjamin Franklin, printer, like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding. That body lies here, food for worms, but this work will not be lost for it will appear again once more in a new and more elegant edition, revised and corrected by the author.

That's what happens to the body of Christians who've died, but there's another truth here.

2. At Christ's return living Christians will be changed

Verse 51 says we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. Now, if you connect this passage to 1 Thessalonians four, we know what's going to happen. It says that when Jesus comes back, the dead in Christ shall rise. Somebody has said they have six feet farther to go than we do. So that's why they're going to rise first! Then we who are alive and remain shall be "caught up." It's the word "raptio." We should be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. And at that moment, you and I will undergo an instantaneous change. Paul says there's going to be a generation of Christians who are alive when Jesus comes back. And for that generation of Christians, they will not die physically. You and I may not die physically if Jesus comes back before we die. We'll never have to go through a cemetery. Billy Graham has repeatedly said for much of his adult life that he believes Jesus Christ is going to come back before he dies. And It could be at any moment.

A few years ago, my telephone rang and it was one of those telemarketers selling something. They are called phone solicitors and some of you call them other things too. But this was a lady who was selling cemetery plots. I know she was just doing her job and that's a good way to make money, but she was selling cemetery plots. And I listened to her as she read her script. Then I thought I'd play a little trick with her there, but witness to her at the same time. And so after she finished, I said, "I don't think I want to buy one of those cemetery plots, but do y'all rent those things?"

And you could tell that was not one of the possible responses. I could hear the paper shuffling. She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I'm a Christian. And if I do die, I won't need a cemetery for very long because Jesus is going to come back and I'll be raised. And If I'm alive when Jesus comes back, I won't even need a cemetery to start with." And she hung up!

So go ahead and prepare to die. That's just good planning. Get you a cemetery plot and make those plans. Prearrange. I'd tell you to do that. But the truth of the matter

is you might not ever need it. If you're alive when Jesus comes back, you'll be changed instantly. That's what this verse is all about. The mystery.

II. THE MOMENT

Verse 52 says it will happen fast, in the twinkling of an eye.

1. The timing

The timing of the return of Christ is going to be fast. I know some people who, honestly, want to live in sin. They want to party. They want to have fun. They want to live as wickedly as they can and have as much fun as they can. Then they say, “But when I see Jesus coming down, I'm going to get saved real quick.” Jesus is not going to parachute down. He's not going to float down in a hot air balloon. It's going to be so fast you will not have time to prepare at that moment. That is why you better prepare right now.

The Greek word for “in a flash” is the word we get our word “atom” from. They thought an atom was the smallest thing that you could imagine that could never be divided. Of course, today we know that even atoms can be divided and even protons and neutrons can be divided into quarks, but that's the word. It means an amount of time so brief you can't even divide it. The twinkling of an eye is a tiny eye movement. And I did some research on this, and experts tell us that the fastest part of your body is your eyeball. Magicians will tell you that the hand is quicker than the eye, but don't you believe it. Magicians just use misdirection of course, because your eye is faster than your hand. So a “twinkling of an eye” doesn't mean a blinking of an eye. See how fast you can blink your eyes. That's about 1/400th of a second, but a twinkling of an eye is the experience of looking through a crowd and seeing somebody you know. That instant of recognition is a twinkle of an eye. The word in Greek means “realization.”

I read once that it is the time that it takes light to travel from the front of your eyeball to the optic nerves behind your eyeball. Once I was teaching a group of college students from the University of North Carolina at a Christian retreat. And I was talking about this very thing, the twinkling of an eye. And I made that statement about the time it takes light to travel from the front of your eyeball to the back of your eyeball. Well, here's about 30 or 40 of these sharp college kids with their Bibles open taking notes, all except one guy. He's sitting over here to the side. And he's the kind of guy that when I was in college, we used to call him a nerd. He didn't have a Bible. He was just sitting there and I could tell he was an egghead because when I made that statement, he whipped out a calculator. He starts punching away on his calculator while I'm talking. Now I want y'all to know that while I preach, I do notice things. I'm trying not to be distracted by this guy. I'm trying to talk to these kids about the second coming of Jesus. This guy's doing his physics homework, you know? When the session is over, this kid walks up to me

and he's got this calculator and his own thermal printer. So he has a long strip of figures there and he says, "0.6 nanoseconds." I said, "What?"

He had factored a twinkling of an eye to 0.6 nanoseconds! Light travels at 186,234 miles per second. And he had estimated the distance from the front of your eyeball to the back as so many millimeters. And he had factored it down to 0.6 nanoseconds. I said, "Is that fast?" He said, "That's fast."

When Jesus comes back, all of this is going to take place in a 0.6 nanoseconds. So you had better be ready now because you won't have time to get ready then. And so there's something about the timing here that's critical.

2. The trumpet

In several places, the Bible says that when Jesus comes back to rapture the church, there's going to be the sound of the trumpet. First Thessalonians four says it will happen at the last trumpet call of God. So where did we get the idea that Gabriel is going to blow the trumpet? It's not in the Bible. Trust me. Somebody just came up with it. But everybody says it's when Gabriel blows his trumpet. But the Bible never says he's going to blow the trumpet. In fact, it says, it's the trumpet call of God. Now, when you start looking in the Bible for that, you go over to Exodus 19, and you see where God was calling the children of Israel into an assembly at Mount Sinai. Revelation chapter four, verse one talks about how John is caught up into heaven and there's a voice that sounds like a trumpet. Also, part of the Jewish festivals in the fall of the year 10 days before Yom Kippur was the Day of Atonement. They would have what they called the festival of trumpets. And it was when the trumpets would play. And it was always different tunes, instructing the people to do different things. The military has used a bugler to signal to the troops when to get up and when to go to bed, when to charge and when to retreat.

So when Jesus comes back, God will make the sound of a trumpet. As I was going through this study, I read about a Civil War chaplain who one night was watching all of the soldiers as they bedded down for the night. And they were all in sleeping bags, not tents. And that night it snowed. And he said the next morning, as he looked out, all he saw was just a flat, beautiful, pure unbroken scene of snow. But when the bugler played Revelry, it was eerie to see one by one these soldiers sitting up out of the snow as if the dead in Christ were rising at the sound of the trumpet! Well, friend, don't you fear. Something like that really is going to happen when the trumpet sounds!

III. THE MEANING

What is the meaning of all this? Why is Jesus going to come back? What is the purpose for his return and what are the spiritual implications?

1. Death's sting is extracted

When Jesus comes back, he's putting the ultimate stamp of victory on what was started at Calvary. You see when Jesus died on the cross, he started dealing with death. And when he comes back, he's going to put the final stamp of defeat on death for his final victory.

Sigmund Freud, who is called the father of modern psychiatry, was terribly confused about death. And you know what he wrote in one of his books? As he's talking about death, he wrote: "And finally there is the painful riddle of death for which no remedy at all has been found nor probably ever will be." A respected scholar, Sigmund Freud could talk a lot about psychology and human nature. But when he looks square into the face of death, you know what Sigmund Freud said? It's a riddle and there's no remedy for it and never will be a remedy for it.

Mr. Freud was totally wrong. Death is not a riddle; it is an enemy that's already been defeated and there is a remedy to death. And his name is Jesus Christ. And did you know at the cross, he started the process and when he comes back, he'll finish the process? That's why after the second coming of Jesus Christ, we will be able to sing and we will be able to shout, "Death, where's your sting?"

What is it about death that we used to fear? What is it about death that made us cringe? When we look at death from the other side, we'll say that death is as harmless as a bumblebee whose stinger has been removed and we'll see it as something absolutely harmless.

2. Death's victory is erased

All of the things that death has claimed through the years will be reversed and removed. I don't know if you understand the importance of this, but when Jesus died on the cross, he started the death of death. And when he comes back again, the final death nail of death will be pronounced. And all the damage that death has ever done through the centuries will be completely reversed.

When I was a teenager and my dad was a forest ranger, he would often have to go out and fight forest fires. That was one of his jobs. If there was a forest fire, he would get his men and his equipment and sometimes I would go out with him. Usually the only way to fight a forest fire is to try and get ahead of it and to plow a fire line, a fire break out through the woods. And you try to cut that fire off so that when the flame reaches that fire line, that's basically just dirt that's been plowed up. There's nothing burn. And the fire goes out.

But what was always left behind was that sickening sight of hundreds and thousands of acres of burned-out woodlands. We could put the fire out, but we could not reverse the damage of the fire. When Jesus comes back, not only will he make the end of death and stop the fire, but it's as if he'll go back and reverse all the damage that death has ever done. It's as if after we put out that forest fire, we could wave our hand and suddenly all the green would be restored. See, that's what

Jesus is going to do. The victory that death has claimed over people through the years will be totally reversed

If you don't live until Jesus comes back, you know what's going to happen? Death's going to claim you. Death is going to reach out its icy fingers and its bony hand with its chilling breath, and it's going to place his hand on your shoulder. There's just something a little bit haunting about that. Let's face it. But what this text is saying is that when Jesus comes back, all the damage of death will be done away with, and that's good news. That's the meaning of the second coming.

III. THE MOTIVATION

All of this so far is doctrine. You say, "I believe everything you've said, but in this something that's going to happen in the future. Big deal. Well, it is a big deal. Everything that the Bible says has an effect on how you should live.

1. Live a life of thanksgiving

If nothing else, you ought to be eternally thankful to God because of what Jesus has done for you and what he's going to do for you. Let me tell you what he's done. Do you know what the sting of death is? The text says the sting of death is sin and sin leads to the death. What that means is because we're all sinners by nature, we all deserve to go to hell and suffer for all eternity. But when Jesus died on the cross, he took the stinger into his own body. So we wouldn't have to experience the pain of the sting of death. It's kind of like this. If I could illustrate it, let's just imagine that this hand of mine represents the Lord Jesus Christ. And this hand is empty to symbolize that Jesus was totally sinless. There was no backlog of sin in his life. He was perfect. But let my other hand represent me and represent you. I'm holding a Bible that represents all of our sins, our failures, our shortcomings, in this book. That's a lot of sin. And it's a lot of death and it's a lot of hell. But the Bible says in Isaiah chapter 53, verse five that he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The punishment for our peace was upon him. And with his stripes, we are healed. We like sheep have gone astray. We've turned everyone to our own way. And God has laid on him the iniquities of us. When Jesus died on the cross, he took your stinger. He took my stinger so that you and I can be clean and forgiven. If nothing else, that ought to make you thankful. Amen?

Some say, "I don't have much to be thankful for." Oh yes you do. If your sins have been forgiven, you ought to be thankful every day of the week. I started examining my own life this weekend, and my assistant Arlene Huckabee can verify this, but hardly any day of the week goes by that I don't just break out singing, "Thank you, Lord for saving my soul. Thank you Lord, for making me whole." Let me just ask you. When was the last time you said to God, "Thank you for saving me"? What was the last time you said, "Thank you, Jesus, for giving me the victory"?

You know, there's a difference in giving thanks and being thankful. You are to give thanks because he gives you the victory. It ought to lead to a life of thanksgiving.

2. A life of service

Jesus is coming back. It's going to be soon. So what should I do? Should I sit around and twiddle my spiritual thumbs? Should I go up to a top of a mountain and put on a white robe and say, "Okay, Lord, I'm ready. Come and get me." Verse 58 says, "...because of all of this, my brethren, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully..." In other words, don't get out of the will of God. That doesn't mean one hour, one day a week; it means always. That doesn't mean half-hearted; that doesn't mean part of the time, some of the time. It means fully give yourself to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

You can be doing many things with your time and your energy and your money that are in vain. But there are some things you can do with your time and your energy and your money that's not in vain. And what you do for the Lord is not in vain.

How important is what you've done this last week going to be 10,000 years from now? Will it matter? I want to tell you every time you serve the Lord, everything you do in labor for the Lord, it's not in vain. And 10,000 years from now, it'll be even be more important. How do we know that? I want you to see why your service for the Lord is critically important. Why you should teach that Sunday school class. Why you should sing in the choir. Why you should work in outreach. Why you should get involved in the work of the Lord. Why should you do that? Not to go to heaven when you die, but because of this great truth: because you want to serve the Lord out of a thankful heart. Revelation 22, verse 12 has the last recorded words of Jesus. We put stock in last words. If I dropped dead this afternoon, probably the things I said to you today would carry great importance because people would say they were my "last words." Well, I want you to read the last words of the greatest man who ever lived: Jesus. He says, "Behold. I am coming soon. My reward is with me and I will give to everyone, according to what he has done." When Jesus comes back, he's going to have something in his hand and it's going to be reward for you and me for all we've done in serving the Lord. Is there going to be a reward for you at all? You say, "I don't want a reward." Well, friend, if you want a reward, that's the wrong motive anyway. But if you serve Jesus out of a heart of thanksgiving for what he's done for you, there will be a reward. Verse 20 in Revelation says, "He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Even so, Lord Jesus, come, as John says. Can you say this? Or do you say, "I don't want him to come back right now because there's sin in my life... because I'm not faithful ...because I'm not working for Jesus"?

CONCLUSION

Are you waiting for a more convenient time? There is no more convenient time and there's no time to prepare for his coming except right now. What difference should it make in your life that Jesus is going to come back soon? You ought to be singing "thank you, Lord, for saving my soul" every day. And you ought to be busy for Jesus every day of your life so that when he does come back, you can say, "Come Lord Jesus."

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