

# 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 — The Lord Himself Shall Descend

*The Assembling Shout, the Archangel's Voice, the Assembling Trumpet, and the Mercy of How the Assembly's Testimony Ends*

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## Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; Ecclesiastes 7:1–3

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*“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”*

## Everything in Man's Hands Goes to Ruin

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Everything that has ever been committed into the hands of man has gone to ruin, with the exception of those things put in the hands of the Lord Jesus. Eden was committed to Adam's hands and went to ruin. Government was committed to Noah's hands and went to ruin. The law was committed to Israel and went to ruin. That which the apostle Paul preached concerning the assembly of God, and of which the Lord spoke in Matthew 13 and 16 — the assembly as a responsible testimony for God in the earth — shares the same fate. We would not expect it to be otherwise when in man's hands.

Is it not, then, a mark of exceeding love and grace in the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, that the assembly of God, as responsible testimony in the world, ends not with the crack of doom or with fire coming down from heaven upon all the unfaithfulness and darkness of Christendom, but instead with these very words? For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout. The Lord comes to

gather his own to himself. That is how the assembly's testimony ends.

## **With a Shout: An Assembling Shout**

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The Greek word translated shout in verse 16 occurs only once in all the New Testament. It is a unique word — not the ordinary words for shouting or crying out or speaking with a loud voice, of which the New Testament has many. It is a cognate of the Greek word for command. Cognate means spelled very similarly, related in derivation, so that one word brings the other to mind.

J.N. Darby, recognizing that it was not merely a shout — for any of the ordinary words could have served if that were all — translated it as an assembling shout. He appears to have looked at the result of the shout and reasoned backward: what kind of shout produces this result? The result is the gathering of all the redeemed to the person of the Lord Jesus. Therefore it is an assembling shout. Not a shout of grief, of anguish, of triumph, or of joy as such — though all of those things are present — but a shout that accomplishes something. What it accomplishes is the gathering together of the saints around the Lord Jesus on the day when his assembly is taken home to glory.

The Lord Jesus has been gathering his saints around himself all through the time since his rejection. The assembly began on the day of Pentecost by the sending down of the Holy Spirit. It will end at the rapture by this assembling shout. The last act of the assembly's existence in the world will be characterized by exactly what has characterized it throughout — the gathering of his own around himself. Not something different; the same thing brought to its final completion.

## **With the Voice of the Archangel: The Obedience of the Angels**

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The Lord does not come with the voice of the Lord. He comes with the voice of the archangel. There is a reason for that. If he had come with the voice of the Lord, the response of Christendom would have been like its response to his word

throughout this age: Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say? The professing church has been loved with great love and has responded poorly. When the Lord speaks to Christians, the obedience is slow, partial, reluctant.

But when the archangel speaks, every angel obeys instantly, completely, without exception. There are no angels that drag their feet. There are no angels that hide in a corner. There are no fallen angels that were once unfallen, or unfallen angels that were once fallen — the angels do not have the kind of inner conflict that men have. When the archangel speaks, all the angels obey. And that is how it will be when the Lord comes. The redeemed ones who are buried in the things of this present evil world, thinking that the affairs of this life are so important, not a single one will disobey. Not one will say, I am too busy. The Lord will come with the archangel's voice, and the assembling will be complete and instant.

### **With the Trump of God: An Assembling Trumpet**

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Nehemiah 4:19–20 gives a useful parallel. Nehemiah was building the wall around Jerusalem and could not man every section at once. His solution was a trumpet: in whatever place ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us. Our God shall fight for us. It was an assembling trumpet — when it blew, all the workers converged on the point of need. The reference to the last trump in 1 Corinthians 15 connects with the Roman military practice of three trumpet calls at daybreak, the third of which was the signal to move out.

If the shout is an assembling shout, it is not far off to understand the trumpet as an assembling trumpet. The walls of separation between good and evil are not fully built. There are not enough to man them. The Lord will come and blow the last assembling trumpet, calling his own to himself, with the message: our God shall fight for us. The assembly's work on earth is over; it is time to meet him in the air.

## **The Lord Himself: That Is the Main Point**

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The most important words in the verse are the first: the Lord himself. Not a representative. Not angels. Not the chariot and horsemen of Israel that were visible when Elijah ascended into heaven. The Lord himself shall descend. We look forward to see himself who died for us. He shall have all the praise.

Ecclesiastes 7:1–3 provides a fitting close: a good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting. The end of the assembly's testimony in the world, the rapture of the saints, is better than the beginning, in the same way that the end of a thing is better than its beginning. Not because it has been expounded better — far be the thought — but because of the intrinsic character of the subject matter itself.

And the precious ointment that encourages and soothes the soul through all the ruin and the decay and the fewness of faithful workmen is a good name. It is the name of Jesus. He is going to descend from heaven himself, with that assembling shout, with the archangel's voice, with the assembling trumpet. And it is himself. And he bears that precious name. Like a precious ointment, that name encourages the heart to be found waiting and watching for his coming.

*The Lord himself shall descend from heaven... and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*