

“The Trumpet Call of God” 1 Thessalonian 4:16

Some of you may have noticed on your calendars that this Tuesday there is a holiday called Rosh Hashana. Sounds Jewish, right? If that is what you thought, you would be correct. I want to tell you a little about this holiday and what it might mean for us as Christians.

So before I tell you more about Rosh Hashana, let me read to you some scripture verses from our New Testaments.

The first passage I want to read to you is from 1 Corinthians 15:50-52:

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 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 second passage of scripture I want to read is from 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18:

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. 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. 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. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Both of these passages point us to the second coming of Jesus. Both are words of hope and encouragement to Christians who were facing all kinds of trials and troubles. The Corinthians were having a hard time keeping their focus on Jesus, and they were a divided church. They were forming different camps: those who followed Apollo, those who followed Peter, those who followed Paul. They were as mixed up and confused as the world around them.

The Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells them to keep their focus. They are not to live like the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. They are to live as a holy people, loving, forgiving, kind, generous, patient and even joyful not because they are trying hard to do these things, but because the Spirit of God within them is producing this fruit within their lives.

Paul points out that those who live for this world, the flesh, will not inherit the kingdom of God. Those who live by the Spirit have a glorious future ahead of them. For some day Jesus will return, and take them to be with him forever in heaven. Death will not frustrate God’s plans, for the dead will be raised back to life in the twinkle of an eye. And what will be the sign that this resurrection is taking place?

The trumpet call of God!

In the second passage the Apostle is dealing with the disappointment and confusion that was among the early Christians because Jesus had not come back yet. Members were dying. Some

from persecution. Some for sickness. Some from old age, but Christians were dying. Would they miss out on the promised home in heaven?

The Apostle assures the Thessalonian Christians that death does not get the last word. God is going to raise those believers who have “fallen asleep” or died, and then they will join the living as they rise from the earth to meet Jesus in the air. Jesus Himself will come from heaven so that he can personally meet and welcome all those who have, through the centuries, put their trust in him.

To the martyrs burned at the stake, or fed to the lions he will give a resurrection body and they will meet him in the air. The Christians who died caring for those infected with plagues and disease through the ages will be given an indestructible body and meet him in the air. Those children who died far too young, those believers who endured terrible diseases, the faithful who died because of disasters and accidents will be raised up and given a new body so they too can meet the Lord in the air.

This wonderful event will be ushered in by the call of the archangel and the trumpet call of God.

Paul is not talking here about timelines and dates for the return of Christ. Paul knew, as all believers know, that “no man knows the day or the hour” of Christ’s return. He is simply encouraging the early Christians not to give up hope, to stay true to Christ no matter what they face, for Jesus certainly will come again and he will come to take them home.

You and I know this is the glorious hope that we have in Jesus. Not only are we saved from sin by faith in the sacrifice Jesus made for us, but we are granted eternal life in Him. You and I should live every day with the certain hope of Jesus return– not a “wish so” kind of hope, but “something we look forward to” kind of hope.

Knowing that Jesus will come again, we will live differently than those who do not have this hope. We will live for Jesus no matter what the cost, knowing that our days on earth are short. Those poor Christians in Afghanistan, who are losing everything to the Taliban, maybe even their lives, will hold fast to their faith because they are certain of the resurrection and the eternal life Jesus has promised them.

So what has this to do with Rosh Hashana?

Rosh Hashana has another name, an English name that you may have heard of. It is the Feast of Trumpets. Like all the major feasts of Israel, this feast was instituted by God himself. In Leviticus 23:23-25 we read:

The Lord said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of sabbath rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts.

The seventh month, or Tishri as the Jews call it, is determined by the cycle of the moon. This means it can be on different days in different years. This year it is September 7th, last year it was September 19th and next year it is September 27th.

More importantly, it takes place at the time of the second harvest in Judea. It could be a time of feasting and celebrating, like our Thanksgiving, but instead it is a time to prepare for the next feast, the Day of Atonement, which comes 10 days later. So the Feast of Trumpets is characterized by repentance of sin, and getting ready to enter the presence of God.

What a way to start a New Year – seeking God in repentance and faith. You see, the Feast of trumpets is also the Jewish New Year, the beginning of the next cycle of feasts. It is a time of new beginnings, starting afresh. New life has begun!

On this day a trumpet is sounded, often the shofar, the horn of a ram made into a trumpet. It was a call to God's people to gather, to come together in the presence of God.

Remember when Moses led the people out of Egypt towards the Promised Land? God led them to the base of Mount Sinai and there Moses was called to ascend the mountain and receive the law of God. It was then that Moses received the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone.

In Exodus 19:13 we read that the people were to stay away from the mountain, and anyone who approached it was to be shot with an arrow or killed with stones. But when the trumpet was sounded, the shofar, then the people were to come up to the mountain where God was.

The trumpet call was a call to draw near to God... sound familiar?

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. 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.

The trumpet was also sounded to warn the people that the day of the Lord, the day of God's judgement, was near.

In the book of Joel, one of the shorter prophetic books in the Old Testament, Israel is warned about a plague of locusts that will come and destroy the land as a punishment from God. Listen to what the prophet says in Joel 2:1:

**Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill.
Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming.
It is close at hand—**

God would use the trumpet call to announce to the people that God's judgement is at hand. When Jesus returns he will not only come to take his followers to their heavenly home, but he also comes to bring judgement on Satan, sin and all who lived with their hearts turned against God.

It is interesting to note that all seven of the major Jewish feasts point us to Jesus.

1. Passover – reminds us of the blood of the sacrificial lamb painted on the doorposts of the homes of the Israelites so the angel of death would pass over them before the Exodus. Jesus was the sacrificial lamb whose blood applied to our lives spares us from spiritual death as well.

2. Unleavened bread – reminds the Israelites that when they fled Egypt they took unleavened bread, bread without yeast. The yeast represented the sin of the people, but they were to be a holy people. Jesus, that bread that came down from heaven, is the one who saves us from sin so we can be a holy people.

3. Firstfruits – a celebration of the first grains and fruits to appear at harvest, celebrating the promise that there would be much more to follow. Jesus is referred to as the first fruit of those resurrected from the dead with a promise that many more would follow – that would be us!

4. Feast of Weeks or Pentecost – this was the celebration of the first harvest. This was the day God chose to establish his church through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and a great harvest of souls followed.

5. Feast of Trumpets – this was to announce the New Year, and a Sabbath rest. It points to the day Jesus will sound the trumpet of his return and call his bride – the church – away to the marriage feast of the Lamb. As the book of Hebrews says, we will enter his rest.

6. Day of Atonement – when the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies with the blood of a lamb to atone for the sins of the people. The book of Hebrews says that we have a great High Priest who has entered the most holy place with his own blood so that sins could be dealt with once and for all. That High priest is Jesus.

7. Feast of Tabernacles – to commemorate the fact that God was with the Israelites throughout their wilderness wanderings, caring for them and providing for them. Jesus promised that he would be with his followers forever, even to the end of the age. He is Immanuel, God with us, and he sent the Holy Spirit so that He may be with us always.

God continually used the Jewish feasts to point us to Jesus, and each feast pointed to an important aspect of what Jesus did to bring salvation to us. Each feast has been fulfilled by the ministry of Jesus, all except one. We still wait for the trumpet call of God to announce that Jesus is here once again.

The feast of trumpets was the celebration of the New Year, but also of the second harvest. Pentecost celebrated the first harvest, and the Feast of Trumpets the second harvest. Could the second harvest be the gathering of God's people to their eternal home?

In two days the Feast of Trumpets will begin. Wouldn't it be wonderful if this was the year that, when the Jews blew the shofar to announce the Feast of Trumpets, the trumpet call of God would also be sounded?

We do not know the day or the hour, or even if God's trumpet call will be on the Feast of Trumpets, but what if... what if the trumpet call of God sounded this Tuesday.

Are you ready? What would you do from now until Tuesday if you knew this was the day the trumpet of the Lord would sound? We are to live every day in readiness for that trumpet call, and to help as many people as possible to be ready as well. Does this describe us? You?

Pray with me that we will be joyfully looking for Jesus' coming, and we will be ready...