Who is Jesus going to call when He comes back?

<u>1 Thessalonians 4:15-18</u>

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

If you are a Christian that is a lovely thought isn't it? It certainly is… it means rest from the struggles of this world… rest from our labors. It means no more sickness or sadness or growing old… no more death. It means that we get to see our heavenly homes and occupy them and serve the Lord forever in His house… a house not made with hands. Yes, that is a lovely thought… and is worth more than anything to those of us who love God. But this can be a frightening thought for those who do not know God… and have never sought to do His will.

Our subject for today is one that has captivated believers for the centuries ever since the ascension of Christ to the heavens… where He is now seated at the right hand of God. We are going to deal with the second coming of Jesus Christ our Lord and King, but we are not going to speculate on when that will happen… because no one knows that. We are not going to go into detail about what is going to transpire when Christ reappears as far as the process goes… what will happen first, second and so on… our opening text has explained that some degree any way.

We are going to talk about those Christ is going to take home with him… We are going to explore the question, "Who is Jesus going to call to come with Him to eternal life?" Who are the people that are going to receive the promises that God has given to us through His word? What are they like… what traits do they have? We know that Christ is going to call people… all of the people of earth who have ever lived… to be judged. But what does this mean and what will be the outcome of this judgment… the judgment of Christ… the final judgment for everyone?

It is my fervent hope that with this message, any questions you have about who Christ is going to claim, as His people, will be put to rest. I have six points to cover that should answer this question for us all… and I will go into as much depth as our time permits. Let's begin now to answer the questions we have posed…

Jesus is only going to call those who have the Love of God in them…

<u>1 John 5:3</u>… "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome."

How do we show that we have the love of God in us? How do we show the love of God… to the world around us? As Christians we are supposed to be doing these things… it is required of us. As we see from the verse that we just read in **1 John,** the first and foremost way of doing this is to keep His word… all of the other ways of having and showing the love of God in our lives flow from this central thought… from this central deed… for if we do not keep His commandments… then how much do we really love Him? We must know God's word first… in order to do this… in order to know what His commands are. God requires this of us, and if you think about it… that is only logical.

After we come to know what God's word says to us, then we must set about keeping it with all our hearts… and by that I mean we need to do what it says. The apostle James tells us this in **James 1:21-25**…

"**Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."**

We need to receive with meekness the implanted word. James gives us an inspired command to know God's word… right here. If we know God's word and then we do what it says… then all of the other things that God is looking for from us… as His children… will flow from this… and the apostle James tells us that we will be blessed in what we do. So in order to show the love of God in our lives we must know His commands and we must keep them.

Next we must show the love of God in our lives by loving our fellow man… and wanting only what is his good as defined by God. Christ tells us in the gospel of Mark what the greatest commandments are… in this context Christ is asked what they are… and He responds to the question like this in **Mark 12:29-31**…

" Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

We see from this that loving God is the first commandment and that all else flows from this… our loving of God. The second command given here is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This type of love is not a warm fuzzy, huggy, feeling although there is nothing wrong with that. *Agape* love, which is Greek term for the type of love that Christ speaks of when He talks about how we must love our fellow man, is intellectual… it thinks about doing what is good for others, just as we want to have only good done to ourselves. Someone may be absolutely offensive to your five senses… but you must get past your feelings and your senses and you must think about them as God sees them… as another one of the souls that He has put on the earth… a soul that He wants to come back to Him. Jesus told us in **Luke 19:10** that He came to earth to "**seek and save that which was lost**"… and what He meant by that was… He wants to offer salvation to all of the souls that God has ever given a human physical existence to… everyone of them… no matter who or what they are. Christ accomplishes this through the work of the church. We are His body on earth…We must do this… it is for their good and ours. We must do this because our Maker demands it of us.

So do we show the love of God to our fellow man by loving them as much as we love ourselves and only desiring their good? Do we show the love of God in our lives by our knowing His commands and submitting ourselves in obedience to them… as a servant does to an all-powerful master… because if you have put on Jesus Christ in baptism… He is your Lord and Master and you are His possession… have you thought about it like that lately? We are commanded in the scriptures many times to imitate Christ… well Christ submitted himself to the will of God and went to the cross for us… shouldn't we submit to God's commands as He did? We will do this… if we are truly His.

God expects us to live our lives knowing that we are valuable to Him… that is why Christ said that we are to love others **as we love ourselves**. Do you love yourself… do you really recognize the value that God places on you? God expects us to learn the value that He places on us and

then to live our lives realizing and recognizing that value everyday… We are valuable to Him… and this value has to be evidenced by the way we conduct ourselves… every minute of every day.

Let me make a point here. All of us, at times, just gloss over the fact that Jesus is the Son of God and died for our sins…. We don't really think about it…every day the way that we should. I want to make you take that thought out of your minds and play with it for a moment… examine it… how many people on this earth… that you know… could submit their child to death for someone else. Maybe people could submit themselves if they loved someone else enough… but not their children… especially not in the way that Jesus died. But let's just say that someone could do this…How many of them then could sit and watch it happen? Every minute of it…? God was watching it… He saw everything… as his precious Son… the Son in whom He "**was well pleased"**… was mocked, beaten, whipped, spit upon, and then crucified until death. How many of us could do that?

We need to realize the value that God places on us because of the very nature of this sacrifice… God purchased us back from bondage to sin with His only begotten Son's blood. How many people realize the value that God places on us? If we don't then we are missing the point…

How many people love God so much **because** He gave that sacrifice for us… How many people love God so much that they would spend their lives in complete obedience to Him… want to know His word like the back of their hand… do anything they can to please Him because of that sacrifice. **Hear this brethren**: only those who love God that much… and who want to serve Him with every ounce of their strength, with every thought in their minds…. Only those who want to serve God like that… are going to go to heaven. That is having the love of God… and those are the people that Jesus is going to call.

Jesus is only going to call those who made their lives living sacrifices…

Romans 12:1… "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

Paul talks here in this passage from Romans about presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to God. Let me uncover some of the context here for our discussion. Under the old covenant, or the Law of Moses, sacrifice to God was required … the sacrifice of animals and their blood… these sacrifices were performed by the Levities… the priests of God. Under the new covenant everyone who has obeyed the gospel and become a Christian is considered a priest in God's eyes… we are told this fact in **1 Peter 2:5** which says…

"you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."…

and again in **verse 9** which reads…

" But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light…"

Christians are now considered priests under the new covenant, or Law of Christ. Paul tells us God still requires sacrifice by His priests… but now those sacrifices come through the submission of our lives to God… our lives being devoted to serving God and our obedience to God are the **"living sacrifices"** Paul talked about here. We are told in **Romans 6** that as Christians we are to crucify the old man of sin that characterized our past lives, and to put on the new man in Christ.

This is the concept of Christian discipleship… it is both a concept to be studied and understood

and it is also a command given by the Lord. It is outlined by Christ in **Luke 14:25-33**… and it is also conveyed to us in **<u>John 12:25</u>** where Christ says… **"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."** We must sacrifice our lives upon the altar of service to God in order to be pleasing to Him… and this is the key to understanding **Romans 12:1** and the idea of presenting our bodies as a "**living sacrifice**" to God. We must seek to do God's will in all that we do… instead of our own.

A qualifier in **Romans 12:1** tells us also that in order for it to be pleasing, the sacrifice must be holy… again we are given another command. Christians are called to holiness as we see in **<u>Hebrews 12:14</u>** … we are to **"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord."** We will not see God without holiness characterizing our daily lives.

Those who take up their crosses daily… and follow in the footsteps of Christ… those who die to their selfish old lives of sin and live new lives that are obedient, pleasing and acceptable… those are the people that God views as living and holy sacrifices. Anyone who does not do this will not be acceptable to the Lord. By the way… notice that Paul ends the passage in **Romans 12:1** with the statement… "**which is your reasonable service."** It is certainly our reasonable service to do this for the Lord… to become living sacrifices to please Him… in view of the sacrifice that He made for us… and Jesus is only going to call those who do this… to come home with Him.

Jesus is only going to call those who bring every thought into captivity for Him…

<u>2 Corinthians 10:4-5</u>… "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ…"

There is spiritual warfare going on all around us… every day. What are the weapons that Satan uses against us as God's children? Sin starts as thought does it not? Thoughts… and temptations that appear as thoughts in our heads… are effective weapons indeed. What is the only way to combat these temptations… these weapons against us? We need to bring to bear in our minds the spiritual weapons that we possess… we must check our arsenal by the hour for the weapons of prayer, and steadfast faith.

But that is not all… our heads must be filled with the word of God… and we must think godly thoughts. What is the best way to do this? We must bring our minds into subjection to God and our Lord Jesus Christ through assimilating the scriptures there. And in doing this we may fight the good fight by taking our thoughts… every one of them prisoner for Christ… literally every thought in our heads. This sounds hard to do, and it is… you have to work at it. You have to study and meditate on the scriptures in order to let the Holy Spirit have the dominion over your mind that He needs to have to help you battle against the Satan and temptations effectively.

We have these words from the Psalmist which state in **<u>Psalms 119:9-11</u>**… **"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!**

The scriptures are vital to learning what God expects of us… that we may cleanse our way in this life and not sin against Him. We are told in **2 Timothy 3:16** that the scriptures discipline us as God's children… they teach us. They tell us when we are right and when we are wrong. We cannot know that… without them being in our heads and living by them. It is not an option if you want to find acceptance as a Christian before the Lord… you cannot learn how to be a Christian if you do not study God's word daily. A soldier needs to know his weapons of war, and so a Christian needs to know the scriptures to take all thoughts captive for Christ.

Now I can just hear people saying… "well I try… but I just don't have the time". Make the time… God requires it of you. Change your life so that you have the time. Part of being a Christian is knowing how to "redeem the time"… time management… God has only given us so long to live on this earth. You MUST do this. Let me ask you this: would you tell the State of Texas that your child does not have the time to go to school… knowing that the law requires it? No you would not… you could go to jail for that. Would you tell your employer that you don't have the time to study the manuals required to do your job properly? No… you would not. No one in their right mind would say that to their boss if they want to keep working there. Do you realize the difference between God and the State of Texas or an employer?

God makes this distinction clear to us in **Malachi 1:6** where He says through the prophet**… "A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the Lord of hosts To you priests who despise My name..."** As Christians our reverence and honor for God should be far over and above the honor we do to the State and our employer… and this should drive us to study and know the scriptures as though our lives depend on it… because they do. No one wants to stand before the Judgment seat on the last day and tell the Lord that they did not have the time to study the scriptures… the consequences of making a statement like that would be too frightening to even think about.

Paul tells us in **Philippians 4:8… "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things."** Paul is telling us this because we need to have our minds filled up completely with godly things in order to not give the devil a foothold in our lives. And so I ask you… what are the first things that you can think of that are true, noble, just, pure, and lovely? Hopefully, God's word comes to your mind as you answer that. We must bring our minds and thoughts into subjection for Christ… it is the only way to fight the battle every day and obtain victory in Christ. Jesus will only call those who have made it a practice in their lives to do this.

Jesus is only going to call those who are faithful until death…

Revelation 2:10… "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Faithfulness… that is what it is all about, isn't it? Let's look at the issue of faithfulness through God's eyes for a few moments. There are those that will be found to be faithful all of their lives, and some that will become faithful right at the end of their lives. There are those that will be faithful for a time and then fall away, and there are those who will never be so. Everyone will fall into one of these groups, and we can know from our Lord's word to us in **Matthew 7:13-14** that few will be found in the "**faithful until death**" category… as opposed to the many that will be found in the unfaithful category.

The Lord tells us to "**be faithful until death"** in the passage we just read. How many of us know when we will die? We don't know when anything is going to occur in life frankly… we cannot see what is going to happen thirty seconds from now. Because of this… it is wise to redeem the time given to us by the Lord now… while it is now. Not to put off faithfulness until a later time. Someone may be 30 yrs old… thinking they have a lot of years left and they may not… that is a foolish premise to live by… Someone may be 70 years old and have 20 years left to live or they may die before their 71st birthday. We simply don't know… only the Lord knows how much time we have to get things right in our lives with him.

We are told this by the writer of Hebrews in **Hebrews 3:13-15… "… but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of**

sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

This exhortation to faithfulness is directed to Christians who were struggling with the temptations of going back to the Law of Moses and abandoning the Law of Christ, but it could just as well be directed to any Christian who is tempted to fall away for whatever reason. In both instances it speaks to us telling us that if things are not right with the Lord in our lives… then address it now, don't wait. Faithfulness to the Lord until death is what is required of us and since we do not have the ability to predict the future… the wise course is to take care of it now.

During the recent floods in Houston, many people told me the day before they occurred… what they were going to do for the weekend. They all thought they were going to do this or that… and it didn't happen. 17 of the people who sat around that Friday thinking about what they were going to do… didn't live to see the next day dawn. We truly need to wake up to the reality that we do not have control over things. Our whole lives are like that… we live at the mercy of God. James tells us in **James 4:14**… **"…whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."** According to heavenly wisdom our lives are vapor… we are less than a bump in time as far as our lives are concerned and we should not take that lightly… although many do.

We must be faithful to the Lord in all that we do, at all times, no matter what happens or what the consequences are to us… Christ was speaking to those who were being persecuted in the verse from Revelation that we read… and He made it clear that only those that are found to be faithful until death… those that persevere in their faith to the end… will be those He takes home to heaven.

Jesus is only going to call those who confess and acknowledge Him…

Matthew 10:32-33… "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."

When Christ returns He is going to call His people to Him… those that were not ashamed to be marked in the world as His disciples. Those that were ashamed of Him… so as not to acknowledge Him while they were alive… will have to acknowledge Him on the last day… but by then it will be too late for them. Those that did acknowledge Him will have their names found in the Lamb's Book of Life and will inhabit heaven. That sounds rather simple… and it truly is, but I want to take this a step beyond those rather obvious points for a moment.

In **Acts 11:26** we are told**… "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."** Now this at the time… this was a term of derision… not a badge of honor. In fact one of the worst things that those outside the church could call you was a "Christian". It was not complimentary. Yet those who were "in Christ" wore the name as a badge of honor proudly… because they acknowledged their Savior by wearing this name.

It seems that in modern times we have much the same thing going on…many people still don't want to be called "Christians". There are those in the world that would not be caught dead wearing that name… no pun intended. And then there are those that feel that the name Christian is just not good enough for them. They have to be called by a denominational designation. They don't want to be called Christians either… even though they would refer to themselves as a part of what the world terms as Christendom… or those that believe in Christ. When you hear them speak though… you hear them refer to themselves as members of the denomination they worship with… the people representing the Catholic church refer to themselves as Catholics, not Christians.

I recently saw an interview with a member of the Southern Baptist Convention and he kept referring to himself as a Baptist, not a Christian… over and over again. In fact he did not acknowledge the Lord's name in any way during this nationally broadcast interview. This was an opportunity for this man to spread the name of Christ… and it was lost. When this man referred to his fellow members… he called them Baptists, and said, "good Baptists will do this", or "good Baptists will embrace that" when talking about the doctrinal directions for their group. The name of Christ was absent from his speech entirely. So was he wearing the badge of Christ proudly or the badge of a Baptist? If you asked an apostle or a first century Christian that question… I think it is safe to say that they would affirm his wearing the latter title. In fact they would not even know what any other titles or labels mean… those of the modern denominational world… because those designations are not found in the scriptures anywhere.

Denominationalism and the damage that it does is widespread in today's world. It takes away from the name of Christ… and it takes attention away from the cause of pure New Testament Christianity…which is the cause of Christ. There were no divisions like this under the apostles as they spread the gospel. In fact they preached strenuously against this very thing… Paul cried out loudly against this type of thing in **1 Corinthians** because it was wrong and it detracted from the Lord. These divisions we see now… came centuries later and are man-made in origin. As Christians we should and need to seek to save people from it… because those caught up in it… are lost.

Make no mistake; Christ will claim those who proudly wear His name… those who are happy with simply the designation Christian… with nothing else attached according to the teachings of the New Testament. In **Isaiah 62:2** through the prophetic utterance of Isaiah about the establishment of the church, the scriptures tell us… **"The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name."** Isaiah is announcing to everyone for the Lord that there will be a new name for the Lord's followers upon the establishment of the church… And then the scriptures tell us once again in **Acts 11:26**… **"they were first called Christians at Antioch"** These things need to be heeded by everyone because the Holy Spirit is telling us these things for a reason… Jesus will not call those who do not acknowledge Him to the world… He will not call anyone that does not wear His name only… if you attach another name to the designation of "Christian"… then you are detracting from the Lord's glory through His church… and the Lord makes it clear to us in scripture that He will not share His glory with anyone. When Christ returns… He will only call Christians. He will claim those who are… His people… wearing His name… and take them home with Him to be in heaven.

Jesus is only going to call those who are of His church…

Matthew 16:18… "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

I want us all to notice here that Christ… when talking about the church… makes it plain that it is His church… it belongs to no one else. His blood bought it… He purchased it with His death on the cross at Golgotha. When one realizes that fact… it is no wonder that He makes it plain… that it is His… and His alone. There is none of the modern religious world's "your church, my church concept" in the eyes of Christ… there is only "the church"… His church. And it belongs to no one else.

The modern world does not understand the meaning of the word "church". If they did… they would rethink many of their religious views. People think of a church as being a building with four walls… or as being one of the denominational organizations they see around them in the world. They don't understand the simplicity of the word "church" as it is meant in the original Greek text… it simply means "those who are called out of the world to be separate and apart." The church is made up of the sanctified… the chosen… those who are "in Christ". The church is made up of those that follow the pattern for salvation given to us in the New Testament… they

are the chosen… because they choose God and His ways… not the ways of the world. They are separate… because they set themselves apart from the ways of the world and choose to be Disciples of Christ instead. They are sanctified… because they have been washed clean in baptism… by the blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed for the remission of sins… and they are made holy… when they do this… in God's eyes. And they are added to the church of Christ when they do this… and God does the adding… that is how one becomes a member of the church that wears the name of Christ.

All of that… is what Christ means by the term "my church" when He references it… and that is who He will call when He returns… those who have followed the New Testament pattern that He gave us… as given to Him by God the Father. Christ will not call the churches that are of man-made origin such as the denominations we see around us today… He will only call the church that is of the divine plan… as set forth by God in scripture. Christ will call only those… who have been "called out"… and that is the "church"… that He will take with Him to heaven.

So there we have it… the six points that we started out with… are now answered as much as our time has permitted. We now know that Jesus is only going to call:

- Those of us who… have the love of God in us
- Those of us who… give ourselves as living sacrifices to God
- Those of us who …bring all our thoughts into captivity for Christ
- Those of us who… are faithful until death
- Those of us who… confess Him to the world as Lord
- Those of us who… are of His church

It is my prayer… that if any of the thoughts presented this morning… showed us something that needs doing in our lives… that we will take the time to address it this morning…as parts of this message should speak to all of us if we want to be faithful Christians.

Let me close this lesson by saying that in the first century… men did not decide who could join the church… God did that. If you are not a member of the Lord's church… then you need to become one… in order to be saved when Christ returns… and you need to be baptized for the remission of your sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit… so that you can be added to the church. The precedent that we have for this is found in **Acts 2:38.** There we find this statement made to those inquiring about salvation from sin… **"Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit…"** Then in **Acts 2:47** we see this**… "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."** It really is that simple… obey the gospel and God adds you to those who are His Chosen people… those in the church of His dear Son.