

JESUS: The Greatest Life of All

STUDY TWENTY

Watching for Jesus in the Air

1 Corinthians 15:50–57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Titus 2:11–13

At any moment Jesus could come. Isn't that exciting? Every morning, you wonder, "Today, Lord?" Everything will change in His presence. We'll spend forever with Him.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

BIOGRAPHIES inevitably end the same. No matter how world-changing the person's contributions, how noble his or her character, or how engaging his or her personality, the hero dies in the final chapter. The *single* exception, notes Pastor Chuck Swindoll, is Jesus Christ.

The account of the greatest life of all is different. Not only does the subject continue to live, but a significant chapter of His story remains untold. The conclusion has been written in prophecy, but not yet in history.¹

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He promised His followers:

"I will come again and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am" (14:3)

Jesus will return, and this time He won't come as a baby in a manger but as the Mighty One the prophets foretold—"the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30).

So, our final *Searching the Scriptures* study is not an epilogue, looking back on a life well-lived, but a prologue, looking forward to a glorious new beginning when Christ returns. Only one conclusion fits Jesus' biography—"to be continued."



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Open your study of Christ's return praying for the Lord to kindle an even brighter fire of hope in your heart.

Father, the sky could split open at any moment and Your Son return. I believe that's true, but I have questions that only You can answer through Your Word. Guide me in Your truth and fill my soul with anticipation. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The hope of Christ's return has sustained Christians through the darkest times. More than 300 New Testament references to the coming of Christ shine like beacons in the night. Even death can't extinguish our hope because, when He returns, Christ will raise us from the dead.

Two central passages address the destiny of believers who have died and the destiny of those who are alive when Christ returns: *1 Corinthians 15:50–57* and *1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*. The Corinthian passage emphasizes the *transformation* that we can expect, and the Thessalonian passage emphasizes the *order of events*.



Observation: Scriptures that Describe Our Destiny

The early believers wondered what would happen to their bodies when Christ returned. In response, Paul penned answers that the Lord Himself revealed only to him. In these passages, look for the logical sequence of ideas, action words, commands, contrasts, and key words to define in the interpretation phase. Read the verses carefully, lingering over each line.

How Our Bodies Will Change—1 Corinthians 15:50–57

What point did Paul make about earthly bodies and the Kingdom of God in *1 Corinthians 15:50*?



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What mystery, or “wonderful secret,” did Paul reveal in *1 Corinthians 15:51*? Notice the contrast.

How did Paul explain the transformation of our bodies in *15:52–53*? What will happen to the bodies of those who have died and those who are alive when Christ returns? What is the purpose of the transformation?

In order for us to endure through eternity, we must be given imperishable bodies. Isn't that a great thought? You'll never show the marks of age. We'll have bodies that will last forever.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What does the glorification of our bodies signify regarding the end of death's curse, according to *15:54–57*?

In the instant we see our Savior's eyes sparkle, our bodies will be changed. What will our new bodies be like? We'll hold that question for the interpretation section. For now, let's uncover more details about Christ's return in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians.



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The Order of Events When Christ Returns—1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians to address their fear that loved ones who died before Christ's return might miss the coming kingdom. What did Paul say to correct the misunderstanding in *1 Thessalonians 4:13–14*? Whose souls will the Lord bring with Him when He returns?

Who was the source of Paul's information about Christ's return in *4:15*, and what was the promise?

Paul was teaching new information that He received directly from the Lord. Write down the order of events that Paul outlined in *4:16–17*.



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When Christ returns for His bride, His beloved church, millions of believers will have already died. Their bodies will be miraculously brought out of the grave in a glorified state. Those who are alive, the second group, “will be caught up together with them in the clouds” (1 Thessalonians 4:17 NASB). —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What did Paul say you should do with this information, according to *1 Thessalonians 4:18*?

This passage raises our curiosity. You might wonder, *what does it mean to be “caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (4:17)?*



Interpretation: Key Questions to Answer

First, what will our resurrected, glorified bodies be like? John provides a clue to answering this question in *1 John 3:1–2*. What did he say?



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What features of Jesus' resurrected body did He exhibit in [Luke 24:28–43](#)? What do the characteristics of His glorified body imply about our future bodies?

Second, what does it mean to be “caught up”? Survey the explanation of this phrase in your Bible-study resources and write down a few notes about its meaning. You might consult Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* or the online resource, [gotquestions.com](#), in the article, “*What is the rapture of the church?*”

In summary, when Christ returns, “We will all be transformed!” Paul said (1 Corinthians 15:51). Christ will transform first the bodies of deceased believers (whose spirits had already gone to heaven) and then the bodies of living believers. *Finally*, all believers in their glorified bodies will “be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17), the event known as the rapture of the church.

The *transformation* of our earthly bodies into glorified bodies and our *transportation* to “be with the Lord forever” will be instantaneous (1 Thessalonians 4:17). What a comfort to know that death will never again separate us from our loved ones, and we will live with the Lord forever.

Magnificent! You'll see the wonderful people from generations past—your grandparents who prayed for your salvation. Your mother or your dad, whoever in your background had a hand in where you are today. We'll be together forever. Isn't that great?
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: Encouragement for Heavy Hearts

Jesus looked forward to reuniting with His followers like a husband anticipates embracing His bride after a long absence. What encouragement did Jesus give in *John 14:1–3*?

What hope did the angel give to the disciples on the Mount of Olives right after Jesus ascended into heaven, according to *Acts 1:9–11*?

After witnessing Christ's ascension, the disciples tucked the angel's promise into their hearts and returned to their homes full of hope. Soon after, at Pentecost, the church was born when the Holy Spirit came, and Christ's mission to spread the gospel to the world was launched. The early Christians never stopped watching for Jesus in the air . . . and neither should we.



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Application: Actions that Reveal Our Readiness

Jesus urged His followers: “Keep watch! For you don’t know what day your Lord is coming.” (Matthew 24:42). Stay alert! Be prepared! The apostle Paul listed the actions that reveal our readiness.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and in a godly manner in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. (Titus 2:11–13 NASB, emphasis added)

The underlined words in these verses underscore four application questions.

1. *Have you received the salvation God provided through Christ?* If you’re not certain, put your faith in Jesus Christ right now to receive eternal life. Read “[How to Begin a Relationship with God](#)” at [insight.org](#) to learn how to be sure about your destiny in heaven.
2. *Are you resisting an ungodly lifestyle?* Say no to the enemy’s attacks and to temptation so that when Christ appears, you will be ready to welcome Him.
3. *Do you live your life in a sensible manner?* Live as if Christ might come today. Be responsible for what God has given you. Stay involved in Christ’s mission. Share His love with others.
4. *Will you, from now on, keep looking for the blessed hope of Christ’s return?* Remind yourself often of that “wonderful day” when Christ appears, which may be today.

After reflecting on these questions, what truth do you especially want to focus on in your life right now? What takeaway from this study do you want to cling to as you reflect on Jesus’ earthly life and His accomplishment on the cross?



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What would it be like to wake up every morning thinking, “Christ may come today!”? Begin tomorrow morning with that thought and carry it with you through your day while you drive to work, drop off the kids, shop for groceries, do chores, fix dinner, wash the dishes, enjoy a sunset, settle in for the night, and drift asleep.

Christ’s biography didn’t end when He left earth for heaven, and since our lives are united with Him by faith, so are our destinies. Our future and His are . . . to be continued. We have eternity to enjoy His presence!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the promise that Jesus will return to transform my body so I can live with You for eternity. What a comfort to know that the old enemy, death, has lost its power. I need not fear the future because my future is secure with You. “I am coming soon,” Jesus said. Come, Lord Jesus, come! In His name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Jesus: The Greatest Life of All* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 288.

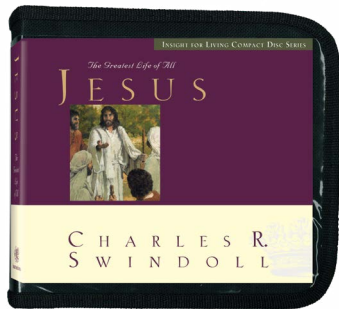


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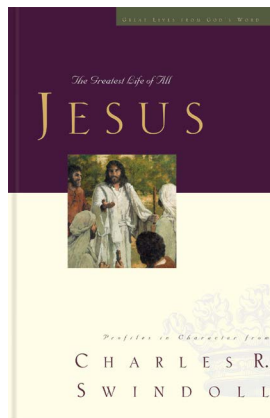
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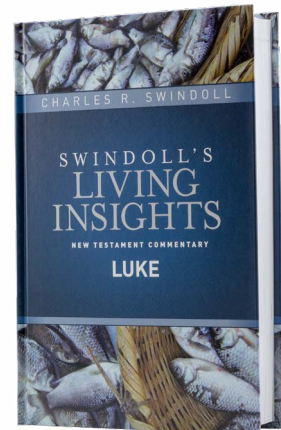
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For the 2023-2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

