

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

The Rapture of the Church

We found 6 amazing principles for the will of God for our lives last week in **1 Thessalonians 4:1-12.**

- #1-Keep growing and keep going
- #2-Sanctification-sexual purity
- #3-There are consequences to sexual immorality
- #4-Love One Another
- #5-Mind you own business!
- #6-Work builds a good reputation!

As we finish up the chapter, Paul continues with his instruction concerning the future of the believer and the rapture of the church. The church (believers in Christ) will be removed from this earth.

As we study the Bible, we must let the scriptures speak concerning these topics. What we think or what we have heard must be verified by the Word of God. We must research these topics biblically and have a biblical perspective.

Concerning the rapture of the church, this topic of scripture is very controversial in the Christian world. Most believe that the church will be raptured.

The controversy about the rapture of the church is when this event will happen. This controversy has 3 specific views.

1. Will the rapture of the church happen before the tribulation?
 - a. A term known as **Pre-Trib** or Pre-Tribulation
2. Will the rapture happen in the middle of the tribulation?
 - a. A term known as **Mid-Trib** or Mid-Tribulation
3. Will the rapture happen at the end of the tribulation?
 - a. A term known as **Post-Trib** or Post Tribulation

The tribulation period is a time of 7 years. 3 ½ years will seem to be a time when peace and world governments will come together and unite. Then the antichrist will reveal himself for what he truly is. Demanding worship from the world and then the final 3 ½ years the earth will endure the wrath of God's judgment upon the earth.

So let's look at this event of the rapture and as we go, hopefully will become clear and we will determine the when. Or you may be more confused after we are finished.

Read **1 Thessalonians 4:13-19**

1 Thessalonians 4:13

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

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What happens to believers when they die? Paul writes to us and tells us that we should **not be ignorant** about this topic.

Now Paul makes this statement **do not be ignorant** in 4 of his letters to the churches. Yet these are areas of our Christian faith that people are often the most ignorant about.

1. Don't be ignorant about God's plan for Israel.
Romans 11:25
2. Don't be ignorant about spiritual gifts.
1 Corinthians 12:1
3. Don't be ignorant about suffering and trials in the Christian life.
2 Corinthians 1:8
4. Don't be ignorant about the rapture and the second coming of Jesus.
1 Thessalonians 4:13

Now Paul addresses **those who have fallen asleep**
Believers in Jesus that have died or **have fallen asleep**.

Why would people be concerned about this?
What was the thinking of the people of this time?

Sleep was a way that the ancient world used to describe death. This is not some secret teaching of "soul sleep" that dead believers are in some kind of suspended animation. This is not what Paul is teaching.

2 Corinthians 5:8
We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Paul also shared with the church in Philippi

Philippians 1:21-23
For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

If there was some kind of holding area for the believer, Paul would have taught this and other scripture would speak clearly of it.

When Jesus died on the cross, the payment was made for all sin before and after the cross. But something interesting happened for the OT saints.

Matthew 27:52-53
and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

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Vs 13-lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

There is nothing to be sorrowful about.
When a believer in Christ dies, they are with Jesus.

Missy and I have discussed what we would do if the other passes away.
She thinks she will go first, I tell her statistically, I will.
She tells me that the Lord loves her too much to leave her here without me.
But anyway. The one thing we do agree on, is that which ever happens, we will have a wonderful celebration of life. I don't want her to be sad if I die, I will be with Jesus!

As believers in Christ, when you get face to face with our Lord and Savior, you will not be thinking about all the nonsense of this world.
It will be the most amazing experience ever!

Yet there is an extreme sadness for those ***who have no hope.***

If you have ever been to a funeral of a friend or family member that **has not** given their heart to the Lord. It is so difficult. There is no hope for that person!
They are eternally damned to a place of pain and suffering, separated from God.

Jesus tells us of a rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus.
It is very interesting that of all the parables or stories Jesus shares, this one has a man specifically named.

Read ***Luke 16:19-31***

Listen, there will be no partying with your buddies in hell.
Billy Joel in his song "Only the Good Die Young" says "*I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints, the sinners are much more fun*"
This could be no further from the truth. There is no hope for the lost after death.

But there is something for believers, we have something to look forward too!

1 Thessalonians 4:14

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

Jesus has risen from the dead and believers that have died, will rise again as well.
This promise is for us! Jesus rose from the grave and so will we.

The Thessalonians must have had some concern about the believers that have died that they would miss the coming of Christ for His church.
Paul assures them that they will not be left out.

1 Thessalonians 4:15

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.

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Paul is telling us that this teaching is ***by the word of the Lord.***

So did Jesus teach this and it wasn't recorded?
Was this a divine revelation to Paul? We do not know.
But Paul tells us it came from the Lord and not from himself.

No one is at a disadvantage. Believers that are alive and believers that have died, none will miss out on this amazing event.

Paul is also saying this in present tense, ***we who are alive and remain.***
His teaching and conviction is that Jesus could return at any moment.
His hope and motivation was to do all that he could before Jesus returned and this motivation should be the same for us!

Are we living as if Christ would return today?

Later Paul's teaching is future tense.

2 Corinthians 4:14
knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.

Paul is now thinking he might not make it, so he will be ***raised up.***
Either way, believers in Jesus will participate in this event.

At this time, Christians who had previously died will have their bodies resurrected and they will be united with their spirits in heaven.
Our bodies will be changed ***from corruptible to incorruptible-***

1 Corinthians 15:52-53
in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

And now Paul tells us about the event that believers in Christ, dead or alive will participate in!

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17
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.

There are 5 points from these 2 verses, let's review in order.

1. Jesus Himself will descend from heaven
 - a. With a shout, with the voice of an archangel
 - b. With the trumpet of God

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2. The dead in Christ will rise
3. Believers who are alive are caught up
4. We meet together in the clouds and we meet the Lord in the air
5. We are with Jesus forever

The first point:

1. Jesus Himself will ***descend from heaven***
 - a. ***With a shout, with the voice of an archangel***
 - b. With ***the trumpet of God***

Jesus is descending from heaven. This is self-explanatory.

Jesus will not send an angel, David or anyone else. Jesus will come Himself.

a. With a shout-

Will Jesus shout? Will someone shout? Will an archangel shout?

There are a few explanations that people have come up with through the years.

Let's look at a few of them:

- 1) Some teach that Jesus will shout Himself.

John 5:25

"Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live."

- 2) Others teach that this is Michael the Archangel.

From ***Daniel 12, Jude 9***

Either of these may be the case, I'm not sure it really matters.

b. the trumpet of God

Turn to ***1 Corinthians 15:51-52***

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

These are the same trumpets. How do we know?

Because of the description of what is happening at the time they are heard.

For some, this trumpet is the 7th trumpet referred to in ***Revelation 11***.

Revelation 11:14-15

"The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly. Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

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When this 7th trumpet sounds in **Revelation 11**, the final wrath of God is being poured out on the earth.

Prior to this trumpet, 6 others have been sounded with devastating results to the world.

IF you were to take this view you would be in the *Mid-Tribulation* Rapture camp. *Post-Trib* camp resides that at the Battle of Armageddon, the rapture will take place.

I personally believe that these are not the same trumpets.

The description in **1 Thessalonians 4** and **2 Corinthians 15** describe the same event.

Jesus coming FOR His saints and Jesus comes in the CLOUDS.

Jesus refers to the **Revelation 11** trumpet in **Matthew 24**.

Matthew 24:29-31

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

This trumpet in **Matthew 24** is different than the trumpet of **1 Thessalonians 4**.

- **Different subjects:** **Matthew** refers to Jewish believers during the great tribulation; **Thessalonians** refers to the church.
- **Different circumstances:** **Matthew** refers to a gathering of the elect scattered over the earth, with no mention of resurrection; **Thessalonians** refers to the raising of the believing dead.
- **Different results:** **Matthew** refers to living believers gathered from all over the earth at the command of their Lord who has returned to earth in open glory; **Thessalonians** refers to the uniting of the raised dead with the living believers to meet the Lord in the air.

Order of events so far:

1. Jesus Himself will **descend from heaven**
 - a. **With a shout, with the voice of an archangel**
 - b. With **the trumpet of God**

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1 Thessalonians 4:16b-17a

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

And now from **vs 16b**:

2. The ***dead in Christ will rise***
3. Believers who ***are alive are caught up***
4. We ***meet together in the clouds and meet the Lord in the air***

We can now look at the detail of **vs 16**:

2. The ***dead in Christ will rise***

If you die prior to the rapture of the church, your spirit is with Jesus in heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:8

We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

So then spirit will be reunited with the body as the corruptible becomes incorruptible.

1 Corinthians 15:53

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

3. Believers who ***are alive are caught up***

The dead in Christ will rise up and ***those who are alive will be caught up.***

Caught up here is the Greek word *harpazō* -meaning to be seize, to be carried off by force, snatched away.

The Latin Vulgate translated this word to *rapturus* where we get the word *rapture*.

So when someone tells you that the word rapture is not in the bible, they are correct. It is not.

So we are snatched away, carried off by force, caught up.
Sounds crazy right?

Any crazier than a donkey talking? A guy swallowed by a fish?
The virgin birth? There is some crazy stuff in the Bible right?

This is the same word used in **Acts 8:39** when Phillip is snatched up after baptizing the Ethiopian Eunuch.

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Scripture gives examples of this deliverance.

- Enoch **Genesis 5:24**
- Noah and his family saved from the flood. **Genesis 7:23**
- Lot being rescued from Sodom and Gomorrah before destruction.
Genesis 19:29

2 Peter 2:4–9

"For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,"

In much the same way, the rapture of the Church is the deliverance of all true believers PRIOR to the Great Tribulation judgment to come.

This would be the Pre-Tribulation camp.

4. We **meet together in the clouds and meet the Lord in the air**
We will meet Jesus in the air, how awesome is that!

And the last point

5. We are with Jesus forever!

1 Thessalonians 4:17b-18

And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Therefore, comfort one another with these words.

We will be with Jesus forever!

And Paul tells us to comfort one another!

Remember in vs 13, this teaching about Jesus coming to get us is something that we should NOT be ignorant about!

We should be excited!

Encourage and comfort one another because Jesus is coming back for us!

We need to be ready. We need to be living with great expectation that the Lord could come and get us and any time.

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The rapture of the church will be an amazing event for the follower of Jesus.

Pray