

1 Thess 4:13-18

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

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. 16 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. 17 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. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Many of us have heard the expression, “by the skin of your teeth,”

Job 19:20

20 My bone clings to my skin and to my flesh,
And I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.

Many in the church of Thessalonica had lost loved ones and there was some confusion regarding the afterlife:

Some were becoming discouraged because they believed Jesus would return during their lifetime.

So Paul is writing to comfort those who had these concerns.

God has given us the book, the bible to understand His plan. Part of that plan is to take the church home in what is commonly known as the rapture.

The rapture is a biblical prophetic event

- where all who have put their trust in Jesus
- as their Lord and Savior,
- both living and deceased
- will suddenly (without notice)
- be caught up in the air and taken into heaven.

It's also important that we understand the purpose of the tribulation period.

Dan 9:27 speaks of a one-week covenant which is

- the 70th week mentioned there in Daniel.
- Each week mentioned in Daniel
- Represents a period of 7 years.

The 70th week mentioned in Daniel will be the last week which is the 7 year tribulation period.

Daniel 9:20-27 is speaking of the nation of Israel.

- That's a time when God's focus
- will be directed to the nation of Israel.

Now, that doesn't necessarily say that the church couldn't be present,

- but the church doesn't necessarily need to be present.

Given the body of scripture we're covering today

- of God removing the believers from the earth in the rapture,
- Then Paul saying in Thessalonians,
- that God did not appoint us wrath
- would seem inconsistent for God
- to leave the church on the earth
- during the tribulation period

Another passage on the timing of the rapture comes to us from Rev 3:10.

Rev 3:10

10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

John said, "from" the hour of trial."

The DBL Greek dictionary defines it as a specific occasion or a time.

Just before Jesus' betrayal and arrest for example:

Matt 26:45

45 ~~Then~~ He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

The time had arrived when Jesus would be betrayed.

As we dive into this section of scripture,

- we'll see starting here in verse 13,
- Paul speaks of those who have fallen asleep.

One thing is certain as the writer of Ecclesiastes put it,

- there is a time to be born, and a time to die.

The bible tells us that it is appointed for man to die once and after this the judgement.

Therefore, Paul writes this section of Thess to comfort those that had lost a loved one to death.

When Jesus spoke to the disciples,

- He encouraged them by telling them
- their sorrows would be turned into joy.

John 16:16

16 "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father."

Not only did He go to the Father, but He went to prepare a place for us.

Jesus said to the disciples,

John 14:1-3

1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

1 Thess 4:13

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.

The idea of dying or falling asleep as Paul puts it here

- is speaking of the body, not the soul.

When a person dies, his soul or his spirit is immediately with Christ

- and his body remains at rest
- until the return of Christ.

Examples: Lazarus, Stephen, Jarius

God's promise to you is that you will wake up tomorrow.

That's why Paul said, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Then Paul said in verse 13 not to sorrow as those who have no hope.

There is hope:

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

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.

Paul uses a word which I defined for you last week when I mentioned the Jehovah's Witnesses.

- They predicted Christ's coming, "Parousia."
- It speaks of the presence of the visible coming of the Lord.

Notice also that some will be alive when the Lord returns.

I think it's important for us to distinguish between two events.

- One being the rapture and the
- second event is the second coming of Christ.

The first event which is known to us as the rapture of the church

- is different from the second coming of Jesus
- when He touches down on the earth.

During the first event, the rapture,

- Jesus will meet the church in the air, the believers,
- those who have made a decision to make Jesus their Savior.

The second coming of Christ will not be hidden.

- Jesus will come down to the earth
- and set His foot on the mount of olives
- and the mountain will be split in two Zech 14:4,
- and everyone will know about it.

Matt 24 describes the second coming:

Matt 24:29-30

29 "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. 30 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.

When Jesus comes the first time,

- it will be in the clouds
- and only the believers will know. It will be unannounced.

Paul said it will happen in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye.

When He comes the second time, everyone will know!

16 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.

It's verses like this one that remind us of the hope we have in Christ.

Notice there are 3 sounds mentioned in this verse.

- These are not 3 distinct sounds,
- but one sound described 3 different ways.

When Christ returns for the church at the rapture,

- only the Christian soldiers will hear the sound
- and we will know what it means, it's time

The sound we Christians hear will be different from

- the time when Jesus called Lazarus to come forth.
- All of the people in the area heard Him.

So it will be with every believer throughout the world

- when Jesus returns for the church.

The dead in Christ will rise first.

The emphasis is on the physical resurrection.

Verse 14 says if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

Since Jesus physically died and physically rose,

- then those who are in Christ will rise also.

Paul says the dead in Christ will rise first. **The verb “to rise” in Greek means “to stand or to stand again.”**

Their spirit is with the Lord, but their body is in the grave.

- When the Lord comes for the church at the rapture
- the bodies of the saints that have died
- will be raised and will meet their spirit in the air
- and they will then receive a glorified body.

Then those who are alive will rise and receive their glorified body as well.

1 Cor 15:50-58

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed — 52 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. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has

put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

God reveals something that was not revealed in the OT,

- that we shall all be changed.
- We won't be raised in corruption.

17 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.

We saw in verse 15 and we see it here again, Paul says, "we who are alive."

This is known as the eminent return, meaning

- that Jesus can return at any moment.

The simple fact that God has not sent His son for the church shows He is merciful.

- He is still giving people opportunity to repent.

We've come to a term in scripture "caught up"

- which is derived from the Greek word Harpázœ,
- meaning to "carry up or to carry away,
- to take by force or to pluck."

The Latin version of the word Harpázœ, is rapiemur.

The word Harpázœ shows up in 13 verses of the NT.

For example: Philip was caught up after he baptized the Eunuch, Acts 8:39.

Where was Philip found, in Asotus.

- He wasn't lost, but somehow he ended up there.

Paul said in 2 Cor 12 that he'd been caught up (Harpázœ) into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which is not lawful for a man to utter.

In the same way Paul and Philip were caught up,

- the church will be caught up one day
- and ushered into the presence of the Lord.

That's one reason to live a prepared life,

- not only that but the Lord can take you
- or me at any given moment.

Paul said in 1 Cor 15 that it would be in the twinkling of an eye.

- As quickly as we blink our eyes,

- we could be gone.

There is an inscription on a tombstone in a British Cemetery which reads:

Pause, my friend, as you walk by;
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, so you will be.
Prepare, my friend, to follow me!

Sometime later a visitor read that inscription and added these lines:

To follow you is not my intent,
Until I know which way you went!

How should the expectation of the rapture impact our life?

Titus 2:11-14

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

Following the rapture and the tribulation period

- is the second coming when Jesus returns to the earth
- along with His church to the Mt of Olives
- where He will judge the nations also known as
- the judgement of the sheep and the goats, Matt 25
- then He will setup His millennial kingdom.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

What will it be like when I arrive in heaven? Will I recognize my loved ones?

1 Cor 13:11-12

11 When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. 12 Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, (mirrors were usually polished metal (ex 38:8, job 37:18) which only allowed only a refracted image to be seen. When we get to heaven we will see clearly 1 Jn 3:2.) but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.