

10/19/25

The Coming of Jesus For His Church
1Thess. 4:15-18

The Thessalonians were being troubled being uncertain about the state of dead believers in view of the Lord's return for His church. 1Thess. 4:13-18

* As we have stated this passage is often used for the Rapture of the church and it is not wrong in itself because it mentions it indirectly. vs. 16-17

But the direct central theme of this section is the relationship of departed believers at the return of the Lord for His church, revealing the resurrection of both the departed believers and those alive at His coming.

1. They were not asking if they would be resurrected, they knew they would. Acts 17:1-4
2. They were not doubting the Lord's return or their meeting Him in the air. 1Thess. 1:10
3. They were anticipating the imminent return of Christ at any time. 1Thess. 5:1-2

The detailed instructions of Paul about what happens to dead believers at the return of Christ for His church in view of the resurrection is two-fold. 1Thess. 4:13-18

- I. The proclamation over their anxious hope. vs. 13-14
- II. The explanation of their living hope. vs. 15-18

Last time we looked at the proclamation over their anxious hope about dead believers, in view of Jesus coming for His church, learning three truths. 1Thess. 4:13-14

- I. The Thessalonians were not to be ignorant concerning the state of departed believers. vs. 13a-c
- II. The Thessalonians were not to grieve for departed believers as unbelievers. vs. 13d
- III. The Thessalonians were to know Jesus would return with the departed believers. vs. 14

So let us look at the explanation of their living hope at the return of Christ for His saints at the rapture, which consists of three important truths. 1Thess. 4:15-18

- I. The lack of benefit to the departed believer over the live believer's hope. vs. 15
- II. The equal benefit of the live and departed believer's hope. vs. 16-17
- III. The valuable benefit of the live believer is sure hope. vs. 18

I. The lack of benefit to the departed believer over the live believer's hope. vs. 15

- A. The apostle Paul identified the authority of what he was about to declare. vs. 15a
 - * "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord."

1. Paul indicated the corporate witness of the Divine revelation he was about to declare.
 - a. The corporate witness is marked by the plural pronoun “we”.
 - 1) Silas and Timothy.
 - 2) The tense is the indicative present, “we are saying to you”.
 - b. The recipients were the Thessalonians by the pronoun “you”, emphatic.
 - 1) They were born again.
 - 2) They were able to understand the word of God by the Holy Spirit in them.
2. Paul indicated the words he was about to impart to them as Divine revelation.
 - a. The phrase “the word of the Lord”, identified the words to follow were directly from Jesus, the highest authority.
 - 1) These words were not the words of Paul, but the very words of Jesus.
 - 2) This confirms the doctrine of Inspiration, the prophets and apostles spoke not of their own impulse or origin, but as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2Pet. 1:20-21
 - b. The writings of Paul are filled with evidence of having received direct revelation from Jesus.
 - 1) “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is* nothing unclean of itself; but to him who

- considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean.” Rom. 14:14
- 2) “Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband.” 1Cor. 7:10
 - 3) “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.” 1Cor. 9:14
 - 4) “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread.” 1Cor. 11:23
- B.** The apostle Paul indicated the relation of the living believer to the departed believer at the coming of Jesus for His church. vs. 15b
- * “That we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.”
1. Paul is actually elaborating on verse 14, the dead saints returning with Jesus to explain the order of the believer’s resurrection.
 - a. These are the words of Jesus that cannot be found in any of the gospels.
 - 1) The closest is to gather the elect, the remnant of Jews from the earth at the Second Coming. Matt. 24:31
 - 2) Remember there are many things that were not written John says. Jn. 21:25

- 3) Paul wrote under Inspiration, no one today writes or speaks under Inspiration, the Canon is closed.
- b. Remember Paul quoted the words of the Lord to the Ephesian elders not found in the gospels, “It is more blessed to give than to receive”. Acts 20:35
 - 1) Paul saw Jesus and was taught by Jesus for three years in Arabia, and imparted the gospel to Paul directly, “But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Acts 9:17; Gal. 1:11-12, 17-18
 - 2) Jesus appeared to Paul in the temple when he had returned for the first time to Jerusalem from Damascus after his conversion and told him to get out of Jerusalem quickly. Acts 21:17-18
- 2. Paul identified Christians who are still in their physical body.
 - a. Those living on the earth by the phrase “we who are alive”.
 - 1) This includes Jew and Gentile.
 - 2) Male and female.
 - 3) Bond or free.
 - 4) Scythian or barbarian.

- b. The physical body is the mere vehicle to be able to express ourselves on the earth.
 - 1) Our soul “psuche”, involves our intellect, emotions and the will.
 - 2) Our spirit is the real us, being created in the image and likeness of God.
- 3. Paul indicated the duration of live believers, “and remain until the coming of the Lord”.
 - a. The revelation is that those who are alive at the Lord’s coming have no advantage over the departed believers, “will by no means precede those who are asleep.”
 - 1) The event described as the coming of the Lord “parousia” is for His church. 1Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23
 - 2) The coming “parousia”, means presence, a technical term for a royal visit by a ruler of Rome as a manifested deity bringing in a new era. Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1Cor 15:23; 2Thess. 2:1, 8, 9; Ja. 5:7-8; 2Pet. 1:16; 3:4, 12; 1Jn 2:28
 - b. There is no disadvantage to the departed believer, they are returning with Jesus.
 - 1) The word proceed “phthano”, means to get the start, to go ahead or before with a particular advantage, a double negative, “by no means proceed”.
 - a) The reason is obvious; the dead saints were instantly present with Jesus at their last breath.

- b) And as the next verse will declare their bodies will be raised also. vs. 16
- 2) Those who are asleep “koimethentas”, is the aorist tense to denote a single past action, literally having fallen asleep, as verse 14.
- * Sleep “koimao”, means to lie down, stated three times. vs. 13, 14, 15

Illustration

It would be like placing two different groups in two safe locations, one would not have a disadvantage from the other!

Application

1. The saint who dies has a physical benefits.
 - a. They do not age or decay anymore.
 - b. They do not experience illness, pain or anxiety.
 - c. They do not have to care for their body needs, food, drink or sexual reproduction or exercise.

* “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.” Phil. 1:21-23
2. The saint who dies has emotional benefits.
 - a. They are no longer tempted to make decisions by their emotions.
 - b. They no longer are deceived by their emotions.

- c. They are no longer manipulated by their emotions.

* “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.” 2Cor. 4:16-18
3. The saint who dies has spiritual benefits.
 - a. They no longer have to worry about their sin nature, resist sin or evil thoughts.
 - b. They no longer have to do good warfare.
 - c. They no longer have to go through trials and temptation by the strategies of Satan.

* “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am **known**.” 1Cor. 13:12

The lack of benefit to the departed believer over the live believer’s hope is none, the living one is just waiting for Jesus!

II. The equal benefit of the live and departed believer’s hope. vs. 16-17

A. The apostle Paul described the Lord descending for His church on earth. vs. 16

1. Paul declared the certainty of the coming of Jesus, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven.” vs. 16a

a. The person is identified clearly, “The Lord Himself”.

1) The title Lord “kurios”, means master and owner of another person or thing.

2) Jesus has bought us with a price, we are not our own, it is by His precious blood. 1Cor 6:19-20; 1Pet. 1:19

b. The place of His descent is from heaven.

1) The Lord Jesus after His resurrection ascended far above all the heavens to sit at the right hand of God and is waiting to return for His church. Acts 1:11; Eph. 4:10; Acts 2:33-35

* Therefore Jesus will be bringing with Him the departed saints that have been with Him in heaven. vs. 14b

2) The first time Jesus descended He emptied Himself of His glory, took on the form of a servant and humbled Himself to provide the atoning righteousness for salvation. Phil. 2:7-8

3) Then during the three days in the tomb the Lord Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth to Sheol or Hades to preach to the spirits in prison

the victory over death for salvation. Eph 4:9; 1Pet 3:19

a) Paul and all New Testament writer believed in the imminent coming presence of Christ, at any time. Rom. 13:11-12; 1Cor. 16:22; Phil. 4:5; Heb. 10:25; Ja. 5:8; 1Pet. 4:7; 1Jn. 2:18

b) Those that say Paul later changed his mind in his later epistle are wrong, reading into them their own bias!

c) The parables of Jesus taught imminence to be ready to give an account.

2. Paul declared the manner of the coming of Jesus, describing it in three ways, “with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God.” vs. 16a-c

a. Jesus will descend “with a shout” “keleusma”, depicting authority. vs. 16a

1) The word is used of a ship master’s command to the oarsman.

2) The word is used of a military officer to his men.

3) The word is used of a hunter to his dogs.

b. Jesus will descend “with the voice of an archangel”. vs. 16b

1) Some take this to mean an archangel will proceed the Lord, but there is no need for that, it merely refers to a proclamation of Divine authority.

- 2) Michael only is called an archangel in Scripture. Dan. 10:13; 12:1; Jude 9
- c. Jesus will descend “with the trumpet of God”. vs. 16c
 - 1) Trumpets throughout Scripture are used to summon military, alarm, warning or festive occasions. Num. 10:9; Joel 2:1; Zech. 9:14
 - 2) This trumpet should not be confused nor identified with the 7th trumpet of Revelation at the end of the seven years of Tribulation and Great-Tribulation on earth. Rev. 11:15
 - 3) John heard Jesus talking to him in a loud voice as of a trumpet. Rev. 1:10
 - 4) Then after the messages to the seven churches, the church age, John says, “After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a **trumpet** speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.” Rev. 4:1
* This is the same trumpet of our text identifying the rapture of the church!
- 3. Paul declared the result of His coming descending from heaven, “And the dead in Christ will rise first.” vs. 16d

- a. The departed saints, as Paul said will be descending with Jesus at His coming to be joined to their raised bodies. vs. 14b
 - 1) The believer is instantly present with the Lord in heaven at death, we are not naked, but we are not in our glorified body, but waiting for our eternal body. 2Cor 5:1-8
 - 2) The text before us is speaking about the relationship of the physical resurrection of the old body that was planted in the ground at death, but though it is related to the old body, it has no resemblance, it will be raise a glorified body. 1Cor. 15:35-38, 42-49
 - a) The next verse will clearly indicates the dead bodies in the graves will be caught up to the cloud with us who are alive at the rapture! vs. 17a
 - b) Jesus said, “For the hour is coming in which all who are in the grave will hear my voice.” Jn. 5:28
 - 3) Jesus was the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, so after Jesus rose from the grave many of the bodies of saints rose and appeared to many in the city. Matt. 27:51-53; 1Cor. 15:20
- B. The apostle Paul described the Lord removing His church from the earth. vs. 17

1. Paul pointed out the privilege of those who are alive when the Lord descends from heaven, “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up.” vs. 17a
 - a. Those alive will escape physical death and the wrath to come upon the world. 1Thess. 1:10
 - 1) “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 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.” 1Cor. 15:50-54; Phil. 3:20-21
 - 2) “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” Phil. 3:20-21
 - b. The manner of their escape is depicted vividly.

- 1) The phrase caught up “harpazo”, means to seize violently, carry off by force, claim for one’s self eagerly.
- 2) The 13 times it appears in the New Testament means a sudden jolting removal and translocation every time.
 - a) Satan “harpazo” the word of God from men’s hearts. Matt. 13:19
 - b) Philip was “harpazo” by the Spirit after baptizing the Ethiopians eunuch and transported to Azotus. Acts 8:39
 - c) Paul was “harpazo” to the third heaven. 2Cor. 12:2
 - d) The woman’s child is “harpazo” to God. Rev. 12:5
- b. The Latin counterpart is “rapare”.
 - 1) We get our word rapture from it.
 - 2) The Greek word “harpazo” means the same.
2. Paul provided a picture of a long awaited family reunion, “together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” vs. 17a
 - a. The live believers will be “harpazo” together with “them”, do not miss the pronoun.
 - 1) Who are the “them”? The bodies of departed saints ascending with us to be with Jesus.
 - 3) The departed believers descending will receive and be united in the

- clouds with their resurrected body, as stated in the previously. vs. 16d
- b. The sphere is “in the clouds”.
- 1) The clouds are most likely literal, as Jesus ascended back up to heaven in a cloud, seen by the disciples. Acts 1:11
 - 2) The ascension is up in the air.
 - 3) Clouds at times refer to theophanies of Divine glory. Ex. 16:10; 19:16; 1Kings 8; Dan. 7:13; Matt. 24:30; Acts 1:9
 - 4) God makes the clouds His chariots. Ps. 104:3b
- c. The purpose is “to meet the Lord in the air.”
- 1) The word meet “apanteesis”, means to encounter used of a formal reception for royal magistrates by going out to meet them and accompanying them back on the final part of the journey, found 4 times in the New Testament.
 - a) The word is used of believers meeting Paul at his port of entry at Rome and accompanying him the rest of the way. Acts 28:15
 - b) Two times the word is used of those going out to meet the bridegroom to attend the wedding in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins teaching the return of Christ with His bride, not for Her.

- 2) The meeting with the Lord in the air will include the meeting with family believers and friends.
3. Paul pointed out the long awaited promise to the saints and church of Jesus Christ, “And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” vs. 17b
 - a. The believer will be glorified.
 - b. The believer will be just like Jesus.
 - c. The believer will not experience sorrow, hunger, thirst or death any more.
 - d. The believer will return to heaven with Jesus for 7 years, while the wrath of God is poured out on the earth and Antichrist.
 - e. The believer will go before the Bema-Seat of Christ to receive reward for the motive of his works. 1Cor. 3:14-16; 2Cor. 4:5; Rom. 14:10
 - f. The believer will be married in heaven at the marriage of the Lamb. Rev. 19:7
 - g. The believer at the end of the seven years will return with Christ at the Second Coming to set up the Kingdom. Rev. 19:11-16

Illustration

If one person received a million dollars, three months before the other, but both had to wait to spend the money together, both would share the equal benefit!

Application

1. The person who puts their trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of their sins and repents has eternal life.
 - a. Jesus told Nicodemus , “You must be born again or you will never see the Kingdom of God.” Jn. 3:3-5
 - b. Jesus said, “If you believe in Me, you’ll never die.” Jn. 11:26
 - c. Jesus stood to receive Stephen, “And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, “Lord Jesus, **receive** my spirit.” Acts 7:55, 59
2. The believer is constantly looking for the Lord to come for him.
 - a. Paul says, “We ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” Rom. 8:23
 - b. Paul again says, “For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” Col. 3:3-4
 - c. John says, “Beloved, now are we children of God; out of it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in them purifies himself, just as He is pure.” 1Jn. 3:2-3
3. The believer is to know there will be a seven year period of God’s wrath on the earth, but Jesus will rapture His church prior to it.

- a. Jesus is the first to mention the rapture to His disciples as He was ready to go to the cross, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 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.** 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.” Jn. 14:1-3
- b. Jesus warned believers, “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted **worthy** to escape **all these things that will come to pass**, and to stand before the Son of Man.” Lk. 21:36

The equal benefit of the live and departed believer’s hope is that both will be together with Jesus!

III. The valuable benefit of live believers in sure hope. vs. 18

* “Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

- A. The apostle Paul concluded they were to comfort each other having the words of Jesus.
 1. The word comfort “parakaleo”, means to call one along side.
 - a. To admonish and exhort.
 - b. To console and comfort.
 - c. To encourage and strengthen.
 2. The believer has an incredible benefit of knowing this detailed revelation about the

departed believers and the live believer at the return of Jesus for His church.

- a. Having great comfort that the departed saints are presently with the Lord.
- b. Having great comfort that the departed saints will be at no disadvantage, for they will receive their glorified bodies in the air with us who are raptured.
- c. Having great comfort that we will see all our love ones who have died before us.
- d. Having great comfort that we will be with the Lord in eternal fellowship.
- e. Having great comfort that what we possess is Divine revelation, Inerrant and Infallible, the Inspired word of God!

B. The apostle Paul concluded they were to comfort one another with the words of Jesus through teaching.

- 1. To remove ignorance from those who would find themselves in their own position, uncertain about departed believers and the Lord's coming.
 - a. Imparting to them God's word.
 - b. Reminding them of the reliability of God's word.
 - c. Exhorting them to teach others God's word.
- 2. To exhort one another when situations and circumstances would lead us to think different or otherwise.

- a. Due to our emotions.
- b. Due to depending on our natural minds.
- c. Due to believing false doctrine.

Illustration

It is much like having all your arrangements made for a trip and knowing every step of your journey, you can be comforted and rest in accurate information.

Application

- 1. The Bible teaches that there are two resurrection.
 - a. The First resurrection includes all those saved during the 7 year Tribulation period, prior to the Millennium. Rev. 20:4-6
 - * “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

- b. The Second resurrection includes all the ungodly that rejected Jesus as Savior and Lord, to be judged at the White-Throne Judgment and cast into the Lake of Fire, at the end of the Millennium. Rev. 20:11-15

* “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

2. The believer has such assurance and comfort through the Scriptures.

- a. “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much **assurance**, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.”
1Thess. 1:5

- b. “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full **assurance** of hope until the end.” Heb. 6:11
- c. “let us draw near with a true heart in full **assurance** of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” Heb. 10:22
- d. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were **assured** of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” Heb. 11:13

The valuable benefit of the live believer in sure hope is resting in the words of Jesus!

Conclusion

This is the explanation of the believer’s living hope at the return of Christ for His church at the rapture consisting of three important truths.

- I. The lack of benefit to the departed believer over the live believer’s hope is nothing, the living one is just waiting for Jesus!
- II. The equal benefit of the live and departed believer’s hope is that both will be together with Jesus!
- III. The valuable benefit of the live believer in sure hope is resting in the words of Jesus!