



FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH
FAIR OAKS RANCH

Day 17: Caught Up to Meet Him

1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words" (ESV).

DEVOTIONAL

We turn now to the second letter of our journey — E, Expectant. The question on everyone's mind from the 1st century disciples to present day is when will Christ return. The apostles peppered Jesus with questions about what would indicate His kingdom and when would it appear (Matthew 24). Paul, Peter and of course John all spoke repeatedly about the return of Jesus in their letters; however, no place in scripture is clearer about the immanency of Christ's return than 1 Thessalonians.

The readers were so convinced that it would occur in their day, they were concerned that their deceased loved ones had missed it. Paul comforted them reminding them that all who are in Christ will be raptured together. In fact, those who are asleep in the Lord will have a head start. Paul then gives a vivid picture of what the rapture event will be like. "The Lord himself will descend from heaven." Not an angel, not a messenger but the Lord Himself, with a shout of command, the voice of an archangel, the trumpet of God. The dead in Christ rise first. Then the living are gathered with them to meet Him in the air to be with him always.

The phrase "caught up" carries the whole weight of that day. The Greek is *harpazō* — to snatch, to seize suddenly, to take away by irresistible force. It is the word used when the Spirit carried Philip away from the road (Acts 8:39), and when Paul was caught up into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2). When Jerome rendered it into Latin as *rapiemur*, the church received the word we still use: *rapture*. This is not a slow gathering. It is sudden, decisive, and utterly beyond our control.

Fact is, this gathering may happen today. That is what makes this hope *expectant* rather than merely future. Paul continues: concerning "the times and the seasons" we have no need of anything written, "for you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord (season of judgment) will come like a thief in the night" (5:1–2). But mark the turn in verse 4 — "you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief." The thief comes for a sleeping world. The bride is not waiting for a sign on the

calendar; she is waiting for a Bridegroom at the door. No prophecy is left to be fulfilled first. Nothing stands between this moment and that shout.

Examine what Paul does with that expectancy — he turns it immediately into holiness. "Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober" (5:6). He dresses us for the wait: "having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (5:8). Hope is not a pillow here; it is armor. And it rests on a promise Paul adds next — "God has not destined us for wrath" (5:9). Therefore, we do not scan the horizon in dread. We watch for our Redeemer with expectation. Paul ends where a grieving church needed him to end: "Therefore encourage one another with these words." Not frighten one another. Encourage. We must always remember that He is coming, and we will always be with Him. This truth should cause us to live expectantly.

TAKE AWAY

The bride isn't watching the calendar for a sign; she's watching the door for her groom. Nothing is left to happen but the shout, which is exactly why Paul turns that hope into armor and tells us to stay awake.

PRAYER PROMPT

Ask the Lord to make His any-moment return so real to you today that it both comforts your grief and keeps you awake and sober.