



BETHSAIDA BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES: EKKLESIA: THE CHURCH
THE CHURCH CALLED HOME!

1 Thess. 4:13-18

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1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 – “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For we say this to you by a word from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord’s coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel’s voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are still 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. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.” (CSB)

Life Group Leaders: After you have read the text, may this lesson help guide discussion and as you expound on what the text says and means. **Use the questions to create discussion of the text, personal application and how to live out the relevant principles in the text. Also, if you go to the 8:45 service, don’t share all the points of the sermon and illustrations because you have other people going to 11am.** Talk about the text and discuss it and how it applies to our lives today.

CONTEXT

Thessalonica was a major city in northern Greece. Situated on the main east-west highway of the Roman Empire, it was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia & was very loyal to Rome. Paul planted this church on his second missionary journey about 50 A.D. Luke, one of Paul's mission buddies records what happened in Acts 17:1-9. Paul was in Thessalonica only 3-5 weeks before he was wrongly run out of the city.

MAIN POINT – The second coming of Jesus gives Christ followers hope and assurance for today and tomorrow.

CONTENT

The pagan world in Paul’s day had no hope of life after death. A typical inscription on a grave demonstrates this fact: “I was not. I became. I am not. I care not.”

While some of the philosophers, such as Socrates, sought to prove happiness after death, the pagan world had no word of assurance. - Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 178.

The Thessalonians were concerned about the question: **“Will we see our loved ones again?”**

Death is universal reality of living in a fallen world. This is a cycle that will continue until Christ comes back. When death happens, we all seek some measure of comfort. Our non-believing friends do not have the comfort provided to believers. Neither the reality of heaven nor of Jesus' second coming can assure them of being reunited with loved ones. Jesus' return gives all believers assurance in the present and hope for the future.

I. THE REVELATION – (v.13-14)

v.13 – “We do not want you to be uninformed or ignorant” – This phrase, expressing that Paul does not want them to be ignorant is a formula customarily used to discuss difficult problems and correct false ideas (Romans 1:13; 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1). Usually, whenever the Bible warns us that we are ignorant about something, it is warranted. The topic of Christians dying is so important to the Thessalonians that it requires an explanation from the apostle Paul.

The only way we can know about the afterlife is through the revelation found in the Bible. If we have adequate knowledge of what the Bible teaches about this subject, then it will dispel excessive grief in our souls. We can only resolve our ignorance by reading the Bible. We will rid ourselves of excessive grief by eliminating our ignorance about the future.

The Thessalonians were clearly looking for the Lord's return at the rapture, but they did not know the state of their dead loved ones until that point. They thought that those who died would miss the Rapture.

Paul believed in Christ's bodily resurrection and based many truths on this certainty (1 Cor. 15:14). In this verse he staked our hope of seeing again the Christian dead at Jesus' resurrection. Jesus' followers in every place and in every age have confessed this truth and have it in common. In fact, to deny our Lord has conquered death is to deny the essence of the gospel message (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The gospel assures us we will see and be with our deceased brothers and sisters again.

v.13 - “concerning those who are asleep” - v.14 - “Fallen asleep” is the literal meaning of the Greek word. “Sleep” is a figure of speech used frequently in the Bible to designate physical death. Sleep in Scripture has to do with the death of the body, not soul-sleep. Some believers in Thessalonica died because of persecution. They wanted to know what happened to their fellow Christians who died.

Many lost people are afraid to die because they have no hope beyond the grave. They have no heaven. In addition they have no forgiveness of sins. There is no hope apart from Christ. If we put our hope in our church, we will be disappointed. If we put our hope in a political system or the President or Congress, they will fail us for sure.

v.14 – “For if we believe Jesus died and rose again” - The word “if” in the Greek means that this supposition is assumed true. Paul assumes that the Thessalonians believe in the death and resurrection of Christ (Acts 17:3). The following truths only carry currency if we believe them. Hope rests on our faith in the resurrection of Christ. The certainty of our hope is inseparable from Christ's resurrection. – Grant Richison, Commentary on 1 Thessalonians

While some of the philosophers, such as Socrates, sought to prove happiness after death, the pagan world had no word of assurance.

The believers in Thessalonica were concerned about their loved ones who had died. What if the Lord should return? Would their deceased loved ones be handicapped in any way? Will those who are

alive at His coming have an advantage over the believers who have died? In this paragraph, Paul answered their questions. He based his encouragement and comfort on five fundamental facts.

- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 178.

How can mortal man have peace in his own heart with eternity?

Why were the Thessalonians experiencing grief and sorrow?

II. THE RETURN – (v.15)

“still alive at the Lord’s coming” - The second component God uniquely revealed to Paul was the Rapture. The idea that the Messiah would come to earth and raise the dead saints of Israel in the Old Testament was not unique to New Testament Christians. However, the idea of a Rapture was unique because there is no hint of this concept from Genesis to Malachi.

The word “coming” means a presence. It comes from two words: with and being. The coming of the Lord will be the time He will be with us. He will arrive and we will stand in His presence.

Christ followers should not get the idea that when believers go to heaven they are somewhere in outer space sleeping in nylon pajamas! That is a fairy tale that is more like a nightmare! When we go to Heaven, we will be more awake than we are now. Our souls and spirits will be in heaven fully conscious, but our bodies will remain on earth until just before the Rapture when God will resurrect our bodies and transform them so they will be just like the resurrection body of Christ.

III. THE RESURRECTION – (v.16)

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout” - The word “descend” literally means to go down. The Lord Himself will descend personally from heaven to the sky. If there is to be rapture, He can employ no lesser agency or person than Himself. He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).

The word “shout” carries the idea of a call, summons, shout of command. This shout is a signal for the church to get ready for the Lord to rapture it. Jesus will summon His church to be with Him forever just as a general would summon his soldiers or an admiral, his sailors. Such a shout both demands and expects instant compliance even in the heat of battle. The call knows no defeat in the conflict and conquest. There can be only one result once the life-giving voice of the Son of God rings forth (John 11:43; 5:25, 28-29).

“with the archangel’s voice” - An “archangel” is an angel of exalted rank, the highest rank of any angel. Jesus’ shout will be with the authority of the ultimate rank of an archangel. The rapture is one of the greatest interventions into the affairs of men in the history of the universe. It is backed by all the authority, power and majesty of heaven.

“and with the trumpet of God” - A trumpet is a wind instrument usually made of bronze or iron broadening out to a megaphone. Ancients blew the trumpet on solemn occasions to stir up others to get their attention. This was true of the seven angels of Revelation. They used the trumpet in war for various signals of military actions.

Trumpets in the Old Testament were a signal to God’s people (not to the lost). This signified the approach of God to His people and their assembly before Him (Exodus 19:13,16-17,19), the ongoing march (Numbers 10:2), movements in battle, divine deliverance and great festival occasions. God’s trumpet sound is an indication of something momentous. This is the divine summons that the church has awaited for centuries.

“and the dead in Christ will rise first” - Dead believers will rise before living believers (1 Corinthians 15:52). Not just any person will rise from the dead but only those who are “in Christ.” This phrase refers to the spiritual position into which God places Christians when they believe in the death of Christ to forgive their sin. The Bible never claims that the Old Testament saint is “in Christ.” Christ makes positional truth possible by virtue of His work on earth. Death does not disturb our spiritual union with Christ.

What will happen when Jesus returns?

IV. THE RAPTURE – (v.17)

The word “Rapture” is not found in our English translations in the Bible but the concept is. The Greek word means to be taken away by an irresistible force. The Rapture is the event when the Church is removed from the earth. It is when Jesus comes for all His followers who have received eternal life. Jesus will come when we least expect it.

“Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together” - The words “caught up” mean to seize, snatch away, carry off by force. This is the idea of rapture. We get the English word “rapture” from the Latin *rapturo* — to catch up.

Jesus will take the church away from earth suddenly and by force in the Rapture. This is a signless and timeless event. The word “together” marks a link in place and time. The Rapture of the church into Heaven is the next event on God’s prophetic timetable. Christ followers will accompany Christ back to Heaven. He will take us by force. He will suddenly seize us and carry us off in order to claim us for Himself.

Our meeting with the Lord will also be a time of reckoning. This is called “the Judgment Seat of Christ” (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). - Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 2.

Will the unsaved world be aware of what is happening in the Rapture?

V. THE REUNION – (v.17-18)

We will meet the Lord and dead in Christ in the air. The New Testament used the word “meet” for the arrival of a magistrate. This word carries the idea of an official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary. Our meeting of the Sovereign Lord of the universe will be the most auspicious and awe-inspiring occasion of the ages. This is when He takes us, His bride, the church, to Heaven. The church will meet the Lord in the “air.” This is the earth’s atmosphere, the space immediately above the surface of the earth.

“and so we will always be with the Lord” - The principal purpose of the Rapture is to “be with the Lord.” We will live in fellowship with Him eternally. We will never be separate from Him. As well, nothing will separate us from fellow believers either. We will never say “goodbye” again.

Jesus’ imminent return to planet earth to translate believers to heaven is a glorious truth that comforts Christ followers. The return of Christ sometime should encourage all Christ followers that He is coming back for us one day and reuniting with the Christ followers who went on before us.

CORRELATION – Matt. 24:29-44; 1 Cor. 15:50-52; 2 Cor. 5:8; Col. 3:4; Heb. 9:27; 1 John 3:1-2

APPLICATION - Knowledge without application or action is useless information. Answer these 4 questions – **Now what? So what? What does this matter to my life? What does this text demand of me?**

What should be our primary response to thinking about the Lord's return?

Did any part of this study challenge you to adjust your thinking about Christ's second coming? If so, which part and why? Or did it solidify your thinking on the 2nd Coming?

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He instructed them to pray "your kingdom come." Do you pray for Christ to return?

Do you have your ticket reserved for heaven?

- * The Rapture of the church is an important doctrine, because it affects our future and present hope.
- * Christ followers have a glorious hope that Jesus will return because Christ rose from death eternally, so we will also rise.
- * Jesus can come back at any time.
- * Christ followers do not have to fear death.
- * God will resurrect our physical body and transform it into a resurrection body first.
- * The blessed future of the church is the Rapture.
- * The Rapture comforts those who lose loved ones that are Christ followers in death.
- * Nobody knows the day, or hour when Jesus will return.

How should you live in light of Christ's imminent return.

RESPONSE

- * Pray your Life Group teacher or teachers. Encourage one another, pray for one another and support one another in your Life Group this week.
- * Prayer for week – Dear Heavenly Father, I'm thankful, grateful and give You praise that Jesus is coming back again someday in the future. Lord, help me live every day with the end in sight. I look forward to that glorious day when You will return for Your church. In Jesus name, Amen.
- * Look for an opportunity to have a gospel conversation. If you have one, report it in your Life Group, tag us on Social Media, email or let the office know so that we can rejoice with you.
- * Pray for Your One that does not know the Lord Jesus. Pray for an opportunity to share with them and pray that they will be saved in 2020.
- * Pray for **VISION 2020** & that we will "**Engage with the Word and the World!**" We are trying to have 2000 gospel conversations by the end of 2020. Pray for many to be saved in 2020!

- * Pray for every one as we read through the New Testament chronologically in 2020. **Make the commitment** to read through the whole New Testament this year with the church!

- * Start praying for Easter Services and that many friends and neighbors might come to church to hear the gospel and be saved that day.