

**While I'm Waiting
(Week 8)
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
"We Believe in The Rapture"**

Introduction

Listen, I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will 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 will be changed.
1 Corinthians 15:51-52

As a pastor who writes out his sermons every week, I personally am amazed at how well constructed are the letters of Paul to the Thessalonians. There are many wonderful books written in the Scriptures. The book of *Hebrews* is astonishing in its theology, linking *The Old and New Testaments* in seamless perfection. The book of *Romans* is considered by many as Paul's greatest achievement, in describing the doctrines of Christianity. It is a book that tells us exactly what a Christian believes. Then there is the book of *Ephesians*, which every Christian should know by heart, for it explains to us just "who we are" in Christ Jesus. But, as far as, the perfect outline for a sermon, I would have to say that *1 & 2 Thessalonians* would win this category hands down.

Of course this is just my own humble opinion. But I am amazed at how Paul lays out the foundations for what he wishes to teach the Thessalonians and then expounds upon them. Maybe it is because they were such a new church that he was extra careful to make his letter perfectly clear to them. Whatever the reason, the outline is brilliant. And yes, I am aware that this is also because it was inspired by The Holy Spirit. But the fact remains, that it is a perfectly crafted document. For example, in **Chapter Three**, he tells them that they must increase in love and holiness, because Christ's return is imminent. And then in **Chapter Four**, he breaks down each of these things, as any good pastor would do, in order to properly train up his flock. If you are a preacher and you want to learn how to put together a great sermon outline, then look no further for an example than that of *1 & 2 Thessalonians*!

When we come to the main portion of Paul's first letter to the church at Thessalonica, there is an important truth that Paul wants them to fully understand. And that truth is the "rapture" of the church, when we shall all be in the "*parousia*" (*presence*) of The LORD. This is a day that every believer must not only long for, but LIVE for. For we do not want Jesus to find us being anything less than faithful, when He returns.

Many these days scoff at the notion of "the rapture". Some theologians have dismissed the notion entirely, claiming that the belief in a rapture is a relatively "new" phenomenon, and that the early church did not adhere to this doctrine. If that be the case, then why were the Thessalonians fearful that they had somehow "missed" it? Why were they afraid that their loved ones who died had been left out of Christ's glorious coming? When Timothy returned to Paul with his report on the church at Thessalonica, he had shared their concerns with his dear friend, pastor, and mentor. And Paul wasted no time in responding to the fledgling church.

For you see, the church in Thessalonica was living in the most difficult of times. Things were so bad there that they had started to wonder if The Day of The Lord (which is an *Old Testament* term for The Tribulation; **Joel 2:31, Malachi 4:5**) had in fact already begun. This gives us a bit of insight into just how severe the persecution of the church was in those days. The Thessalonians could not imagine a darker time than they were enduring. But there is a difference between the persecution at the hands of men and the wrath of God. God will allow His followers to be persecuted for His namesake, but He will never raise His own hand against His beloved children. When the tribulation comes, God will send His angels to declare war on mankind. But He will never do such a thing to His Church. God has not appointed us for this wrath (**1 Thessalonians 5:9**).

I love the way that Paul begins his in-depth discussion of the rapture of the Church. It begins with the statement, "**For if we believe...**", and then, he gives us three pillars of the Christian faith to which we hold fast, and of which, we must remind one another so very often: 1. *Christ's death and resurrection assures us*; 2. *Christ ever lives to keep us*, and 3. *Christ is coming back for us*. So, as Paul would say, "**Comfort one another with these words.**"

Christ's Death and Resurrection Assures Us (vs. 13-14a)

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. 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. **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14**

A vital element of the foundation for our faith, the coming resurrection of the dead, is based upon the belief the Jesus died and rose again. When Paul says, **"If we believe..."**, he is not suggesting that there is any doubt of the fact, he is simply saying, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then we should also have complete assurance in the certainty of His return! The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is our very hope. And to have certainty of these things is to also have full assurance that because He rose, we too will rise! If Christ is not risen, then our situation is hopeless.

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless: you are still in your sins. **1 Corinthians 15:17**

But the good news is that Jesus died for our sins, and God raised Him from the dead, so that those who put their faith in Him can have the full assurance of eternal life! And if we truly believe in His death and resurrection, then we can certainly count upon His return. He will come again for His bride.

I love how Paul carefully words the death of Jesus, in comparison with the death of His saints. When He speaks of Christ's atoning death upon the cross he says, **"..We believe that Jesus died..."** But, when he speaks of of the Thessalonian believers who had died, he refers to them as **"those who have fallen asleep"**. There is a beautiful spiritual truth in this statement. Jesus died on the cross, and in so doing, He took away the fear of death. He died, so that when our time comes, we simply go to asleep in Him. Death, thanks to Christ, is no longer a thing to cause us dread!

I once heard a story about two young boys, who were riding in the back seat of their parent's car, when a huge wasp flew in the window. As the wasp begin to buzz about the car, the young boys went into a panic. Without warning, the wasp stung the older brother who winced in pain, causing the younger brother to cry hysterically in fear that he too would be stung. The older brother looked at him and said, "Why are you still crying? The wasp cannot hurt you now. I have his stinger! You see, Jesus took away the sting of death, and now, all that is left for us "younger brothers" is to fall asleep in Him. Death cannot defeat us any longer. Or as Paul would say:

Where, death, is your victory? Where, death, is your sting? **1 Corinthians 15:55**

The Thessalonians were afraid that somehow those who had died in their congregation had missed out on the promises of Christ. But Paul assured them that nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus died and rose to secure for us the inheritance of eternal life in Him. We have nothing to fear. What we have in Christ cannot be lost.

For I am persuaded that neither DEATH nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will are able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our LORD. **Romans 8:38-39**

So, rest assured child of God, Jesus died and rose again, so that you would have nothing to fear. Every promise that He has made will be kept. To the believer, even death brings a blessing.

For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. **Philippians 1:21**

Christ Ever Lives to Keep Us (vs. 14b)

...in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. **1 Thessalonians 4:14b**

I really do not believe that we, as human beings, can ever fully grasp the depths in which Jesus loves us! But there are clues, “breadcrumbs” if you will, that we see in Scripture that show us that His love is beyond anything that we can even imagine. For instance, think about His love for us demonstrated in these verses concerning the rapture of the Church.

You see, Christ’s resurrection means so much more than the proof that He conquered death, and therefore, we too shall rise. *The Bible* tells us plainly that those who believe in Christ are *IN Him*, and that He **“always lives to intercede”** on their behalf.

Therefore, He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, since he always lives to intercede for them. **Hebrews 7:25**

I just love that verse. It tells me that the risen Christ is always living to take a stand for me. He is my constant Companion and Protector. My everlasting Shepherd, if you will. There is not a single moment, when His eye is distracted from His sheep.

Now, look closely at **verse 14b**. It says that Jesus will bring with Him the spirits of those who have fallen asleep when He returns. Why would he do that? Why not just leave them behind in heaven and take us there to see them? I believe that I know the answer to this question. I believe that it is because He won’t leave those who are His for even one millisecond. When Jesus comes to call for His bride, He will say to those who are there in heaven with Him, *“Let’s go! It is time to go get the rest of the family!”*

And why will the glorified bodies of the dead rise and be rejoined with their spirits, who have returned with Christ at the rapture, first... before we rise? I think it is because when we see our loved ones again for the first time, when the church is finally united in the clouds, Christ wants those who have gone on before to be revealed to us in their full glory! It will be like one of those TV shows where a person gets a total “makeover”, and they are revealed to their loved ones in dramatic fashion, so everyone can marvel at the transformation. Can you imagine seeing all those that we have lost in one astounding and quick reveal? What a glorious reunion that will be!

I have many times, as a minister, had a front row seat to death. And many times, I have heard someone on their deathbed say regarding their child or grandchild say, “I don’t want them to see me like this.” But on the day when our LORD returns, our loved ones won’t be able to wait to show us what they look like then! Many of us have said over the years, “I can’t wait to get to heaven to see my grandfather, uncle, child, etc,” who’ve gone on before. But, if you are alive when the rapture of the Church takes place, you won’t have to wait till you get to heaven, for Jesus is bringing them along! I have a feeling that they are just as anxious to see us as we are to see them. And because of His great love for them, Jesus won’t leave them behind for a single moment! He ever lives to keep us. Now, listen to this verse we have all heard so many times and see it in the light of His everlasting love.

...I will never leave you or abandon you. **Hebrews 13:5**

Christ Is Coming Back For Us

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. 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. 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. Therefore, encourage one another with these words. **1 Thessalonians 4:15-18**

Three times in Scripture we see Jesus cry out in a loud voice. And every time he does, someone rises from the dead! He cried out with a loud voice at the tomb of Lazarus (**John 11:43**), and Lazarus was raised from the dead. He cried out with a loud voice upon the cross (**Matthew 27:50**), and the graves were opened, and many of the dead were raised again.

And here in Thessalonians, we are told that Jesus will once more, cry out with a loud voice, and those who are in Him will rise from the dead all around the world. What a mighty roar that will be from the Lion of The Tribe of Judah! It is important for us to notice that when it is time for the rapture of the church, The LORD won't send an angel to do His bidding. No, He will come for us in person. And with the trumpet of God, and a mighty shout, and the voice of the archangel, He will call us to meet Him in the clouds. The dead in Christ will rise first, and by the time we get there, they will have already been given their new glorified body. And we too, if we are still alive when He returns, shall be glorified in an instant.

Listen, I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will 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 will be changed. **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**

Although the word "rapture" is never mentioned in Scripture, the teaching about it is perfectly clear. Paul tells us, when Christ calls us out of this world in a loud voice, we will be **"caught up together with them (the host of departed saints) in the clouds to meet The LORD in the air"**. The word he uses in the Greek (*Harpazo*), that is translated "caught up", literally means ***to seize by force and snatch away***. It is similar in meaning to the way that an eagle will swoop down and snatch up its prey from the earth. In fact, our word "rapture" is actually akin to the word "raptor", which is used to describe a bird of prey. Simply put, when Jesus calls, it will be impossible for those who are His to "miss the rapture". So, The Church should be in an ever present state of preparedness, knowing that Christ could come and take us away at any moment. I expect the Christians, who will be the most "surprised" by this wondrous event, will be the very ones who have never believed it will occur in the first place! Regardless, it would be a grievous error in judgment to be caught unprepared for the day that we are to be transformed instantly and brought into the *parousia* (*presence*) of The LORD Jesus Christ. So, be holy in all that you do, serving faithfully, for you do not know when the Master of the house returns (**Mark 13:35**).

What a comfort it must have been for the Thessalonians to hear these words from Paul. That Christ will never lose one of His own, and that when He comes for us, it will be in-person, to take us away from the wrath that is to come. The book of *Revelation* shows us in great detail what it will be like when God "breaks His silence" and sends His angelic host to declare war on the wicked of this world. But we, the chosen of God, have not been appointed to wrath. Rest assured. Jesus will come and personally escort us away from the darkest days this earth will ever see. It will be seven years of hell on earth, as the very wrath of God is poured out upon the world. But even in the midst of this time, many will repent and turn to Christ and find salvation. But the good news for us, those who have believed upon His name, will not be here, when the day of The LORD comes in power. We will be seated in the heavenlies with Christ Jesus: The One Who died and rose to give us this blessed assurance. The One Who ever lives to keep us close to Him. The One Who is coming soon to take us from this evil place to be with Him... FOREVER!

Are you ready? We believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we also believe that this same Jesus will come again to call ALL of His saints home at the rapture of the Church. While we wait, we serve Him with our whole hearts, striving for holiness and longing for His coming.

He who testifies about these things says, 'Yes, I Am coming soon.' Amen! Come, LORD Jesus! **Revelation 22:20**

Ant let those who are waiting upon The LORD Jesus Christ say... TRUTH!!!