

"The Hope of the Church"

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Introduction: Throughout the church age believers have been tested and tried, they have been afflicted and persecuted, and they have been tortured and slain. But in the midst of all they went through there was a hope which sustained them. It was the hope of the return of Jesus Christ.

Now let me clarify what I am talking about when I refer to the return of Jesus Christ. First of all, I am not talking about the earthly return of Jesus Christ which will take place in Revelation 19. The return of Jesus Christ in Revelation 19 will take place at the end of the Great Tribulation.

Revelation 19:11-16

¹¹ And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

¹² His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

¹³ And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

¹⁴ And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

¹⁵ And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

¹⁶ And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Here is the earthly return at the end of the Great Tribulation. We also see this very return in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:29-31

²⁹ Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

³⁰ And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

³¹ And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

This is not the return we look for. This will be what the saved of the Tribulation look for in the midst of the darkness they will be in. The RETURN which we are looking for will happen before the Tribulation. We look for the RETURN of Jesus Christ not to the earth but in the clouds. This is the RAPTURE of the Church. This is the next event on God's calendar. This is the HOPE which many believers have held to through the times of darkness. The Bible is very clear that we should live in expectancy of the return of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:9-10

⁹ And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

¹⁰ That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.

Philippians 3:20-21

²⁰ For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

²¹ Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

⁹ For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

¹⁰ And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

2 Timothy 4:8

⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Titus 2:11-13

¹¹ For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

¹² Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

¹³ Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

Hebrews 9:28

²⁸ So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

These are some of the verses that speak of the return of Jesus Christ in the clouds before the Tribulation to catch away His Bride, the church. Today we are going to look at some of the details of the event.

We find the most detailed description in 1 Thessalonians 4.

I. Paul's Concern

Notice 1 Thessalonians 4:13

Here in this verse we see Paul's concern for the believers at Thessalonica. They desired to know what would happen to their loved ones who had died in Christ if the Rapture happened. Would they miss out on that blessed event? Would they be left out since they had died?

So, as Paul moves on in this section, he is going to explain to them what will happen to those who died in Christ when the Rapture happens. Just as a side note I want to show you a passage from 1 Corinthians 15 and in this passage, Paul explains what will happen to those who are ALIVE when the Rapture happens.

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

⁵¹ Behold, I shew 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

Here we see that Paul explains that not everyone will die but everyone will be changed. Without going into great detail this tells us what will happen to those alive when the Rapture happens.

Now let us get back to 1 Thessalonians.

II. The Source of Paul's Teaching

Notice 1 Thessalonians 4:14

Here in the beginning of this verse Paul outlines the Gospel and how it is that a person is saved. He says, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again..." The Gospel is that Jesus died for our sins, was buried and rose again on the third day.

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

² By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

³ For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

⁴ And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures;

This is the message that must be accepted and believed if a person is going to be saved and have part in the Rapture.

Notice 1 Thessalonians 4:14 again.

Those who sleep in Jesus are those who died IN CHRIST. When the Rapture happens, Paul tells us that those who died in Christ are coming back with Him. This would be their spirits and not their bodies.

Notice 1 Thessalonians 4:15a

Paul did not get this information from the local news or from social media. This was a Truth that was taught to Him by the Lord Himself. Jesus had taught Paul concerning the Rapture of the church. Probably in Paul's time in Arabia this Truth was revealed to him.

Therefore, because of the source we can rest in the fact that what Paul is teaching here is 100% accurate and it will come to pass.

Listen to the words of Clarke on Paul's words here:

"In no place does the apostle speak more confidently and positively of his inspiration than here; and we should prepare ourselves to receive some momentous and interesting truth."

III. The Details

Notice 1 Thessalonians 4:15b

Paul wanted his readers to know that those who died in Christ would not be at a disadvantage when Jesus returns. He tells his readers that those alive when the Rapture happens will not "PREVENT" which means "preceded" those who have died. In other words, those alive will not have an advantage. It will be a glorious event for ALL who are IN CHRIST.

I want you to notice that Paul used the pronoun "WE" here. That means that he, himself believed that the Rapture would happen in his day. This tells us that the Rapture is imminent. That means it can happen at any time. The Rapture is a sign less event and by that, I mean there is absolutely NOTHING that must happen before the Rapture can happen.

Some people say that certain things must be in place before the Rapture can happen, but we have certainly learned in what is happening in our world today how quickly things can change. God could move every piece into its proper place overnight or even quicker.

Notice 1 Thessalonians 4:16

When the Rapture takes place there will be a shout and the trumpet blast. Paul spoke of the trumpet in 1 Corinthians also.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52

⁵¹ *Behold, I shew 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

Some teach that this is the 7th trumpet of the Trumpet Judgments of Revelation. This is NOT connected with the Trumpet Judgments. Those trumpets are the trumpets of angels and they bring death and destruction. The trumpet at the Rapture is the TRUMP OF GOD and it issues in blessings and peace for us who know Jesus Christ.

So, when Jesus returns to catch His bride away there will be a shout that we shall here and there will be a trumpet blast that we shall here. We do not know what will be shouted.

Maybe it will be the Words, "COME HOME" or maybe it will be the Words, "THE GROOM HAS ARRIVED".

Notice 1 Thessalonians 4:16 again.

When the shout and the trumpet sound the very first thing that will happen is the dead in Christ shall rise first. This will be the resurrection of the bodies of those IN CHRIST and at this time the dead IN CHRIST will receive their glorified bodies.

Notice 1 Thessalonians 4:17

There are three points to be seen in this verse:

1. **At this very time those who are alive IN CHRIST will be caught up together with the resurrected believers in the clouds.**

This is when we shall receive our glorified bodies. This is what Paul wrote of in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 15:51-54

⁵¹ *Behold, I shew 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall 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 shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*

When this happens, this will be a great family reunion. The loved ones who have died in Christ will all be there. There are many people that I long to see again and, on that day, I will get to see them again. Have you lost a child or a spouse who was saved? On this day you will reunite together with them and we shall never again be separated.

2. **On that day we shall meet our Lord face to face.**

Finally, after all these years we shall see with our eyes the ONE who died in our place on the cross. On this day our Lord will take us into the Great Throne Room in Heaven. Let me show you a few verses from Revelation 4 which many people believe is a picture of the Rapture.

Revelation 4:1-3

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

² *And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.*

³ *And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.*

There are several things to see here:

- a) John's focus was completely upon the ONE on the Throne. This is God the Father.
- b) He is like a JASPER and a SARDINE STONE. This is very important. The Jasper is clear like a diamond and it speaks of the holiness of God. The sardine stone is the color of a ruby and it speaks of the blood that was shed for our sins.
- c) There is a full rainbow that is emerald in color which is green. This is very exciting to consider. The rainbow tells us the storms of life are over. Because it is a full circle that means there will be perfect peace for you and me when we arrive there. The green color speaks of the freshness of that peace. It will never grow old.

Let me take your mind back to seeing our Lord face to face.

1 John 3:2

² *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

3. We will forever be with our Lord.

Conclusion:

1 Corinthians 2:9

⁹ *But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

This is the HOPE of the believer. But for the unsaved there is no hope. When the Rapture happens, the demonic forces will be released to run wild. The Spirit of God within the believers is restraining the demons. We can see them pushing at the gate but when the Rapture happens it will be terrible. You MUST be born again!