

The Reality of the Rapture #11

I Thessalonians 4: 13-18

Tonight we have come to the most recognized passage in I Thessalonians, and one of the most familiar passages in all of Scripture. It is a passage that is often read at funerals because of the comfort that it affords to the families who have lost loved ones in Christ.

This passage is dealing with the rapture of the church. This is a subject that has been debated for centuries. There is a great discussion concerning the timing of the rapture. The views are varied as to when the Lord will actually come for the church. (As we dealt with in our study of Revelation, I believe the rapture will take place just prior to the Great Tribulation.)

Others contend that we have no biblical basis for such a thing since the word rapture is not found in Scripture. To the fact that “rapture” is not found in the Bible, I will agree, but it is there nonetheless. We see the phrase [caught up](#) in [V.17](#). The word rapture translates the Latin word “*rapto or raptus*” and comes from the Greek word “*harpazo*.” The phrase translated [caught up](#) literally means “*to seize; to claim for one’s self; to snatch out or away.*” While we don’t have the word rapture recorded in Scripture, clearly the doctrine and teaching is there.

The rapture of the church is a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. Through our faith in Christ we have the hope of a future resurrection of the dead where all believers will be caught away to meet the Lord in the air and enter into His glorious presence with new, glorified bodies. Had Christ not risen, and if we had no hope of life beyond the grave, our faith would be no better or different than the false religions of the world. That hope sets us apart from all others.

As we continue our study in I Thessalonians, I want to consider the [principles](#) surrounding this miraculous event as we think on: [The Reality of the Rapture](#).

I. A Stirring Reminder ([13-15](#)) – As Paul continues to exhort the church in Thessalonica, he is aware of their confusion regarding the coming of the Lord and the future of all believers. Dealing with their confusion, Paul offers words of wisdom. First he offers:

A. Words of Comfort ([13](#)) – Many in that day were earnestly looking for the Lord’s return. They lived each day in full anticipation of His coming. Many of them believed they would be taken up in the rapture. (That ought to stand as a challenge for us as well!)

- While those who were living looked for the Lord’s coming, they were sorrowful over loved ones who had died in Christ. Many there feared that those who had already gone by way of the grave would somehow miss out on the coming of the Lord. They felt as if the Christians hope was buried with those believers in the grave.

- While Paul understood their sorrow, their grief over death, he reminds them that even though they sorrow, they do not sorrow as others who have no hope. Their loved one may have died prior to the Lord's coming, but hope was not lost. Just as Christ rose from the dead, they too would rise as He comes and calls for the church.
- We live in a time where many are searching for a means of comfort and stability. The believer has a hope that is beyond this world. When our loved ones die in Christ, hope is not gone. The hope and assurance of their resurrection in Christ is real and certain.

B. Words of Confidence (14-15) – The apostle goes on to further assure them with the confidence that they possess in Christ. If they believe that Christ is risen from the dead, [V.14](#), and surely they did, then they ought to believe that those who slept, or had died in Christ, would too rise from the dead. [1 Cor.15:20 – But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.](#)

- He continues to assure their confidence in [V.15](#). Those who had died in Christ were not left without hope. They would not be left in the ground and forsaken at the rapture. [Those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.](#) This is an interesting thought. The word [prevent](#) means “*to come before, to precede.*” To the comfort of the church, Paul declares that the living at the rapture will not take precedence over the dead in Christ or gain advantage over them. Those who have died in Christ will in no way be inferior to the living at His coming! All those who have been born again will be included! [1 Cor. 15:19 – If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.](#) [1 Cor.2:9 – 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.](#)

I. A Stirring Reminder (13-15)

II. The Savior's Return (16a) – [For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God:](#) Here we find much truth and confidence in the coming of our Lord.

A. His Presentation – My what a blessing we find in this verse. The Lord himself shall descend from heaven. It won't be one like Him; it won't be Michael the archangel; it won't be one of the prophets or apostles; it will be Jesus Himself coming for His bride! [Acts 1:11 – Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? **this same Jesus,** which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.](#) The One who bore our sin and shame, bled and died upon the cross, was buried and rose again, this same Jesus will step out on the clouds and call for the church!

- It is interesting to note, Jewish history reveals that a bridegroom would first complete a place for the newly-wed couple to live at the father's house prior to the wedding. Upon completion of the home, he would return for the bride, take her home, and the marriage ceremony would begin. **John 14:1-3 – Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. [2] 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. [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.** The Bridegroom will one day come for His bride!

B. His Proclamation (16a) – For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: When the Lord returns, it won't be a somber, quiet affair. He will return with a **shout: a stimulating cry or a loud summons. It has the idea of the master of a ship giving orders to the rowers or a commander addressing his soldiers. The Savior will come and deliver the summons for the church to come up hither!** **John 5:25 – Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.**

- He will come with **the voice of the archangel and the trump of God.** The heavens will declare His coming for the church. The **trump of God** will sound as the Lord proclaims the Victor's shout! This is quite significant. We can look to the Old Testament for some insight into the trumpet. There were four occasions upon which the trumpet was blown.

1. **To Proclaim Victory** - Victory was won at Calvary.
2. **To Call an Assembly** – It will be time for the saints to assemble.
3. **To Announce a Warning** – With the rapture of the church, judgment will soon come.
4. **To Call the Troops to Battle** – After the Tribulation, the Lord will return to defeat Satan and the forces of evil.

I. A Stirring Reminder (13-15)

II. The Savior's Return (16a)

III. A Sovereign Removal (16b-17) – In closing Paul addresses the sovereign removal of all believers as the Lord returns for His own. Notice:

A. The Resurrection (16b) – **And the dead in Christ shall rise first.** When the Lord returns with a shout, all of the sainted dead will hear His voice and come forth out of the grave. The bodies that have been committed to the ground will be resurrected and created a new glorified body.

- This is the hope that Paul spoke of. Those who have died in Christ will rise first. Cemeteries all around the world will burst open as the graves release their dead.

B. The Rapture (17) – Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Isn't that a comforting and amazing thought? Immediately following the resurrection of the dead, those who are alive and remain on the earth, who have placed their faith in Christ, will be caught up, snatched away, raptured out, to meet the Lord in the air! 1 Cor.15:51-52 – 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.

- Have you ever stopped to consider the chaos and confusion that will create here upon the earth. All the babies, gone! Most of the children, gone! Husbands and wives, missing from their homes and jobs! Hospital and nursing home beds, empty, patients missing! Crowded malls and auditoriums, suddenly missing many of their occupants! Automobiles, trains, buses, and airplanes continuing on their journey with no one to guide them! It will be a reality when the Lord comes for the church.

C. The Reunion (17) – We will be caught up with all of the saints who have gone before. All of the loved ones that we have stood beside the graveside and wept who were saved in Christ, we will meet them in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. No longer will we be separated from them. What a glorious reunion in the air.

- The most important reunion will be as we see our blessed Redeemer for the first time. We have met Him in salvation, but we have never beheld His face. We will see Him as He is and spend all of eternity in His glorious presence! We will begin one eternal day with Christ!

1 Thes.4:18 – Wherefore comfort one another with these words. The believers at Thessalonica may have had their doubts, but Paul offered words of comfort. Each time they read or considered these words, they found comfort and assurance.

It has been a couple thousand years since Paul was inspired to pen these words, but they still bring comfort to our hearts today. This life is not all there is for the child of God. Hope does not end with the grave. Our Lord is coming again and it may be much sooner than we think.

As we close tonight, I have to ask if all is well with your soul. Do you know Christ as your personal Savior? All of the saved, but only the saved will be included in the rapture. Have you made your preparation to go?