

Solid Rock Christian Church Manassas, Virginia

Bible Study - September 30, 2021

Prepared & Presented by: Pastor James G. Austin, Jr., PhD, D.Min

Title: "Words of Comfort While We Wait"

Subtitle: "The Rapture of The Church"

Scripture Reference: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

I. Introduction

A. I would imagine that most of you after reading the title of this study, have immediately asked yourself, "After we wait for what?" However, if you just hold on for a little while, the answer will be forthcoming.

B. Many people dislike waiting for most things, and they grow impatient when things are not done rather quickly. Additionally, some people allow their impatient attitude to drive them into a state of panic or even anger. This condition may be called the "**microwave oven**" condition or the "**hurry up syndrome.**" You probably know someone like this, those who might say - "I've got to have what I want, now!"

C. It must be acknowledged that sometimes, even those who are patient, may experience weakness while waiting for something to take place or the results of something to come through.

D. When your strength, be it mentally, physically, or both, start to diminish while you are waiting, remember the words of the prophet Isaiah recorded in Isaiah 40:31 - "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

E. For those who have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and have received the wonderful gift of salvation, the next

great prophetic event on God's time clock is the Rapture of the Church.

Comment: This is the answer to that probable very first question you may have had after reading the title of this lesson.

F. Having said that, let's now dig into our target Scripture passages with eager anticipation that the Rapture could take place, even while we are studying this lesson. Therefore, as a television news commentator likes to say - "Let's get after it."

II. Background and Context

A. The Apostle Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, had visited the Macedonian port city of Thessalonica on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-14). This was the second place that the gospel was preached in Europe, Philippi being the first.

B. After departing Thessalonica for Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to encourage the believers and then return back to him and report on the condition of the church.

C. Timothy rejoined Paul in Corinth (1 Thess. 3:6) where the two Thessalonian Letters were written. Timothy's report back to Paul contained the following information: (1) Good news concerning the faith and love of the Thessalonians, (2) They would always remember Paul, and (3) They had a great desire to see Paul, Silas, and Timothy again, just as much as the three of them desired to see the Thessalonians.

D. In light of Timothy's wonderful report, it was relayed to Paul that the believers in Thessalonica wanted to know, what happens to Christians who die before the return of the Lord? Paul answers that question in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

III. Exposition [Part I]

A. Before we go any further, let me first tell you that the word "**Rapture**" is not found in our targeted verses for this study. I also

what you to know that the word "**Rapture**" is not found in the Scriptures.

B. So now you're asking yourself, why then are you teaching us something that is not in the Scriptures? Stand by and listen. The word **Rapture** is not in the Scriptures, but the event is, and if you will bear with me, it will all be made clear.

C. First, the definition of the term **Rapture**. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is the phrase "**caught up**." In the Greek the word for the expression "**caught up**" is "harpazo," meaning "**to seize**."

D. The Latin Vulgate (the 14th Century translation of the Bible) rendered the phrase "**caught up**" by the Latin verb "**Raptus**." Hence the word "**Rapture**." The word implies an immediate translation of believers, including the change of their bodies to a glorified state. Stand by for more on this.

E. The certainty of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis for our confidence in a future resurrection. The Rapture ("catching up") of the true Church (i.e., all believers in Jesus Christ) is the next great event in the redemptive plan and purpose of God.

F. I want to state very clearly and to let you know that if you are not in Christ (i.e., you do not have a personal relationship with Him), you will **NOT** be a part of the Rapture of the Church.

G. That statement solicits another question - What will happen to me if I miss the Rapture? I will also answer that question a little later in this lesson. (See 2 Thess. 2:1-12)

IV. Exposition [Part II] - A Seed Picture of The Rapture

A. We serve a wonderful and marvelous God and He very often provides for us a preview (or a seed picture) of things that He will do in the future.

B. In Genesis Chapter 5, which I will refer to as "The Grave Yard Chapter" because of the repetitive phrase "and he died," we notice an exception to this principle with regard to Enoch, the son

of Jared (Gen. 5:18), and the exception of Enoch's death in Genesis 5:23-24.

"And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years. And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." (Genesis 5:23-24)

C. We know that because of the sin of Adam (the first man and the forerunner of the entire human race), Romans 5:12 says - "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all man, for that all have sinned:"

D. As a result of Adam's sin, we all have a divine appointment with death - "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:" (Hebrews 9:27)

E. Even so, Enoch never experienced physical death. Why? Hebrews 11:5 provides us with the answer, and it says - **"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; AND WAS NOT FOUND, BECAUSE GOD HAD TRANSLATED HIM: for before his translation, he had this testimony, that he pleased God."**

F. Please continue to read and listen carefully. Enoch's translation by God is a **"seed picture"** for those of us in this Dispensation of Grace in which we are now living, (and those who have died) and have exercised a saving faith in Jesus Christ. We too will one day be translated (**caught up**) to be with the Lord.

G. Did you notice the testimony that Enoch had before his translation? The scripture says, **"he pleased God."** Enoch's walk and talk with God had to be one of faith. So, listen to Hebrews 11:6 which says - "But without faith it is impossible to please him (i.e., God): for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

H. Remember what I mentioned previously, we all have a divine appointment with death? Well, by the revelation from God, the

Apostle Paul's response to the concerns of the Thessalonian believers, lets us know that not every believer in Jesus Christ will keep that divine appointment of death. Some who are living will have an experience like Enoch, they will be "caught up." Keep reading and things will become even clearer.

V. Exposition [Part III] - Eschatological Misconceptions

A. 1 Thess. 4:13 - Paul now turns his attention to answering the concerns of the Thessalonian believers from the report that Timothy had brought back to him in Corinth.

B. Timothy reported to Paul good news of the Thessalonians' steadfastness and zeal in propagating the gospel (1 Thess. 3:6). Nevertheless, Timothy reported that there were ethical problems (1 Thess. 3:4-7), as well as some eschatological misconceptions.

Comment: Eschatology is a division of Systematic Theology concerning the Doctrine of Last Things. Eschatology is taken from the Greek word "eschatos" meaning "last" or "farthest."

C. 1 Thess. 4:13 - **"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope."**

Comment: First and foremost, I consider it essential that we study the topic of the **Rapture** because we do not want to be the church of the ignorant brethren.

D. Please continue to follow along. Paul does not want the Thessalonian believers to be uninformed (the meaning of the term "ignorant" in this passage), concerning their loved ones and friends who have died in the Lord.

E. Paul uses the term "**asleep**" in verse 13 and this word is used as a euphemism (i.e., an expression representing something else), and here it is used for death.

F. Paul understood that those Thessalonians who were still

living, were concerned about the state of those who had heard and believed the gospel, but they were now dead.

G. Paul also encouraged the Thessalonians not to be in sorrow as others are who have no hope.

H. The pagan world of Paul's day had no hope after death. A typical inscription on a grave demonstrates this fact:

I was not

I became

I am not

I care not

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

J. The believers in Thessalonica were concerned about their loved ones who had died, and Paul answered their questions. He based his encouragement and comfort on five fundamental facts.

1. **Revelation:** We Have God's Truth (1 Thess. 4:13-15)
2. **Return:** Christ is Coming Again (4:14-15)
3. **Resurrection:** The Christian Dead Will Rise (4:15-16)
4. **Rapture:** Living Believers Will Be Caught Up (4:17)
5. **Reunion:** Christians Will Forever Be With the Lord
(4: 17-18)

K. How can mortal man move beyond the grave and find assurance and peace for his own heart? In our modern world, scientists have investigated the experiences of people who claimed to have died and returned to life again. They have also studied occult phenomena, hoping to find a clue to the mystery of life after death.

L. Paul solved the problem when he wrote, " For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15).

M. As Christians we need not wonder about death or life after

death, because we have a revelation from God in His Word. Therefore, why substitute human speculation for divine revelation?

N. God gave Paul a special revelation concerning the resurrection and the return of Christ (see 1 Cor. 15:51-54). What Paul taught agreed with what Jesus taught (John 5:24-29; 11:21-27) and God's revelation is based on the historic fact of Christ's resurrection.

O. We need not fear death or the future (1 Cor. 15:12ff).

Points:

- (1) The authority of God's Word gives us the assurance and comfort we need.
- (2) Every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ should have hope; not only in this earthly life but also in the life that is promised after the transition from earth to glory!

VI. Exposition [Part IV] - The Return: Christ is Coming Again (1Thess. 4:14-15)

A. Paul related Christ's return to salvation (1 Thess. 1:9-10), service (1 Thess. 2:19-20), and stability (1 Thess. 3:11-13).

B. In these verses (4:14-15), Paul related the return of Christ to sorrow, and he showed how the doctrine of Christ's return can comfort the brokenhearted.

C. Paul applied the word *sleep* to those believers who died. Jesus used the same expression (John 11:11-13).

D. Vs 14 - In this verse, Paul gives those believers in Christ the assurance that because they (and also those of us who are believers), that even those "which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

E. Paul did not say that the soul went to sleep at death. He made it clear that the soul of the believer went to be with the Lord: "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (v 14).

F. Jesus cannot bring them when He returns unless they are with Him. It is not the soul that sleeps; it is the body.

G. The Bible definition of death is given in James 2:26a: "For as the body without the spirit is dead." At death the spirit leaves the body, and the body goes to sleep and no longer functions. The soul-spirit goes to be with the Lord if the person has trusted Jesus Christ. "Absent from the body, and ... present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

H. The fact of our Lord's return is comfort to us in bereavement, because we know that He will bring with Him His people who have "died in the Lord."

I. When will this event occur? Nobody knows, and it is wrong to set dates. The fact that Paul used the pronoun "we" in 1 Thess. 4:15 and 17 suggests that he expected to be alive when the Lord returned.

J. Theologians refer to this as the Doctrine of the Imminent Return of Christ. **Imminent** means that it can happen at any moment. As Christians, we do not look for signs, nor must any special events transpire before the Lord can return. These great events will take place "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:57).

K. Jesus Christ will return in the air, and this is where we shall meet Him (1 Thess. 4:17). Suddenly, millions of people will vanish. Will you be in that number?

Comment: The fact of our Lord's return is a comfort to our hearts.

VII. Exposition [Part V] - The Resurrection: The Christian Dead Will Rise (1 Thess. 4:15-16)

A. When Paul preached the doctrine of the resurrection to the Athenian philosophers, most of them mocked Him (Acts 17:32). To them, this was foolish and impossible.

B. When Jesus Christ returns in the air, He will issue the "shout of command" and the dead in Christ shall rise first (v 16).

C. Three unique sounds will be involved in this event: The Lord's shout, the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of the archangel.

Comment: Jesus Christ will give a "a shout of command" just as He did outside the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:43). Those in the graves shall hear His voice (John 5:28).

D. The Christian doctrine of the resurrection assures us that death is not the end; the grave is also not the end.

VIII. Exposition [Part VI] - The Rapture: Living Believers Will be Caught Up (v 17)

A. Millions of people will vanish instantly, and no doubt there will be chaos and great concern. Except for those who know the Bible's teaching about the Rapture, the world will wonder, what has happened?

IX. Exposition [Part VII] - Reunion: Christians Will be Forever With The Lord (Vv 17-18)

A. You and I shall meet the Lord in the air, in person, when He comes back for us. It will be a glorious meeting because we shall have glorified bodies.

B. The suffering that we endure today will be transformed into glory when our Lord returns (Romans 8:17-19; 2 Cor. 4:17-18).

C. It will be an everlasting meeting because we shall "forever be with the Lord." His promise in John 14:3 says: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

D. 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.5:18).

E. The Greek word ***bema***, which is translated "judgment seat," referred to the place where the Olympic judges awarded crowns to the winners. Our works will be judged, and rewards will be given (1 Cor. 3:9-15).

F. The judgment seat of Christ must not be confused with the Great White Throne Judgment described in Rev. 20:11-15.

G. We will not only meet our Lord Jesus Christ at the rapture,

but we will also be reunited with our believing friends and loved ones who have died. "Together with them" (v 17) is a great statement of encouragement.

Point: Death is the great separator, but Jesus Christ is the great reconciler.

X. Summary

A. Because of all the wonderful news about our Lord's return to rapture His people, when a loved one dies in Christ, and because you are also in Christ, let us do as Paul admonishes the believers in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 - "**Wherefore comfort one another with these words.**"

B. I pray that you now have a clear understanding of this lesson title and its content - **Words of Comfort While We Wait.**

It is once again interactive time. Please complete the following passages by filling in the blank spaces. As always, each passage is taken from the King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible.

"Behold, I show you a _____; We shall not all _____, but we shall all be _____, In a moment, in the _____ of an eye, at the last _____: for the _____ shall sound, and the dead shall be raised _____, and we shall be changed."

[1 Corinthians 15:51-52]

"In my _____ are many _____; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to _____ a place for you. And if I go and _____ a place for you, I will come _____, and _____ you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be _____."

[John 14:2,3]

"For now we see through a glass, _____; but then _____ to

_____ : Now I know in _____ ; but then shall I _____
even as also I am _____."

[1 Corinthians 13:12]

"For we must all appear before the _____ of
Christ; that every one may _____ the things _____ in
his body. _____ to that he hath done, whether it be
_____ or _____."

[2 Corinthians 5:10]

"And let us not be _____ in well doing; for in due
_____ we shall _____, if we _____ not."

[Galatians 6:9]

Thought Questions For Your Consideration

1. If you should die today, where would your soul go?
2. Do you have hope today?
3. Have you been comforted or troubled after having gone through this lesson?

I pray that you have been blessed from this study of the Rapture. As always, please feel free to share what you have gleaned with others.

Jude 3

Pastor Austin