

1 Thess. 4:13-18 THE CHRISTIAN'S GREATEST COMFORT

INTRO: 1 Thessalonians was written to a group of young believers. These people had only been saved for a few months and they were suffering intense persecution for their faith. Because they were so young in the Lord, they were confused about a number of matters, so Paul wrote to them to help them grow in their faith.

In this great book, Paul confronts their doubts; challenges them to a closer and cleaner walk with the Lord and He answers the questions they have about several areas of the faith. Among the topics Paul discusses is the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. The Thessalonians possessed some fears regarding the Lord's coming and Paul addresses those concerns in these verses. Paul lets them know that the coming of Jesus is not an event that should bring fear to the hearts of believers. He wants them to know that the return of Jesus Christ for His church is an event that should comfort the hearts of those who know the Lord.

The fact of our Lord's Second Coming should comfort our hearts as well. And I hope it does today as I preach on THE CHRISTIAN'S GREATEST COMFORT. Lets read...

1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18 *"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words."*

Notice...

1) THE RESURRECTION: **vv 13-14** Among the fears of the Thessalonians was that their departed loved ones had missed the second coming. They were afraid that their dead had missed the rapture and would not be raised again until after the Tribulation, or that their dead loved ones might be second-class citizens in Heaven. Paul gives them some much needed information about this matter. **v 13** *"do not be uninformed (ignorant) about those who sleep..."*

Death is not what we think it is. Paul calls it "sleep". This does not mean that the soul sleeps. That is a false doctrine. The word "sleep" is a euphemism for death. When we fall asleep at night, we lose consciousness, but we do not cease to exist. Those who die in Jesus lose their conscious presence in this world, but they do not cease to exist. The phrase in v 14, *"...will God bring with Jesus"*, makes it clear that they continue to exist with God in Heaven, (2 Cor. 5:1-8).

The metaphor here in v 14 of sleep is precious. *The phrase "those who have fallen asleep in Jesus"*, can be translated, *"them which Jesus puts to sleep"*. It is the image of a loving parent rocking a child to sleep. That is just what the Lord does. He comes for His Own, and gently rocks them to sleep. Death is merely the "departure" of the soul from this life into Heaven above.

I) THE RESURRECTION: vv 13-14 Where does our hope in the face of death come from? Two sources: the death of Christ on the cross and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

It's noteworthy to know that when the Bible speaks of the death of Jesus, it does not use the word "sleep". Jesus was not gently rocked to sleep; He endured the full force of death for His elect. When Jesus died, He endured the full wrath of God for our sins and He, by His death, took away forever the sting of death for His saints.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57 *"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Not only does His death give us hope, so does His resurrection. Because Jesus rose from the dead, all those who have their faith in Him will rise again also, (1 Cor. 15:12-23). Because Jesus died and rose again, we need not fear death or the judgment of God. God has accepted Jesus as our ransom and in Him we are delivered from sin, wrath, death and judgment, **Romans 3:26; 4:25** *"He did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus...He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."*

V 15 tells us that those who are still alive when Jesus comes will not "prevent them which are asleep". The word "prevent" means "to precede". In other words, when the Lord comes for His people, the living saints will not receive preferential treatment. Those who are alive will not stand in the way of the Lord's ministry to the dead! Those who have died in faith will not miss out on the Rapture of the church.

To die in Jesus is not to miss out on anything. To die in Jesus means that you get to enter His presence before the rest of us. It means that you will wait with Him until He returns for the rest of His people. That is a comforting word!

II) THE RAPTURE: vv 16-17a *"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."*

These verses talk about the Rapture of the church. Some people don't understand or they simply struggle with this doctrine of scripture, but Paul was certainly looking for the imminent return of the Lord Jesus in His day.

Some completely reject the doctrine of the Rapture say, "Well, the word Rapture isn't in the Bible." They are right, but the word "grandfather" isn't in there, yet we believe in them, don't we? The word "trinity" is not in there either, but if you reject that one, you will go to Hell. The word "rapture" translates the Latin word "raptio or raptus". It is a word that means "to seize for oneself." The word "rapture" is the Latin translation of the Greek word "harpazo", which is translated in v 17 as "caught up".

Paul tells us that those who are alive when the rapture comes will be "caught up". This phrase comes from a word that refers to "a strong, irresistible and violent act". It literally means, "To seize by force, to carry off by force, to claim for oneself eagerly." In the rapture, the Lord Jesus will claim His bride by force! He will take from the clutches of Satan that which belongs to Him, you can count on it!

I) THE RESURRECTION: vv 13-14

II) THE RAPTURE: vv 16-17a CONTINUED How will this event take place?

We are told that Jesus Himself will come in the clouds above this earth. He will shout, the archangel will lift his voice and there will be a blast from a trumpet. Let's look at these events for a moment.

There Will Be A Shout - v 16 *"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God..."*

This refers to a military command. Jesus is calling the hosts of Heaven to assemble for military action against the domain of the enemy: the air -

Ephesians 2:2 *"Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience:"*

The air is the domain of the devil. Jesus will invade the devil's very territory, stop there and call His Bride to come up and meet Him. This is a clear demonstration of our Lord's power over Satan!

Look at it.. v 17 *"After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."*

Of course, this shout has another emphasis. Jesus promised that there would come a day when the dead would hear His voice. It was this shout that was heard by Lazarus, even in death that brought him back to life.

There Will Be A Trumpet - v 16b *"...with the trumpet call of God..."* Throughout Jewish history, the trumpet was used for many different reasons.

To announce the feasts - Numbers 10:10

To announce various celebrations - 2 Samuel 6:15

To announce a sacred assembly - Leviticus 23:24

To sound an alarm during a time of war - Numbers 10:9

To assemble a crowd - Numbers 10:2; Judges 6:34

To make an announcement - 1 Samuel 13:3; 2 Samuel 15:10; 1 Kings 1:34

To notify the people that it was time to break camp and move – Numbers 10:2

There seems to be a two-fold purpose here:

To assemble the people of God.

To call them to move out!

When Paul talks about the Rapture of the church, he uses the word "we". Who is he talking about? Who will get to go in the Rapture? He mentions two groups: "The dead in Christ" and "We which are alive and remain". In both cases, he is referring to believers, or those who are saved by the grace of God.

The Rapture is not for everybody. The Rapture is for those who are in a personal, faith relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. A magnet only attracts things with a similar nature. Jesus is only coming for those who possess His nature. This nature is given at the "new birth". Praise God that is a comforting word!

I) THE RESURRECTION: vv 13-14

II) THE RAPTURE: vv 16-17a

III) THE REUNION: vv 17b-18 *“After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. and so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.”*

Paul tells us that we will be “caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.” This verse reminds us that the day of our Rapture will also be the day of our reunion. Our reunion will be two-fold on that day.

We will meet those who have gone before us in death – Spouses, children, parents and loved ones will meet again in the clouds above this earth. That meeting will be far different than our partings. Our partings here are marked by sadness and fear of an unknown future. These verses take the fear out of the future. The Lord tells us that we can be confident that we will meet our loved ones again. And, when we do, they, and we, will be far different than the last time we met.

We will meet the Lord also – Do you comprehend what Paul is saying? One day, you and I will either be raised from the dead or raptured. Either way, we will be changed in a “moment, in a twinkling of an eye.” On that glorious day, we will look on the Lord who died for us on the cross. The One Who loved us so much that He left Heaven above and endured countless sufferings to redeem us. We will meet the One Who conquered death, Hell and the grave. We will meet the One Who loved us in spite of our sins.

I don't know about you, but that cranks my tractor! It stirs my heart to know that one day, whether I leave here by the clouds or by the clods, I will stand completed in His image in His presence!

Paul says, v 17b *“and so shall we ever be with the Lord”*. Jesus is what will make Heaven Heaven. Imagine what it will be like when we see Him face to face! Imagine what it will be like to hear His voice. Imagine what it will be like to feel His touch. Imagine what it will be like to be able to bow at His feet and thank Him for the cross, the blood, the empty tomb, the Bible, the Holy Ghost, the church, the blessings of life, His presence, and all of the countless other great things He does for us.

v 18 tells us to *“comfort one another with these words.”* Does the thought of the Lord's coming comfort your heart? It sure does mine. Paul is telling us to remind one another that this life with all its pains, sorrows and problems is merely a temporary existence. He tells us to find our hope, our comfort and our encouragement in the coming of Jesus.

Some of you are walking through tight places today. Let me just remind you that the Lord is coming! Jesus is coming and not a single thing that plagues you here will follow you there!

That comforts my heart today. How about you?

Are you fearful when you think of His coming? Come tell Him about it.