

Being Snatched Away
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
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INTRODUCTION

1. I want to invite you to take God's Word and turn with me to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 as we continue in our short series on prophecy.
2. For the last two weeks we have looked at Revelation chapter six and examined the six seals that are opened by Jesus.
3. We said that these six seals parallel perfectly with what Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24 concerning "the sign of [His] coming, and of the end of the age" (v.3).
4. This period, which is referred to as the seventh week of Daniel, is ushered in, according to Daniel 9:27, when the Antichrist signs a treaty with Israel.
5. This will mark this period which will be divided into two divisions of 3 ½ year periods.
6. The first division is called "The beginning of birth pangs" and encompasses the first three seals.
7. The second division encompasses the next three seals and is referred to by Jesus as "the great tribulation."
8. The seventh seal, which is opened in Revelation chapter eight, is the Day of the Lord's wrath.
9. After the sixth seals and prior to the opening of the seventh,

the church will be raptured.

10. Revelation 7:9-17 records the rapture of the church when it says, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; 10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." 13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" 14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 "They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."
11. As we consider this subject this morning, I want us to look at 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.
12. Here we find Paul's teaching on the rapture.
13. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

14. We are introduced to the fourth mention of the return of Jesus in this letter.
15. The first three being mentioned in 1:10; 2:19; 3:13.
16. Paul is answering a question the Thessalonians had about their loved ones who had died before the return of Christ.
17. “Even though Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica was brief, it is clear the people had come to believe in and hope for the reality of their Savior’s return” (The MacArthur Study Bible).
18. Their question seems to be “What happens to the Christians who die before Jesus’ return?”
19. Paul answers that question in vv.13-18 by first telling them, *do not be ignorant*.

I. Do Not Be Ignorant (v.13)

Paul begins by saying, “We do not want you to be ignorant.”

The AV has “I do not” but “all the oldest manuscripts and versions have ‘we’ not ‘I’” (JFB, Vincent).

The term “ignorant” (agnoeo, pres.act.inf.) means “to be uninformed due to a lack of information or knowledge, to lack understanding...It seems always to refer back to something that has happened and to which attention is called to correct a misunderstanding or to relieve anxiety” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, pp.187-188).

Paul uses this phrase in Romans 1:13; 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1; 2 Corinthians 1:8.

Each time he uses this phrase, he intends to correct his audiences lack of understanding.

In 1 Thessalonians, he want to correct the Thessalonians understanding:

A. Concerning Those Who Have Died in Christ (v.13a)

1. The phrase “those who have fallen asleep” “did not originate with Christianity. It was a common metaphor among the Jews and was current even among believers” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, p.188).
2. The term “Asleep” (koimaomai), used of “sleep” (Mat.28:13), and of the death of the body (Jn.11:11 - Lazarus). Here it is “a euphemism for death” (Martin).

“There is nothing in the context to indicate that Paul used the word here in any way other than the conventional fashion” (D. Michael Martin, The New American Commentary).

The term indicates the restful effect of death for the child of God and points to its temporary nature.

Some have tried to use this passage to teach the erroneous doctrine “soul-sleep” but this false doctrine cannot be pressed here. Paul’s point is in reference to the body not the soul. Besides “soul-sleep” offers no hope in light of Scripture. Nor is it a biblical teaching but rather false teaching.

- a) In Philippians 1:23, Paul said, “But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better.”
- b) In 2 Corinthians 5:8 he said, “We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

He wouldn’t have said any of this if “soul-sleep” was a biblical teaching. Also how could this offer any hope to someone who is grieving over a loved one as is the case here?

In the second part of verse 13, Paul tells the Thessalonians that their misinformation was connected to their present sorrow. So he also wants to inform them:

- B. Lest You Have Continual Sorrow (v.13b)

1. They were already grieving

“Sorrow” Gr.lupeo (Pres.pass.subj.), means, “their ignorance was the cause for their sorrow.” The verb means to “grieve, to be said, to be distressed.”

“There is a normal sorrow that accompanies the death of a loved one, caused by the pain of separation and loneliness. Jesus grieved over the death of Lazarus (John 11:33, 35), and Paul exhorted the Romans to "weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). However, the apostle did not have that kind of grief in mind here, but grief like the rest who have no hope. In Ephesians 2:12 Paul described unbelievers as "having no hope and without God in the world." There is an awful, terrifying, hopeless finality for unbelievers when a loved one dies, a sorrow unmitigated by any hope of reunion. Commenting on the hopeless despair of unbelievers in the ancient world.

William Barclay writes, “In the face of death the pagan world stood in despair. They met it with grim resignation and bleak hopelessness. Aeschylus wrote, "Once a man dies there is no resurrection." Theocritus wrote, "There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope." Catullus wrote, "When once our brief light sets, there is one perpetual night through which we must sleep." On their tombstones grim epitaphs were carved. "I was not; I became; I am not; I care not.””(The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, rev. ed. [Louisville: Westminster, 1975], 203; Cited by John MacArthur, 1 & 2 Thessalonians).

2. They were grieving like those who have no hope

This phrase identifies unbelievers. They are seen as those who have no hope.

- a) Isa.57:20-21 - “But the wicked are like the tossing sea, For it cannot be quiet, And its waters toss up refuse and mud. 21 ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”
- b) Job 15:20-26 - “The wicked man writhes in pain all his days, And numbered are the years stored up for the ruthless. 21 "Sounds of terror are in his ears; While at peace the destroyer comes upon him. 22 "He does not believe that he will return from darkness, And he is destined for the sword. 23 "He wanders about for food, saying, 'Where is it?' He knows that a day of darkness is at hand. 24 "Distress and anguish terrify him, They overpower him like a king ready for the attack, 25 Because he has stretched out his hand against God And conducts himself arrogantly against the Almighty. 26 "He rushes headlong at Him With his massive shield.”

Paul continues in verses 14-15 to correct their misunderstanding concerning their loved one by saying:

II. God Will Resurrect the Dead in Christ (vv.14-15)

Paul says, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.”

A. Because of Christ's Resurrection (v.14)

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again”

“For” introduces the reason why the readers are not to sorrow for their dead. The historical facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus are the guarantee concerning the future of the believing dead. Christian faith and hope are anchored in history” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonians Epistles*, p.191).

1. Paul states this as a recognized truth (v.14a)

If does not imply doubt and uncertainty. It is a condition of reality and might well be translated “since.”

2. The Bible teaches Christ's death and resurrection as the great major premise of the Christian faith – They are the sure foundation of Christian hope

“The two facts must be kept together. Paul bases his gospel not on the cross taken in isolation, but on the cross as followed by and interpreted by the Resurrection.”

a) “Jesus died” asserts the past historical event

Jesus' experience of death as our Redeemer has significance for our own experience. “Death was not final in His case, neither will it be in ours. It is not said that Jesus “fell asleep” but rather that He died. He experienced death, the result of sin, in all its grim horror. But His death brought the death of death; in dying as our sin-bearer He transformed death for

believers into sleep with a future awakening” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, p.192).

- b) Jesus “rose again” is also a past historical event

Both verbs – *died* and *arose* are in the active voice. “To have used the passives would have meant that He was acted upon by others. The active voice depicts Him as voluntarily laying down His life and taking it up again (Jn.10:17-18). Christian faith embraces as its Savior this Jesus, who voluntarily died and rose again” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, p.192).

- (1) In 1 Corinthians 15:20 Paul says, “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”

“‘Firstfruits’ speaks of the first installment of harvest to eternal life, in which Christ’s resurrection will precipitate and guarantee that all of the saints who have died will be resurrected also” (The MacArthur Study Bible).

- (2) Jesus said to Martha in John 11:25-26, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”

- (3) Peter begins his first letter by saying in 1 Peter 1:3-5, “Blessed be the God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ”

3. Because Jesus arose so will His followers (v.14b)

“Even so **God will bring with Him** those who have fallen asleep in Jesus” (v.14b).

- a) Jude 1:14 says, “Behold, the Lord comes **with ten thousands of His saints**” (NKJV).
- b) 1 Thess.3:11-13 says, “Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; 13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus **with all His saints.**”

All these verses indicate two things: (1) When a believer dies He immediately goes into the presence of Jesus, not soul-sleep, and (2) They will be given glorified bodies.

If Jesus did not actually arise from the grave our Christian hope has no justification. But He did rise

just as He said He would and He gave the promise that those who believe will be raised at the last day “to the resurrection of life.”

- c) Jesus said in John 5:28-29 - “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, 29 and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment. ”

- d) In John 6:39-44, He said, “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. 40 "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." 41 Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." 42 They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. 44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”

God will resurrect the dead in Christ because of Christ’s resurrection and...

B. Because of God’s Word (v.15a)

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord”

“For” introduces the authority for the statement just made. It was based upon a revelation from the Lord

1. This verse indicates the character of the revelation of verse 14

- a) What Paul just stated was “by the word of the Lord” – this indicates the source of the revelation

It was revelation made in connection with a communication from the mouth of the Lord.

It should read, “For this we say to you *in* the Word of the Lord.”

- b) “You” is in the emphatic position and stresses that the revealed truth now being spoken is given in the special interest of the readers

2. The second part of verse 15 provides the corrective for their sorrowing (v.15b)

He says, “That we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.”

“The revelation that the living will not have any advantage over the dead at the return of Christ makes any further feeling of sorrow for the dead wholly unjustified. The two classes of believers at the Lord’s return, those that are still alive and those that have died, will unitedly share the same destiny” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, p.196).

- a) Paul says that we have no advantage over those who have died in the Lord
 - (1) They are immediately in His presence
 - (2) We are still here in these earthly bodies
 - (3) You see the play of words – “we who are alive and remain” versus “those who are asleep”

- b) And then he says we will “not precede those who have fallen asleep”

“Precede” Gr.phthano, “to go before”
(Rienecker)

In verses 16-17, continuing with the corrective for their sorrowing, he specifically details the events of the rapture.

He says:

III. Jesus Will Return (vv.16-17)

He begins with another “For” but this one (a different Greek word) could be better translated ‘because’ (hoti).

This “justifies the preceding statement by a fuller description of the Lord’s return” (Hiebert).

A. He Will Personally Return for His Own (v.16)

1. He will “descend from heaven”

“He will not merely send His angelic deputies to call the saints; He will return physically for them in His glorified body” (Hiebert).

- a) John 14:3 - “If I go and prepare a place for you, ***I will come again and receive you to Myself***, that where I am, there you may be also.”
- b) The two angels revealed at His ascension in Acts 1:9-11 that “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven” (v.11).
- c) Mat.24:30 says, “And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.”
- d) Rev.1:7 - “BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.”

2. He will summons those in the graves

“The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout”

“The noun rendered *shout* means ‘a shout of command’ and implies authority and urgency” (Hiebert).

- a) John 5:25-29 - “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26 "For just as the Father

has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; 27 and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. 28 "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, 29 and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment."

- b) When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, John 11:43-44 says, "He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

3. The archangel will sound

"With the voice of an archangel."

- a) "voice" Gr.phone, means, "a sound"
- b) "archangel" (archangelos), used only here and in Jude 9 where it is used of Michael

"The voice of the archangel" "may denote a vocal utterance by the archangel or a sound or tone produced by him, namely, with the trumpet" (Hiebert).

Mat.24:31 says, "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the

other.”

4. The trumpet will sound

“And with the trumpet of God.”

“Trumpet” Gr.salpinx, “a trumpet”

“In ancient Israel, as in many ancient lands, the trumpet was used to announce important convocations” (John MacArthur, Matthew 24-28, p.58).

- a) A trumpet was blown to gather Israel at Mt. Sinai to receive the law (Ex.19:13,16,19)
- b) A trumpet was blown at the beginning of war times (Jos.6:5,20)
- c) A trumpet was blown as a sign of victory over Israel’s enemies (Judg.3:27)
- d) Rev.1:10-11 - “I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

5. The dead in Christ will rise

“And the dead in Christ will rise first”

1 Cor.15:51-52 summarizes it this way: “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will

all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

If you will notice in verse 17, this is where we get the apostles teaching of the rapture of the church.

B. He Will Rapture His Church (v.17)

“Then we who are alive and remain will be *caught up* together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.”

The Latin word “rapturo” is where we get the word “rapture.” The word itself does not occur in the Bible but the concept does.

1. It is defined as the catching away

“Caught up” Gr.harpazo, “to snatch or catch away”

- a) This word is used of Philip being snatched away by the Spirit - Acts 8:39

“When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord *snatched* Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.”

- b) It is also used of Paul being caught up to the third heaven

2 Cor.12:2 says, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know,

God knows—such a man was *caught up* to the third heaven.”

Verse 4 says he was “*caught up* into Paradise.”

c) It “denotes a sudden forcible seizure, an irresistible act of catching away, due to divine activity” (Hiebert).

2. It is described as being caught up in the clouds

“Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.”

IV. Find Comfort in These Words (v.18)

A. Their Comfort is Based on the Content of vv.14-17

1. They have no advantage over those who already died because they are now with Jesus
2. Jesus is coming personally for His own
3. When He comes He will raise the dead first and then we how are a alive and remain will be caught up together to meet them in the clouds

B. The Rapture Replaces the Sorrow

CONCLUSION

1. As we have already seen in our last two studies of Revelation chapter six, the timing for the rapture of the church is after the

sixth seal prior to the opening of the seventh which is the Day of the Lord's wrath.

2. In Matthew 24:8 Jesus says the first 3 seals are “the beginning of sorrows” or “birth pangs.”
3. Seals 4-6 is called the “great tribulation” (Mat.24:9, 21).
4. Matthew 24:29-31 says, “But immediately *after the tribulation of those days* THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 "And *then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky*, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and *they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY* with power and great glory. 31 "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.”
5. This is the rapture. It follows best the chronology of Matthew 24, Revelation 6, and 1 Thessalonians 4-5.
6. So what is the next prophetic event on God's calendar? The signing of the treaty with Antichrist and Israel and then ushers in the 70th week of Daniel.
7. The church will experience the six seals in Revelation 6 and then be “caught up” or “snatched away” prior to the opening of the seventh.
8. What does all this mean for us now?
9. First it means there is coming a great persecution on the church—leading up to the arrival of Antichrist and one

experienced by the Antichrist.

10. Secondly, it means that Jesus is coming and you better prepare yourself to meet Him either in judgment or heavenly bliss.
11. I pray that you're ready and that you have turned from your sins to Christ for forgiveness.
12. If you haven't, turn to Him now.
13. Let's pray.