

# “A Word of Comfort & A Message of Hope”

1 Thess. 4:13-18

## Introduction

- The pagan world in Paul’s day had no hope of life after death. Listen to what a typical inscription on a grave would say: *“I was not; I became; I am not; I care not.”*
- There were some philosophers, such as Socrates who tried to prove happiness after death, but the pagan world had no word of assurance.
- Even though Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica was brief, it is clear that the people had come to believe in and hope for the reality of their Savior’s return.
- They were living in expectation of that coming, and they were eagerly awaiting the return of Christ.
- But they were more than just a little concerned, maybe even a little agitated; about some things that were happening to them that they thought might affect their participation in Christ’s return.
- They knew that Christ’s return was the climactic event in redemptive history and they didn’t want to miss it.
- The major question they had was “What happens to the Christians who die before He comes? Do they miss His return?”
- Clearly, they had an imminent view of Christ’s return and Paul had left the impression it could happen in their lifetime.
- Their confusion came as they were being persecuted, which was an experience that they thought that they were going to be delivered from by the Lord’s return.
- **Read Scripture (4:13-18)**
- **Pray**
- This morning, in this short paragraph of Scripture, Paul answers their questions. And he bases his encouragement and comfort on five fundamental truths.

- And the first truth is that we have...

## I                      **A Comfort of Hope**

(4:13)

- **Read Scripture**
- This entire passage is probably THE primary passage that is used in regards to the rapture of the church.
- However, while the rapture is discussed in this passage, the primary reason Paul wrote these verses was to comfort the church at Thessalonica.
- The members of this church were sincerely and anxiously anticipating the Second Coming of Christ, but they were concerned about their loved one who had already died.
- That word “sleep” in vs. 13, or “asleep,” is Paul’s tender way of talking about the death of a Christian.
- It describes the dead body, but not the soul of the Christian. [*Paul made it clear in 2 Corinthians 5:8 that as Christians, “...to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”*]
- Jesus’ words to the thief on the cross also convey that assurance when our Savior said, “*Today you will be with me in paradise.*”
- The church members, in their ignorance, had come to the conclusion that those who die would miss the Lord’s return and they were grieved over the thought of their absence.
- Therefore, the departure of a loved one brought great anguish to their souls. But Paul was very gently letting them know that there was no reason to sorrow when a Christian brother or sister died.
- Paul is suggesting here that death is like sleep for believers, not for the soul, but for the body. Why? Because first of all, it is a temporary state.
- There is coming a time when our souls will be reunited with our bodies (**Read vs. 16**).
- But not only is it a temporary state, it will be a restful state. Our bodies have been going, going, and going, like the energizer rabbit ever since we were born. But for a short time, our earthly bodies will rest, even as our spirits are with the Lord.
- Thirdly, this sleep for the Christian is a state from which we will awaken. We will be joined together again with our bodies, only this time they will be glorified bodies.

- We will be changed instantly, in the twinkling of an eye. And Paul is telling the Thessalonian church not to worry, your dead loved ones haven't missed anything.
- The last part of vs. 13 says, "...lest you sorrow as others who have no hope."
- It is ok to cry for someone that has passed away. It is natural for us to miss someone when they are gone.
- When Jesus saw how His friends grieved when Lazarus died, the Bible says that Jesus wept.
- Psalm 116:15 says, "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*"
- The people in the world, who are not in Christ, when they die without Christ, the Bible says they have no hope. But those that die as born again believers in Jesus Christ have a hope for tomorrow; and this hope is very comforting.
- And so we see a comfort of hope. But that is not all. Paul also shared with them the...

## II                    **Comfort of a Return**

(4:14)

- **Read vs. 14**
- That word "if" in verse 14 is probably better translated "since." "*For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again...*"
- The certainty of the resurrection of Jesus is the basis for our confidence in a future resurrection. As Jesus died and rose, so also will those who die believing in Him rise again so they can be taken to heaven with the Lord.
- These verses describe the rapture of the church, which takes place when Jesus comes to collect His redeemed and take them back to heaven. This includes those who have previously died, or those who "sleep." They, too, will be gathered and taken back to heaven with the Lord.
- Paul begins vs. 15 by saying, "*For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord...*" Most Bible commentators believe that what Paul was about to speak was new revelation.
- Paul was about to solve a "mystery," that had not previously been explained. In John 14:1-3, Jesus told them that He was going to prepare a place for them."
- But that was all these people knew. No other details were known at this point, which is probably why the Thessalonian Christians were concerned about their dearly departed loved ones.

- I know that there are some who believe that we as Christians will not be raptured away before the period of tribulation, but that we will suffer through the tribulation before Jesus comes again.
- There are some Bible teachers, and pastors that believe this today. However, I want you to know what I believe, and I want you to know why I believe it.
- I personally believe that the rapture of the true church (genuine believers), is the next great event in the redemptive plan and purpose of God.
- I do not believe that we as Christians will be required to live through the time of the tribulation with Satan's anti-Christ.
- There are two reasons why I hold this view: the first reason is because of my interpretation of Scripture.
- **In Revelation 3:10**, Jesus said, *"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."*
- **Read 1 Thess. 1:6-10**
- **John 14:3** says, *"And 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."*
- **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**, *"Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."*
- When God snatches us away, we will instantly receive our glorified bodies. And we won't have to worry about not having Medicare part B. Because there will be no more sickness and no more sorrow, and no more disease.
- The time of the rapture cannot be conclusively determined from today's passage alone.
- But when you take any of these verses that speak of the rapture of the church, and if you compare them to other texts concerning Christ's coming judgment after the 7-year period of tribulation, then you can see that any time the rapture of the church is mentioned or alluded to, there is no mention of any of the judgments.
- Therefore, the rapture of the church could and should be seen as a separate event from the return of Christ with His church at the end of the tribulation to set up His millennial reign.
- The second reason that I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture is this: during the tribulation period, a lot of people think the devil is going to be showing off his power here on earth.
- Well I've got news for them, during the tribulation period God is going to be pouring out His wrath on this earth.

- His wrath is building right now. And if you want to know what is going to happen you just read Revelation 6 and following; but don't read it just before you got to bed at night.
- Revelation 6 describes the most catastrophic events in the history of the world, but these events do not originate from the anti-Christ, they originate from Almighty God as He pours out His wrath upon sinful man.
- Let me ask you something; can you imagine a young man, on the night before his wedding, going to where his bride-to-be lives, dragging her out of the house, and beating her half to death? And then saying, 'ok honey, I'll see you at the chapel tomorrow.'
- No. I cannot imagine that. I do not believe that the Lord will allow His bride to be beaten half to death; and the Church is the Bride of Christ. And for that reason, along with my interpretation of these Scriptures, I believe that is why we won't be here. We will have been taken away.
- And so this morning we have seen: a comfort of hope; and we have seen a comfort of returning loved ones.
- But thirdly this morning, I want you to see the...

### **III Comfort of a Resurrection**

(4:15-16)

- **Read Scripture**
- When Paul preached the doctrine of the resurrection to the Athenian philosophers, most of them mocked him.
- To the Greeks, being rid of the body was their great hope. Why would any man want to have his body resurrected?
- Besides that, how could his body be resurrected, when the elements of the body would decay and become a part of the earth? To them, the doctrine of resurrection was foolish and impossible.
- In Paul's day, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead at the end of time, but the Sadducees did not.
- Jesus taught the doctrine of the resurrection and silenced the Sadducees. The Old Testament Scriptures taught this doctrine; and the fact that Jesus arose from the dead proves that there is a resurrection.
- But there will be three unique sounds at the rapture: the Lord's shout, the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of the archangel.
- Jesus Christ will give a shout of command, maybe just as He did outside the tomb of Lazarus. And when He does, those in the graves will hear His voice.

- 1 Corinthians 15:52 also relates His return to the sound of a trumpet. The Jewish people were familiar with trumpets, because trumpets were used to declare war, or to announce special times or seasons, or to gather the people for a journey.
- In Exodus 19, just before God gave the Law to Israel, the event was preceded by a trumpet blast.
- But why the voice of an archangel? The only archangel mentioned in Scripture is Michael (Jude 9). But according to Daniel 10:13, there is more than one archangel; so we cannot be for sure that it will be Michael's voice.
- At any rate, the angelic hosts will share in the victory shout when Jesus Christ comes.
- The doctrine of the resurrection assures us that death is not the end. The grave is not the end. The body sleeps for a while, but the soul goes to be with the Lord (Phil. 1:20-24).
- When the Lord returns, He will bring the soul with Him, will raise the body to glory, and will unite the body and soul into one being to share His glory forever.
- And this leads us to the fourth fact that should give us assurance and comfort. And that is the...

## IV            **Comfort of the Rapture**

(4:17a)

- **Read Scripture**
- The actual word "rapture" is not used in this section, but that is the literal rendering of "caught up."
- The Latin word *rapto* means "to seize, to carry off." It is from this word that we get our English word "rapture."
- Will the unsaved world be aware of what is going on? Will they hear the shout, the voice, and the trumpet?
- I don't know anyone who would state for certain, but, if you go back and read 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, you will see that it will be over in "the twinkling of an eye."
- And since the shout, the trumpet, and the voice are for God's people, there is no reason to believe that the unsaved masses will hear them.
- It will probably be just as the song says, "Man and wife asleep in bed, she hears a noise and turns her head; he's gone. I wish we'd all been ready. Two men climbing up a hill; one disappears and one left standing still. I wish we'd all been ready. There's no time to change your mind; the Son has come, and you've been left behind."
- But our fifth and final fact of assurance and comfort today is the...

## V

### Comfort of a Reunion

(4:17b-18)

- **Read Scripture**
- If you are in Christ, then you and I are going to meet the Lord in the air, in person, when He comes for us.
- The Greek word translated “meet” in vs. 17, carries the idea of meeting a “very important person,” or “a person of royalty.”
- We have walked with Christ by faith here on earth, but in the air we shall “see Him as He is” and I just love the way vs. 17 ends: “...thus we shall always be with the Lord.”
- It will be a glorious meeting partly because we will have our glorified bodies.
- It will be an everlasting meeting because we will forever be with the Lord.
- Death is a fact of life. The only way we can escape death is to be alive when Jesus returns. Death is not an accident; it is an appointment.
- Heb. 9:27 says, “*It is appointed unto man once to die, but after this, the judgment.*”
- If you should die today, your body will probably go to the cemetery. But where will your soul go?
- A genuine follower of Christ has a wonderful assurance and hope, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and His promised return.
  
- Do you have that hope today?
- Do you know which way you are headed?
  
- **Pray**