

The Rapture

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[0:00] Okay, that didn't turn off. There it goes. All right. We're in 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 13-18, and we'll be getting to that shortly.

And it's going to be awesome and wonderful, and you're really, really going to be excited about that. But only if you can get excited about giving me the power.

There it is. All right. That was fun.

Okay, key idea. Believers have hope. We have hope, we have hope, we have hope. That's different than other people, and it's going to come out loud and clear today. All right. When we walk out of here, our life, our actions, that which we are and what we do is because we have hope.

So, but, oh, I preach early, okay? And the reason why I preach early is later on in the service, we have a time for people to ask questions.

[1:14] So if there's something today that comes up that you have questions about, you won't be unusual. It's free to ask questions later on. That's why we preach early, okay? So, no, the service isn't almost over, Dick. Sit back down.

All right. All right, here we go. I have a question for you. What do we have in common with an orphan girl, a groundhog, and a vending machine?

Wait, wait, wait, wait. We'll make it easier. You ready? What if I told you that the orphan girl's name was Annie, that the groundhog's name was Puxatawneyville, and that the vending machine was Zoltar the fortune teller?

Duh. All right. We all look to and have hope in the future, right? Little Annie, tomorrow, tomorrow, right?

The groundhog day, he predicts the future, and Zoltar the fortune teller looks into the future. It was great in my head. It was awesome. You guys reacted much better than my wife who started throwing kitchen implements at me.

[2:28] It doesn't work well. I'm just kidding. She just wanted to do that. But if you've got your Bibles, hopefully you're open now to 1 Thessalonians 4. We're going to be continuing our study of this.

And what does hope have to do with the future? Everything. Without our hope, our future would be unsettling.

It would be disturbing. It would leave us with anxiety. But because we have a sure and certain hope, our future is not troubling.

It might not always be fun. There might be things ahead of us that are less than desirable, but our ultimate future, our ultimate hope is secure, and we can boldly live in light of that.

So here we go. 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 13 through 18. That's on the other page. Here we go. But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep.

[3:43] Help me out. What does asleep mean? Dead. Very good. We're all on the same page. We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are dead, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

Now, you remember, the Apostle Paul had come to the church, and he had started the church. He hadn't come to the... He'd come to Thessalonica and started a church. And because everything went so well there, and he had to leave in such an expeditious manner, that he didn't get to teach him everything he wanted to teach him.

And so there were some things that hadn't been fully covered. Like, what happens when you die? The Lord's return.

There's some things that were, you know... And he had taught them that we were waiting for the Lord's return, and it should be any day. And so then they had these people that died, and they were wondering, did God not love them enough for them to wait, you know, to live until the return? And so there was questions. So the Apostle Paul is writing to people whom he knows and has taught, and he's dealing with some very specific questions.

[4:55] Number one, what about Aunt Mary who died yesterday? Does she get to see Jesus? And that's why he says, We don't want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord.

[6:02] Therefore, encourage one another with these words. The first time I read through that this week in getting ready for today, the word we jumped out at me.

We is a beautiful concept. You guys remember the Lone Ranger? And all the Indians had surrounded him and they were coming at him.

And the Lone Ranger looked to his faithful sidekick, Tonto, what shall we do? And Tonto looked at him and said, What we, white men? But Paul says, we are together.

And you know what? It's been darn near 2,000 years. But we are together. Just as much as those who have fallen asleep are still part of the body of God, just as much as Paul was part of the body of Christ.

So we today are together. We are. And so as I'm sitting in my office, I was just, my heart was warmed with that. The solidarity, the community, the fellowship that is there.

[7:16] But that's another thing. I'm going to cover three things today. I'm going to cover number one, what this passage teaches. And that's going to be really specific.

That's going to be, Thus saith the word of God. Then I'm going to say what we believe about it. Which thus, we believe about what the Bible says.

It's going to be pretty close, but it's not going to be a one for one like the earlier one. There's some things in here that we believe that are not, they're not unbiblical, but they're not biblically specified. Did that make sense? There are things that we believe about the Bible, but the Bible doesn't necessarily say. That's a tough one.

We'll get to that. And then we're going to go, what we can do, how we can live our lives. Let's start with the easy one. What the Bible actually says.

[8:14] What is taught? Got your Bible open to verse 14. It says, For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, all in favor say aye.

Motion passes. Jesus Christ, second person of the deity, left heaven, took upon himself humanity, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, and then died a substitutionary death on the cross.

Having died without sin, he was raised to life again, and he was witnessed not only by people, but then he was ascended into the clouds.

All right? And it says that just as we believe that, even so through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Specifically, there is life after death. The physical death does not end our existence. There are people in this world who believe that physical death is the end.

[9:21] That when you die, that's it, there's nothing, you go back to the great, whatever of nothing. No, that's not it. We, individually, are unique creations of God who have a point where we begin and we live in one form or another forever because he has created us with an eternal spirit.

Now there's, I said that wrong, didn't I? Eternal soul.

That was the word I was looking for, soul. Eternal soul. Sorry about that. We have body, soul, and spirit. In the Garden of Eden, when man fell from grace, that part of him died, the spirit part.

And that is when God, when Jesus says, you must be born again, that spirit must be reborn. The body, God graciously gives us these days, about 70 to 80 years, in which to live and to turn to him so that we can have that spiritual life.

But the soul goes on forever. The physical death doesn't impact the soul. God created us. Though we have a starting point, we go forever from there.

[10:56] There is life after death. Take a look in the Gospel of John, chapter 5. Gospel of John, chapter 5, verses 28 and 29, puts it this way.

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in tombs will hear his voice and come out.

Those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. This is not teaching salvation by works. This is teaching that there's life after death and that that life after death will be based upon what we do here on this earth, mainly our relationship with God.

If you take a look at Revelation chapter 20, this is an interesting read. The first, what is it? Five verses and then 11 through 15.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his right hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan.

[12:14] And bound him for a thousand years and threw him into the pit and shut it and sealed it over him so that he might not deceive the nations any longer until the thousand years were ended.

After that, he must be released for a little while. Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed.

And I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God and those who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their forehead or their hands.

They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.

Then if we skip down to verse 11, this is after the thousand years. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it.

[13:16] From his presence, earth and sky fled away and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne and books were opened.

Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them and they were judged, each of them, according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. We see here two resurrections.

There's a resurrection before the thousand-year millennial kingdom. And then afterwards, there will be another resurrection before the judgment.

[14:21] I've got, if you look on the back of your notes, you're going to see this really cool diagram. We'll go over that in a minute, but it's got that in it. But the point is this, there is life after death.

Do not be deceived. Okay? Now, back in Thessalonians, chapter 4, you're all still looking at the picture going, that's awesome! I didn't draw it.

The Lord will return. bless you twice. I thought she was going to be greedy and go for a third one there. But take a look in chapter 4 of 1 Thessalonians, verses 15 and 16.

It says this, For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead will rise in Christ first.

[15:34] There is a day coming where Jesus Christ is coming back. Now, in this particular passage, it's talking about what's called the rapture.

The rapture is not the second coming of Christ. How come I say that? Because in this passage there's no talking about Jesus coming down and staying.

There's no speaking of His feet landing. There's no discussion of Him establishing everything. Notice what it says down here.

Verse 17, We who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with Him. That's, I guess, the Latin or whatever. That's where the idea of rapture is, to be caught up together.

The idea is, He comes down, gets close enough for us to hear the voice of command, the loud shout, the trumpet, and we join Him.

[16:41] It's just that the dead people get a head start. I'm not saying they get a head start because they're dead and they need it, but that's just the way it goes. Wow, tough crowd today.

The Lord will return and we will join Him. This is what this passage is teaching.

And you've got to understand, who's Paul writing to? He's writing to those believers in Thessalonica who are wondering about the loved ones that have died.

And Paul teaches them, says, look, look, look, look. Death isn't the end. There's life afterwards. The Lord's coming back and the church, we are going to join and be with Him forever.

Those are the facts. Death is not the final state. The Lord is coming back and we're going to be with Him. Those are the absolute facts.

[17:41] Which brings us to what we believe about them. Number one, the church is not part of prophetic history. The church is not part of prophetic history.

In Galatians chapter 1, Paul the Apostle speaks about how he knows what he knows. I mean, he wrote the vast majority of the New Testament.

How come he did that? Is it because he was just really, really good at school and he did such a great job studying that it was really super smart? I mean, all that's true. But no, in Galatians chapter 1, he says that he had a specific revelation from God.

that God pulled him aside and spoke to him. And in his teaching, if I look at my notes, it should say, shout loud, because we haven't done enough homework to put it all out at once, but I'm not going to do that.

Look, the Apostle Paul was raised up in the Jewish tradition. We know that. We know that after the stoning of Stephen, he was on his way to Damascus when God confronted him with a great light and a voice from heaven.

[19:11] We know that he was blinded and he went on to Damascus where he received his sight and was called by God, according to Galatians chapter 1, for a time being out into the wilderness where he spent three years being taught by Jesus.

We believe that in that time, Paul was taught everything we need to know about the church today because God was doing something that was not prophesied.

What had been prophesied was when Adam and Eve in the garden sinned, in Genesis chapter 3, 15, God said, I will send my son and he will pay the penalty for sin.

He will redeem you. Right? Right? Crushed head, crushed heel, look it up. And we can go from Genesis chapter 1 and we can follow through biblical history and we can see God calling Abraham. We can see Isaac. We can see Jacob. We can see Joseph. We can see how God has worked all through history picking Abraham and his family, picking Jacob and his descendants, and we get all the way down to Jesus.

[20:23] because God promised that the Savior would come. God promised the Savior would come through Abraham, that God promised Isaac through Jacob, that it would come down through the line of David and at last we get to Jesus.

All of prophetic history is following that and the Jewish people were chosen by God to be a particular nation and so all we come to the cross where Christ dies and the fulfillment of all the promises happens.

And you would think if they didn't realize that he was God beforehand, they'd figured out when he rose from the dead, it didn't happen. And the apostles came up to him and they said, hey, look, this is Jesus.

He's God's son. And they rejected him. And finally, in Acts chapter 8, 7, Stephen is confronting the religious leaders and he goes through all of salvific history and they end up rejecting not only Stephen but God and his plan.

And so God says, time out. Israel, I'm setting you aside for a bit and I'm going to do something different. And he opens what we call this time, this dispensation of grace, the time for the church where there's no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, where everybody has free access to God through faith.

[21:50] That's what the apostle Paul was all about. And so the church is not following that stream of God's promise to the specific family, to the lineage, to the person of Jesus.

But because the nation of Israel rejected God, they're set aside for a time and God says, look, everybody, you've got access for a time. And the only prophecy that applies to the church today, we read right here in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, the rapture.

That's it. If you go through Israel's history, you don't prophesy this is going to happen, that's going to happen, prophecy, church, no. Our next mark on the calendar, our next date is the rapture.

We're not told when it's going to happen, but we're told it will happen. We, the church, are not part of that same prophetic history, meaning there aren't predictions made about the church.

Now, we believe that this rapture is going, because of that, we believe that the rapture is before the tribulation.

[23:04] Take a look in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 10. By the way, there is no Bible verse that says the rapture will happen when.

There's no Bible verse that says that it's going to happen before the tribulation, in the middle of the tribulation, after the tribulation. There's no Bible verse that says it happens on the third Tuesday of the fourth moon. There's none of that.

What we have to do is understand that God promised that this is going to happen. And then we, we look for Bible verses that help us to know what God's word says.

Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman needeth not to be ashamed. So, I say, the rapture happens before the tribulation. Now, let me tell you why. 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 10 says this, to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

The wrath to come. And if we turn to Revelation chapter 3, we find this.

[24:30] because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to those who dwell on the earth.

The idea is this, God is going to keep us from the wrath that is to come. And that we identify as the tribulation.

the tribulation impacts two different people groups and only two different people groups. You ready? First, it addresses the sin of the Jews and then it addresses the sin of the non-Jews.

That's only two people groups, but it kind of encompasses everybody, doesn't it? Ezekiel chapter 30 verse 7 and Ezekiel 38 14 through 23.

Jeremiah, God deals with the unbelief of Israel. Ezekiel, God deals with all those who don't believe in Him but aren't Jews. Alright, let's take a look at this picture.

[25:45] Church age. That's today. Today. Here's Christ in glory. This catching up or rapture of believers.

We see here the resurrection of believers. Notice it says believers, believers. That's because those who are dead in Christ get a head start. Those of us who remain, we go up.

Now, the tribulation is supposed to last seven years. You can take a look at Daniel for that. I'm not going to get into all of that today. Daniel's 70 weeks, 69 of which was completed with Christ on the cross.

There's one week remaining, the week of God's wrath. That's what the tribulation is. So, we've got this time right here where the church age, which is outside of prophetic history, the tribulation is part of prophetic history.

It is Daniel's 70th week. It's broken into half. Three and a half years, three and a half years. Three and a half years are the tribulation. The second three and a half are the great tribulation.

[26:53] But that's part of prophetic history, and nowhere in the Bible is the body of Christ mentioned in that. At the end of that, we have the second coming of Christ.

And notice that the believers in Christ are coming together, as we read in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, that we will be with the Lord forevermore. So if he goes to heaven, we go hang out in heaven. If he's got a job to do on earth, we go hang out with him on earth. If he goes to the 7-11, I hope we get our Slurpees, all right, because we're going to be with him. Followed by the millennium, which is the thousand-year reign of Christ.

The millennium reign has been promised to the Jews that they will have a thousand years of dominance. This is what is going to happen. followed by, this is that general resurrection that we read about in Revelation, where everybody was before the throne, and the books were opened, and you were judged according to what you did in the books, and if your name was found in the book of life, good on you.

If not, bad on you. That happens here, and then we have the new heaven and the new earth. Okay? There's the rapture.

[28:12] That's what 1 Thessalonians 4 is talking about, is that point right there. And here's the thing. Did anybody read a date in there?

You sure? So when can it happen? I know when I was going to school, I prayed that it would happen before every major test, right?

Dear God, I didn't study. Can I please have the rapture now? There's nothing in the way. The rapture could happen at any time.

Only God knows when. But I do know that things are going downhill in our nation, in our world. people are not people.

I know that evil is becoming more aggressive. I know that the consequences of being a believer, I see believers attacked.

[29:17] I see from Charlie Cook to the Christians in Nigeria. We are the one people group that's okay to attack.

Do you know the only group that it's more okay to attack than Christians in general? White male Christians. It just, that's the way it is.

We live in a fallen world. world. So here's the apostle Paul writing to a church that he started, to people that he knew and loved, the people that were getting up every day and they were living for Christ, but they had some questions because some of their loved ones had died.

And they weren't certain what was going to happen to them. They were, they had anxiety. They were worried. There was, and so Paul was writing to comfort them, to teach them, to show them the truth.

And he says, look, I don't want you to grieve like everybody else. Let me, let me tell you what's going to happen. We know that Jesus Christ lived and died and rose again.

[30:35] And because of that, and because of what he has told me, we know that he's coming again and he's going to take the church home and those who are dead are going to go first. And we who are still alive, we're going to join them in the air.

And then we're going to be with God forevermore. So it's okay. Relax. Be comforted. That's what he wrote. So, and, and, and looking at this is, this is what I believe that it means.

It means that today is the church age, the rapture is going to happen, and then the clock will start going, but what about today? Man, okay, that's great.

Think, what about today? What to do? Number one, you can grieve without despair.

As I was studying this, I mean, I've read Acts, I don't know how many times, it's been at least once. But I read Acts chapter 8, verse 2, and I was, it stood out to me like it never had before.

[31:45] In Acts chapter 7, we have Stephen, this devoted man of God, this man beloved of the saints, this man who was filled with the Spirit, and who spoke so well to the Jewish nation and the Jewish leaders, and was stoned to death because they turned their back on God.

And the other believers, look at chapter 8, begins with Paul, or Saul, approved of Stephen's execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria except the apostles. And then verse 2, devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.

It is okay to feel bad when you lose someone you love. I've seen people that are so spiritual, oh, they're with Jesus, I don't feel bad. No! When somebody you love and who has been part of your heart and your life is taken from you, it's okay to mourn.

We need to come alongside somebody who has lost a loved one, and not tell them, buck up, Christian, don't you trust Jesus? No, that's wrong. You need to understand.

[33:08] When we lose a family member or a friend, come alongside, man, this hurts. It's not that we've lost our trust in God.

It's the reality of the fact that it hurts to live in a sin-filled world. And there are times when our heart is broken. I mean, I can look around this room and I know who you lost, I know who you lost, I know who you, I helped bury this person, I helped bury that person.

I could name about 60 people that I buried in the first five years that I was the pastor here. I was crushed in spirit. It was heartbreaking.

It's taken me a long time to get over that. And not because I don't trust God, but because I'm a human being. And God created us to have relationships.

It's okay to mourn.! But not as an unbeliever. But not as those without hope.

[34:12] Because I have hope that those that I know trusted Jesus. I will join them in His presence. Dirty buggers got a head start.

I'm going to have to run faster. I am looking forward to the day when I can actually sit down with my dad and talk about our walk with the Lord.

I am looking forward to that day. I can't wait to sit down with Bryce Townley and say, Hey, I get it now.

This is what you were trying to teach me. Or, you got that one wrong, buddy, and I was right. I'm looking forward to that day. But I tell you, I wish he was here and we could have that conversation now.

It is okay to grieve, but we don't grieve without hope. Alright? Number one, we grieve, but without despair.

[35:14] Number two, now, I hate to do this, but I am really piggybacking off last week's sermon on this one. Okay? We can live sacrificial lives because our future is secure.

Look, we don't have to worry about whatever's coming down the road because God's got a plan. That doesn't mean we're stupid and all that. We went over this last week. But we can lay it all out on the line for God.

We can willingly sacrifice for God because He's got an eternal plan for us. We could read, what's that passage, I go to prepare a place for you.

If it were not so, I would have told you. God has a retirement plan for Christians and it's out of this world is a very trite way of putting it. It's fun, though. But here's the thing, we can live today sacrificially.

What's the worst thing that could happen to a Christian? It's not death. Not by a long shot.

[36:24] The worst thing that could happen to a Christian. I'm not getting into that. We can live a sacrificial life because our future is secure. Remember, remember what I said jumped out at me when I read this passage the first time this week?

I was sitting there and I felt an enduring, comforting connection to the Apostle Paul and to all who trust in Jesus Christ.

the we, the fact that we are in this together, the fact that God has a plan for Christians, the fact that God knows tomorrow, the fact that He has a plan for it.

We need to encourage one another in this. Look, as darn near perfect as Mrs. James is, there are days when I need to encourage her.

All the rest of the time she's trying to buck me up and keep me going, but there's, once in a while I might have to encourage her. There's times when you have a bad day and you need somebody to

come alongside, put their arm around you and say, you are loved by God.

[37:54] He has got a plan for you. I know that today sucks. I know that today is hard, but God loves you. The rest of the time you need to be going out that and doing that to other believers.

You see, you see them stuck in the misery and the mire of this life. You come alongside them and you say, God loves you. Now, I know that this church does this perfectly all the time and we never have any mistakes in that, right?

We can keep wishing that was so. We can keep practicing to make that so. So, here we go. Let me wrap this up.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, the Apostle Paul is writing to people that he knew and loved who were having a bit of a quandary because they didn't know what was coming.

And he told them, he said, look, there's life after death. The Lord is coming back and we're going to spend eternity with him. So, we can boldly live our lives for Christ because he's got it in hand.

[38:58] And so, my encouragement for you today, boldly live for the Lord. Take the risk. Share the gospel. Tell somebody about your faith in Jesus.

See another brother and encourage another brother. See a member of the church. Give them a hug. Tell them that they're loved. If they need a hand, give a hand because we are the body of Christ and we are in this together.

Let's pray. Father, Thank you.