

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

**The Coming of Christ for His Church
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Part 2**

We have begun examining 1 Thess. 4:13-18. Let us once again read this passage. **“But we do not want you to be uninformed brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. (14) 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, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. (17) Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. (18) Therefore comfort one another with these words.** Hopefully as we mature in Christ, we will have a growing anticipation of this glorious event. There is a day coming when we will be caught up out of this world to meet the Lord and enjoy fellowship with Him forever. And this is the hope of the church. That is why in **1 Thessalonian. 1:10** we see Paul describing the Thessalonian church as **“waiting for Jesus.”**

What happens to believers who are in fact waiting for Jesus to catch them up or to rapture them? They certainly will not put down roots in this world. If we hope to avoid becoming unduly attached to this present world then we must continue to look upward. Not using our hope as an excuse to live irresponsibly but certainly as a way to keep a healthy balance between the temporal and eternal.

The catching up of the church is not the hope of Israel. This is the hope of the church. Israel is looking for Christ to come to the earth to establish His earthly rule. We are looking for Christ to come and to catch us up to be with Him forever. Hopefully everyone one of us have this wonderful anticipation. But what happens if we die before this event happens? Will we as God’s children miss out? Will we have a lesser experience than those who are alive when Christ comes to catch up His church? These are the questions that Paul is seeking to answer in the passage that we have read this morning. For us it is largely academic but for the Thessalonian believers it would appear that this question was much more than an academic question.

It is largely academic for us because we know that there are many Christians who have died without experiencing the rapture. So it doesn’t alarm us if more die without experiencing the rapture. But for the Thessalonians, who were all brand new believers, it would appear that they had never anticipated that any of their brothers or sisters in Christ would die before this wonderful event. They all shared equally in the confident expectation, that while living, Jesus was going to come and catch them up to Himself. But this did not happen, certain Thessalonian believers did die and those that were left behind were troubled. So Paul is going to give them some very important information in order to comfort them.

This is why we read in **V. 13 “But we do not want you to be uninformed brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.”**

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They are presently uninformed but not for long. In **VV. 14-18** Paul is going to share new information with them that will give them answers to their questions and these answers will in fact prove very comforting. What information does he share with them? We will be looking at three different aspects of the rapture that will be very important for them as well as ourselves to know.

THE PARTICIPANTS

First of all we need to look at the participants. Certainly the Thessalonians knew that living Christians at the time of the rapture would participate. This was their hope. This is what the Thessalonian believers who were living in Thessalonica were “waiting” for. They understood this but their question involved those who had died. Would they also participate in some way? He does not keep them waiting very long. Look at **VV. 14-15** **“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, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.”** He is telling the Thessalonian church that those who were now asleep in Jesus would not miss out on this wonderful event.

Two weeks ago we made it very clear to you that when Paul refers to those who are sleeping he is referring to those who had died. Paul chooses the word asleep to emphasize the temporary quality of death in respect to the body. Though our bodies may be placed in the ground those bodies will wake up. And our resurrected bodies will then be joined with our spirits and enjoy full participation in the rapture.

If Christ were to come back this evening to catch us up to Himself in order to take us to heaven, I know that other believers that I have known and loved, but who have died will be there with me to participate in the rapture. If Christ were to come back this evening I know that my father-in-law Coy Maret though having died over 25 years ago will be there with us in his new resurrected glorified body. If Christ were to come back this evening to catch us up to Himself and to take us to the place that He has prepared for us I know that George Karlis would be there with us in his new resurrected glorified body. If Christ were to come back this evening to take us home Dick Paxman would be there with us in his new resurrected glorified body. If Christ were to come back this evening to take us home Erin Schultz will be there with us in her new resurrected glorified body. **THEY WILL NOT MISS OUT ON THIS WONDERFUL EVENT.**

Who will participate in the rapture? All those who are in Christ whether living or dead will participate in the rapture. **BUT THERE IS MORE INFORMATION.**

PLAN

Paul in **VV. 16-17** now gives us very specific detail concerning how this particular event is going to unfold. He is giving this detail in respect to the plan to make sure that the Thessalonians understand that their brother and sisters though present, were not going to have some kind of backseat status to those who were alive at the coming of Christ for His church.

Let us read these two verses **(16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first**

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(17)Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.” Clearly the dead in Christ at the rapture will have a very front and center involvement. They will in no way suffer any loss. To help us look at the unfolding plan of this event. We need to notice that there are three different sounds

The Lord’s shout

Look at **V. 16 “For the Lord Himself will come from heaven with a shout.”** Not an angel or a lot of angels but the Lord Himself will come with a shout. He is the bridegroom coming to get His bride in order to take her back to the home that he has prepared. Where is that home? It is heaven. This is where he has been. And it is there he has been preparing a place for us according to **John 14:1.**

Notice how he does this? He comes with a “shout” (KELEUSMA). He is calling the church to Himself. I do not know exactly what he shouts. But it might be very much like what he did in **John 11:43** at the tomb of Lazarus. Do you remember what the Bible said He did at the tomb of Lazarus? It tells us that Jesus **“cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus come forth.”** And what happened? It says, **“He who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”** At the rapture Jesus is coming for His church. And when he comes it says that he will come with a shout calling His church to Himself. But this is not all that we will hear. We will also hear the voice of the archangel.

The voice of the archangel

Look at **V. 16 “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel.** The only archangel who is named in the Bible is Michael (Jude 9) but according to Dan. 10:13, there is more than one archangel; so we cannot be sure that it will be Michael’s voice. At any rate, the angelic hosts will share in the victory shout when Jesus Christ comes. We are not done yet, there is another sound.

What I picture is something like this. Jesus Christ coming for His Church crying out with a loud voice for his church “Come forth.” And the archangel of God agreeing with this pronouncement. And representing all of the heavenly hosts saying “Amen!” But we are not done yet.

The sound of the trumpet

Look again at **V. 16 “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first.”** This trumpet that is referred to here we would have to assume would be the same trumpet that is referred to in **1 Cor. 15:50-52** as the **“last trumpet.”** Let us read that passage **“Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (51) Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 shall be changed.”** The reason why I mention this is because this trumpet is used by certain Bible teachers to place the time of the rapture either at or near the end of the tribulation or in the middle of the tribulation.

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What we need to keep in mind when the trumpet associated with the rapture is referred to as the “**last trumpet**” it does not mean that it has to be the last trumpet in respect to time but rather it could mean that last trumpet in terms of sequence. In other words the word “last” may signify that which concludes a program, but it is not necessarily the last trumpet that will ever be sounded. Inasmuch as the program for the church differs from that for Israel, each may be terminated by the blowing of a trumpet, properly called the “last trumpet.” The last trumpet for the church is blown at the time of the rapture. When will the last trumpet be blown for the nation of Israel? I believe that the “last trumpet” is sounded in respect to the nation of Israel in **Matt. 24:29-31** “**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.**” It is this last trumpet and what follows that ushers in the Messianic kingdom which will fulfill every promise made to Israel concerning its nation and its land.

If I am correct then it would seem that we might see very distinct differences therefore between these trumpet blasts considering they are sounding at different times and for different reasons. Do we see significant differences between the trumpet of 1 Thess 4 and Matthew 24. I believe that the answer is a definite, yes!

In Matthew we see that the trumpet is blown by angels. In 1 Thess. 4 we see the trumpet is blown by the Lord.

In Matthew we see that the angels having blown the trumpet gathering the Lord’s elect. In 1 Thess. 4 we see that the Lord Himself having blown the trumpet gathering the church to Himself.

In Matthew the context of Jesus statements are in response to questions by the disciples concerning the Messianic Kingdom and therefore an earthly hope. In 1 Thess. 4 the hope certainly would be consistent with the hope presented to Christ’s disciples in **John 14:1** which certainly would be a heavenly hope.

Why is this issue even significant? It is significant by virtue of the fact that if the Olivet discourse, which includes Matthew 24, is linked in some way to 1 Thess. 4 then it opens up the possibility of an overlapping of God’s programs for the nation of Israel and the church and therefore the possibility of a mid tribulational or post tribulational rapture. But hopefully on the basis of the “trumpets” we should see that this is not indicated. The “last trumpet” for the church sounds at the end of the church age just prior to the tribulation. And the “last trumpet” for the nation of Israel sounds forth right at the end of the tribulation just prior to the Messianic or Millennial Kingdom.

The passage indicates that there are two separate responses to the three sounds. Therefore when the Lord descends from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God then what happens?

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V. 16 tells us “**and the dead in Christ shall rise first.**” The first thing that happens is that the Christians who have died are resurrected. God’s plan for the church at the rapture involves a very prominent place for those who have died in Christ. It would appear that those who have died and whose spirits are already with him in glory when the rapture occurs will literally have a flying head start. So when the shout, and the voice, and the trumpet sound they will have already been joined with their resurrected bodies and then and only then the Christians who are alive are translated.

Paul certainly makes it clear to the Thessalonians that the dead will not lag behind. They are not second class citizens. This is such an important truth for the Thessalonians to understand that he repeats the basic thought again using different words in **V. 17** “**Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.**” At this moment in time our salvation will be complete, for our corrupted bodies have been redeemed.

The church is going to cross the finish line together. Those who have died, though will be just ahead of those who are living. This is the grand finale of our redemption.

PILLARS

What are the pillars of the rapture? Why can the church look forward to this event with confidence? How can we, who make up the church know that we will actually be a part of this wonderful event? Let us go back to **V. 14** “**For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even.**” The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus are the pillars of our confidence in the rapture of the church and the unfolding of the events associated with the rapture as Paul describes them in **V. 14-18.**

Let us know that just as assuredly as we know that Jesus died for our sins and was buried and on the third day rose again, be assured of this, that one day Jesus is going to come with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first and then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

I love these last words. “**Therefore comfort one another with these words.**” The Thessalonians wondered if those Christians who had died perhaps had missed out on the rapture. Or perhaps would not experience the full glory of the rapture. Paul writes this passages to assure them that this was not the case.

CONCLUSION

We may not this morning share the same grief that these Thessalonian Christians experienced. But even if this might be so it is not as if these truths cannot be comforting.

The thought of being caught up to Jesus along with all who those have placed their faith and trust in Christ since the very first day of the church is a very comforting thought in the midst of the complexities of this life and the frequent disappointment that accompany it.

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The thought of being caught up to Jesus along with all those who have placed their faith and trust in Christ since the very first day of the church and returning back to glory to the home that He has prepared for us is a very comforting thought in the midst of the stresses and difficulties that continue to press in upon us on a daily basis. The thought of being caught up to Jesus and returning with him to glory along with all those who have placed their faith and trust in Christ since the very first day of the church, to never again be separated from fellowship with Him is a very comforting thought.