

The Blessed Hope

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Thessalonians 4, 13, 18. But we do not 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. Therefore encourage one another with these words. Let's pray.

Father, we're just grateful that your Word declares truth. Your Word reveals mysteries that we could have never fathomed. Your word is understandable by the power of your Holy Spirit. And we just pray as we look at this passage, I know it's a controversial passage, a lot of different ideas about the Rapture, but I just pray that you would help us to look at it from what you say and God, that we'd somehow apply that to our lives. And again, Father, we're just grateful for those of us who are left, that we have that blessed hope of Christ coming back again and seeing him face to face.

And so, Lord, we pray as Jesus taught us to pray. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from

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evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen. You may be seated.

Many, if not most of you, know that I've been dealing with heart failure, congestive heart failure, for the last five or six years. And kind of adjust your physical approach to things. Medicine has helped a lot with that. Well, three weeks ago, I had a little turn for the worse. And where it went down worse than it was, thank God they're working on that and adjusting medications.

I share that, because when we face physical difficulty, especially a difficulty that might be long lasting or even could possibly result in death, we start thinking about things in a different way, don't we? We do. And I have And I'm not saying this because, oh, I need somebody to feel sorry for me. I have perfect peace, Perfect peace. I know that whether I live or die, I belong to the Lord.

If I live, it's more service. If I die, it's to be with Christ. And that's not a concern. I believe that he's got more for me to do. But it forces us to look at the topic of Jesus coming again.

And the Bible calls this the blessed hope. It's the hope that every Christian should have that when they leave this world, whether they're raptured out or whether they die and God brings them back with him when Christ comes, that is our hope. And so it just happens that it kind of coincides with the passage we're looking at today as we're working through the book of 1 Thessalonians. And I've already mentioned that this passage gives us the most complete detail about Christ's second coming. There's a lot of other passages that deal with that.

Matthew 24, Luke 13, 1 Corinthians 15, the rest of Thessalonica's Revelation. But this gives us the most concise, detailed account of what is going to happen at that time. I know that depending on your background, that many of us have a lot of different opinions about the Rapture, what's going to happen and how it's going to happen. I think all Christians believe it will happen, but there's a lot of different opinions as far as

the timing and those kinds of things. And I could share my opinion on that.

But we need to look at God's Word and see what it says. Okay, we're not trying to make this fit with my theology. We're trying to develop our theology by what the Word of God says. Many are guilty of what Martyn Lloyd Jones calls adding to what the Scriptures say, adding to what the Scriptures say instead of relying on Scripture alone. So God willing, we're going to look at the Second Coming, and not just today, because he goes into it in more detail in chapter five, and then he answers a lot of questions in Second Thessalonians, which we'll eventually get to.

As we look at this, I want you to see four Rs. Four Rs. Return, rapture, reunion and responsibility.

Return, rapture, reunion and responsibility. Before we look in detail at each One of these Rs, though, Paul is telling us why he's teaching about the Second coming in verse 13. If you'll look there, he says, but we do not want you to be uninformed brothers about those who are asleep that you may not grieve as others do, who have no hope. He doesn't want them to be uninformed. What does that imply?

They are uninformed. They don't understand this. Well, whether he didn't have the time to teach it while he was there, he was just there for a few weeks, or whether someone else came in and taught some other things we don't know. But he is implying that they're uninformed. He does not want them to be uninformed.

Whichever it is, they needed to know about Christ's return. And if they needed to know about Christ's return 2000 years ago, guess what we need to know about Christ's return. I guarantee you we're a lot closer today than they were 2000 years ago. Right? Everyone agree on that?

We don't know when Christ said that. No man knows the day or the hour, but we know it will happen. And so the reason we need to know about Christ's return not so that I can get the date right or I've got the right theory. He says the reason you need to know this is so we won't grieve like others who have no hope. That's his objective in sharing this.

Not to give us details about times and events and my theory or your theory, but so that we will not grieve, that we will be aware that Christ is going to come back to
There are three basic truths that every Christian has to hold on to. The first one is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, entered this world as a human God, man in the flesh. He came into the world to save you and I. The second thing we need to know and hold on to a basic truth is Jesus Christ died for our sins on the cross and was resurrected on the third day. There is no salvation.

There is no hope, apart from the fact that Jesus Christ died for your sins on the cross and that he was resurrected to show that he had overcome death. The third one though, is when we're looking at the day and it is Jesus is coming again. Jesus is coming again. Titus 2:13 tells us waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus is coming again.

And every true believer should have that in mind and be looking forward to that. And it will usher in when Christ comes back, it will usher in the blessed hope of living for eternity with God. No more pain, no more suffering, no more sickness, no more war, just with the Lord and unimaginable Joy. And if that isn't important to you as a Christian, then you have to stop and ask, well, am I a Christian? When you came to Christ, you came to a relationship with Him.

It's the idea that you want to spend eternity with Him. And so we're looking ahead to that. So with that in mind, let's look at some of these R's. The first R we see is Christ's return in verse 15. If you'll turn there 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. And the key word here is the word coming. That word in the Greek is Perusian. It was used to describe when a visiting dignitary would come to a city and the city would put out the red carpet and welcome them and let them know how much they thought of Him. The basic word means arrival, that he's come.

That word is used 16 times in the New Testament for the second coming, the coming of Jesus Christ. But we get the fullest teaching of it right here in this. And so a few things we need to know about the number one, it is what Jesus taught. It says a word from the Lord wasn't something that the Apostle Paul made up, or Peter or Paul, Peter or John. Somehow Jesus had taught about that.

I believe that's in Matthew chapter 24. If you want to get a good picture of Christ's return and the events that precede that and what happens, go to Matthew chapter 24, and it details Christ's second coming. So whatever Paul is teaching here, it's a word from the Lord. So it has to agree with what Christ said. Okay?

And that's important. Number two, there will be Christians alive when Jesus comes again. And we don't know how many, we don't know who, but there will be Christians alive. It talks about back in Matthew 24, many will fall away from the faith and many will be led astray, and the love of many will grow cold. And that's one of the reasons we need to know about the second coming of Christ, because those things can happen.

But it says, the one who endures to the end, the end, referring to when Christ comes, will be saved. That's the second Christians alive. Third, Christians who died before Christ return will come with him. Jesus is coming again. We'll see him in the clouds.

And it says he is bringing with him everyone who has died in the Lord. So if someone was a Christian, they were looking forward to return of Christ. But they died well. They will come with him when he comes down in the sky. I might mention that the Bible only mentions one coming.

Somehow we've been taught that there's two comings. And yet the word is not plural. It is singular, one coming. And so it says the Lord himself.

Make sure I'm in the right spot here.

Okay? So he will return. That leads to the second R. In verse 16 to 17, he says, 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'll always be with the Lord. So the second R is the word rapture. And that word is not in that passage. The word is caught up.

The Greek is harpazo, which means to seize or to snatch. The Latin Vulgate translated that word rapturo, which we get the word rapture from a bird of rapture. They seize their prey and they fly off. In the same way, we will be snatched or will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air just after the dead in Christ have risen again. I believe that every Christian should believe in the rapture.

You may have a different idea of when and how and all those things, but not if Christ said he is coming back and he is going to fulfill His Word. And we look forward to that. It's the details where we differ. And depending on what we've been taught and who taught it, we have different ideas of what it's going to be like. I think most of us have been taught that the second coming is a secret coming, that just the Christians are going to know about it.

They're gone. Everybody else is looking around and why'd that car go off the road? And why did that plane follow the sky? And all the things that we learned through some of the novels that we've read and left behind.

No one's getting left behind.

If you are a Christian and Christ comes back, you will be with the Lord in the air. Sometimes this left behind, it's almost like an evangelical purgatory. You get a second chance. You didn't put your faith in Jesus, but there'll be a second chance. And maybe you'll make it then.

This was first taught in 1830 at the Powers Court Prophecy Conference in England by a man, J.N. darby. Starred Plymouth Brethren. We don't know where he got it. People there said it was new, they hadn't heard it before.

Some accepted it, some didn't. And most of us familiar with this theory because of a novel, the Left behind series. How Many have Left Behind? Okay, an entertaining book, but not necessarily based on Scripture. I do not want to base my theology on a work of fiction.

So let's look at what this passage actually teaches about the Rapture. So first of all, we see that Jesus will descend from heaven visibly. Visibly. Back in Acts 1:9 11, Jesus ascended into the sky. The disciples were watching.

Two angels came by, and basically, what are you doing? And they said, he's going to come back in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. They watched him ascend and we will see him descend. It's visible. It says, he will come back in the same way as you saw him go.

Revelation 1:7 the apostle John declares, 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 wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. The same day that ushers you and I as Christians out of this world is going to usher in the wrath of God on the people who have rejected Jesus Christ, and there will be no hope for them.

He comes visibly second. He comes audibly. Go back to 1 Thessalonians 4:16. It says, 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 that's audible, something people will hear. You and I as Christians, will hear that we'll look up and we'll be with the Lord.

I believe that others who do not know the Lord will react in fear at this loud sound of Jesus Christ coming back together. And this is what's consistently taught in the scriptures. In Matthew 24:31 it says, he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds. And this word gather basically is the same thing as talking about the Rapture. He will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Over in 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 52, Paul says, Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed 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 all be changed. And again, we who know the Lord, we look forward to hearing this trumpet call. The trumpet was Used in the Old Testament for several things.

One, it would call people to an assembly. We've got some announcements to make. Everybody come in front of the tabernacle, they blow the trumpet. But it was also used as the declaration of war, that there's going to be a battle, and we've got to go out and fight this battle. And so we will instantly be with the Lord when we hear this.

But those on the earth, it says in Revelation chapter 6, they'll hide in the caves, hide us from the face of the Lamb, because they know it brings judgment on them. Those who don't know Christ will hear this sound and be filled with abject fear. I know what this is like, just a little bit. Every now and then over the years, we have heard this huge explosion at our house here on the beach, and we go, what in the world was that? And there were some munitions left on the beach or something.

They were exploded. And it really gets your attention, and you don't know what it is. And there's a fear. And I believe that's what's going to happen. For those who don't know Christ, who haven't given their life to him.

That brings us to the third R. And this is really the one I wanted to focus on, the one that's really hitting me, and that is reunion in verse 17. 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. And it gives us the idea of this great reunion in the sky, not just with the Lord, but with believers that we've known over our life.

I don't know about you, but there have been hundreds, maybe thousands of believers I've been involved with in my life who have died and gone on to be with the Lord, and we will meet in the air. I think that's what the Thessalonians were worried about, is, hey, we're waiting for Christ to come back. But while we're waiting, some people died. What's going to happen to them? Do they get to be a part of this great reunion in the sky?

Some commentators teach that they were afraid the dead in Christ would miss the Rapture, which they would if they'd already died or somehow be left behind. But that wasn't their concern. I believe their concern was, is we are looking forward to this time when we will be in the presence of the Lord and there will be such excitement and joy, and we want to know what's going to happen to those who have already died. Are they going to miss out on this? And of course, Paul is telling him, no, they're not.

They're going to be the first to rise. They come back with the Lord, but their bodies are reunited to them and they have their heavenly body. And going back to left behind. If you're left behind at the Rapture, I believe it means you're not saved, you have no hope. And all that's left is the wrath of God in your lives.

And we want to be careful there. And we'll be looking at that more detail because he goes into it in a deeper way. So the door closes when Jesus comes back. And so our responsibility is to be ready, be ready to meet the Lord in the air. And I can't even begin to imagine the joy among Christians when that trumpet sounds.

And we'll be instantly with the Lord together. The joy of seeing Christ our Savior, but the joy of seeing loved ones who are in the Lord. And can you imagine what it's going to be like seeing each other? And I just can't believe this. This is so amazing.

How could this ever happen? And it'll be a time of great joy. I believe nothing in this world compares with what God has prepared for us who love Him. Now. We experience that on an earthly level.

Thanksgiving's coming up, and that's my favorite holiday because all of the family comes back and we celebrate together, people we haven't seen, sometimes for a year or even more. And we catch up on each other's lives and how's it going? And I'm glad this, and I'm glad that, and have a great time together. Well, it won't even begin to compare with what it's going to be like when Christ comes back and we're going to be with him. And it's worth everything to prepare yourselves for that day, the joy of that day that brings us to the last R, and that's responsibility.

In verse 18, he says, Therefore, as a result of the fact that Christ is coming back, that the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive will meet them in the air. He says, therefore, encourage one another with those words. Encourage one another with those words. And sometimes we don't think about that. I don't need encouragement.

I'm doing fine. But I'll tell you, when someone's going through hard times and they're not sure how things are going to work out here on this earth, there's no greater encouragement that whatever happens, you will be with the Lord for All eternity. And we can thank God for that. And that's a responsibility we have as Christians to be encouraging others to keep our eyes on Christ, that he is coming back. And you have a lot of different opinions and different feelings, but the fact is he will come back.

And we need to remind ourselves of these things again. I go back to congestive heart failure. Nobody knows what's going to happen. Hopefully a lot of years left to serve the Lord. But I was looking at the statistics and there's a certain percentage of people who die from that.

And obviously that's the case. Well, guess what? If I die, that's great. Paul says for me, to live is Christ, to die is gain. If I don't die, more work to do and see people growing in Christ.

And that's what this whole purpose is, that we don't grieve as others do now. We grieve because we miss people and we should. Even Jesus grieved over Lazarus. But we don't grieve like other people who have no hope. Okay, yes, they died, and yes, we're sad and it hurts and all of that.

But our hope is eternal life. And Jesus Christ guaranteed that when he went to the cross and was resurrected for you and I. So let's encourage each other to keep our eyes on the Lord. Paul will be going into this in more detail as far as some of the events and the questions and those things. But I didn't want to go past what the Bible says.

I could teach my view, and I like to do that. And I could listen to your view, and I don't like to do that.

But that's really not the issue, isn't it? The issue is what does God say? What does the Bible say? And when we focus on that, it'll take care of a lot of the details. Let's pray.

Father, again, we thank you for the promise that we have in Jesus Christ that he is coming again, Lord, to catch us up, to snatch us, to be with him forever, to meet him in the air, to be with the Lord always. God. We can't even begin to comprehend a little bit what a joyous occasion that is going to be for those who have put their faith in Christ. God. I'm aware that there may be people here who have not put their faith in Christ.

And if that trumpet were to sound, that would be the worst sound they'd ever hear. It close the door on eternal life forever. I just pray that everyone would be thinking about this, would be making sure that they're ready whenever that will be. It could be any time. And, God, that we'd be living in a way that would glorify you while we wait.

In Christ's name, amen.