

LIVING IN LIGHT OF HIS COMING

Live in Hope

Week 4 Notes

1Thessalonians 4:13-18

I. Live Expectantly

There are 866 passage of Scripture dealing with end times. We believe the events, but we often disagree on how those events will unfold. Certainly, we want answers, but God has not given us every answer. He has, however, given us all He wants us to know.

The End Times is considered a secondary doctrine. Not that it is secondary in importance, but that there is room for differing interpretations that do not interfere with the purity of the doctrine of salvation. In other words, there is room for disagreement.

Because there is room for disagreement, it is not my objective to confuse you.. My goal is to work through the passage of Scripture in the spirit of the entire book/letter of 1 Thessalonians. While my goal is not to confuse you, it is defiantly my goal to encourage and persuade you to eagerly await His coming while we continue to live for Him here.

The Thessalonian Christians were experiencing persecution for their faith. It would be easy for a new Christian to become confused and discouraged. The Greek and Roman culture around them did not believe in an afterlife. Death was the absolute end. Any of the Greeks who did believe in an afterlife, believed it was a half-life with no joy and certainly no hope. The Christians had lost loved ones, and they were concerned that during the rapture of the church, these deceased loved ones would be at a disadvantage. Paul writes to encourage the church as well as address any confusion about end times teaching.

The theme of the letter seems to be 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10. The word "*waiting*" in verse 10 is an emphatic Greek word used only once in the New Testament. It means *to stay and wait, stressing an eagerness in the waiting*. The *waiting* of 1:10 points to Christ's coming in First Thessalonians 4:13-18. Scripture is clear. Jesus is coming for His own and we must look for it and be ready.

2 words to clarify as we begin.

1. **Rapture.** The word "rapture" is not in Scripture. It is derived from the Latin word/phrase for "*caught up*", found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. It means *to be suddenly, forcibly snatched up*. It is used to describe or designate the event that will occur when Christ appears.
2. **Coming.** This is the Paul's preferred word in 1 Thessalonians to describe the coming of Christ when He shall rapture His church. 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 3:13, 4:15 and 5:23 all use the Greek word *parousia* which was used *to designate the arrival of a ruler*. This coming of Christ is sometimes called The Day of Christ (Philippians 1:6), or The Second Advent, or the revealing of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:7). The coming of Christ in 1 Thessalonians 4 is Christ coming for His own.

Every generation of Christians has believed they would be alive when Christ returned, and yet 2000 years have passed and still—He has not returned. So, what is to be our mindset as we continue to wait?

1. God is not slow. 2 Peter 3:9 God is on His sovereign timetable. His plans will unfold in His way and His time.
2. While we wait, our attitude is not impatience but eagerness. 1Corinthians 1:7, Philippians 3:20, Hebrews 9:28, 1 Thessalonians 1:10
3. The coming of Christ is immanent. Everything is ready for the event to take place. It is sure. James 5:7-9
4. No matter when it occurs, the coming of Christ has bearing on our lives today.

“The fact that the glorified, holy, Son of God could step through the door of heaven at any moment is intended by God to be the most pressing, incessant motivation for holy living and aggressive ministry, and the greatest cure for lethargy and apathy. It should make a difference in every Christian’s values, actions, priorities, and goals.” (The End Times in Chronological Order, Ron Rhodes, p. 49)

For the believer in Christ, His coming is a joyful occasion. The study of end times is never intended to bring fear or gloom, rather it brings hope.

II. Live in Hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Paul is describing two groups of people: Christians who have already physically died and Christians who are still physically alive. This passage explains the positive aspects of the Lord’s return.

Verse 13. Paul uses the word “*asleep*” to describe believers who have physically died. It is/was a common euphemism for dead. But Paul is not saying the soul is asleep, still “resting” in the dead body, and will go to heaven when Christ returns. NO! He has already made it clear in Philippians 1:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8, that when we die, our soul/spirit is immediately with the Lord. He goes on to tell them there is hope for the believer and we do not grieve as if there is no hope. *Grieve* is a relationship word. Certainly, we will grieve when a loved one dies. But as believers in Christ, we have a hope within our grief that unbelievers do not have.

Verse 14. That hope is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Notice that Paul does not use the euphemism for death (*asleep*) when talking about Jesus’ death. He does not want there to be any confusion. Jesus indeed died on the cross, was buried, and raised on the third day. (1 Corinthians 15:55). When Christ returns, He will bring with Him those who have already died. I do not know what that will look like. I don’t know what kind of bodies they will already have. I have a million questions for which there are no answers. But remember Paul’s purpose in writing the letter—to give clarity and comfort to those who had lost loved ones that were believers.

Verse 15. Paul’s teaching is not some made up fairytale. He presents it as the Word of the Lord. The phrase “and we who are alive” is used twice in this short passage, indicating Paul assumed he would be alive when Christ returns for the church. He stresses that Christians who are alive will not precede those who have died. Several things to note. 1. The living do not have an advantage over the dead when Christ returns for His church. 2. All of the events of the return of Christ will seem simultaneous to us, but there is a divine order that we will probably not be able

to distinguish because it will all happen so very fast. (! Corinthians 15:51-52) 3. When Paul says the dead will not precede the living, he means the raising of the dead bodies of believers will be raised first—and then we who are living will join them. Again, I have no idea what that will look like.

Verse 16-17. These two verses give a step-by-step account of what will happen at the appearing of Christ and the rapture/resurrection of the church. Christ HIMSELF, not an angel, or prophet, or messenger, will descend with a shout. The shout is a military command that we will hear and obey. It is unclear if the archangel(s) will literally accompany Him and a literal trumpet will blast. It can be translated that His own voice will sound forth **like** an archangel and a trumpet. Either way, the call to *come up* will be clear, distinguishable, undeniable, and joyful! The bodies of the *dead in Christ* (Christians who have already died) will rise first and then those Christians who are alive will follow (be caught up with them/raptured). Again remember, the events will happen so quickly, they will seem simultaneous. 1 Corinthians 15 gives more insight when Paul writes, “*Behold I tell you a mystery, we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.*” There is indeed a mystery (something that must be revealed) about this entire event. Some believers will be alive, and some believers will have already died, BUT *we will all be changed*. Our perishable, mortal bodies will be changed to imperishable and immortal, never to experience death, disease, or decay. And we will be WITH the Lord forever! (1 Corinthians 15:51-54) Also note, that we will meet Him in the air.

Verse 18. We are to comfort one another with these words. The word *comfort* means *to come along beside, to console especially in times of sorrow*.

We comfort one another because the coming of Christ is our blessed hope. **Titus 2:13.** Yes, we have hope for every day, but we also have *a blessed hope* that is the centerpiece of our faith-- the HOPE that Christ will return. Remember, hope is not wishful thinking, nor is it a nice sentiment. *Biblical hope is the anticipation of something good, and the confidence that we will receive based on the unfailing Word of God and His unfailing character.* Christ is coming for His church—this is our blessed hope.

Jesus tells His disciples this in **John 14:1-3**. In the previous chapter, the disciples are gathered with Jesus in an upper room to celebrate the Passover. They are arguing over who will be the greatest when Jesus comes into power. Jesus, however, shows them the true character of His kingdom by kneeling to wash their dirty stinking feet. The disciples are certainly confused by this act, but they are terrified when Jesus tells them He must leave them. It turns their plans, their world, upside down. They are filled with confusion and fear—much like the Thessalonians who did not understand what would happen to their loved ones who died before the return of Christ.

Jesus comforts the disciples the same way He comforts us when we do not understand the events of life and death. “*Let not your heart be troubled, Believe in God, believe also in me.*” The comfort doesn’t come because we perfectly understand all the events about death and end times. Comfort didn’t come to the Thessalonians or the disciples because they perfectly understood the events. Comfort comes as we continue trusting Christ. “*Believe in God, believe also in Me*” means keep on trusting God (entrusting yourself to God), keep on, continue, trusting Christ. Lean into Him when you do not understand your circumstances, your losses, or

the unfolding of end times. God is still in charge. Jesus said He is preparing a place for us and He will return to get us. Rest in that truth, whether we completely understand it or not. Certainly, we should study prophecy and end times events. But our study should never be an academic pursuit that simply tantalizes our minds—a puzzle we must solve. It should be a study that has bearing on how we live. Are you eagerly waiting for the return of Christ? Are you living as if it could be today? Does His return have bearing on the way you are living?

Comfort one another with the truth of His return... and then live faithfully in light of His coming.