Grace Fellowship (28 Dec 1986)/ Bethesda Christian Centre (14 Jan 2018) Dr. Rick Griffith

Title

Crossroads International Church (31 May 2020) Message 8 of 10

NLT 40 Minutes

**Are You Ready for the Lord’s Return?**

***1 Thessalonians 4:13-18***

**Topic:** Eschatology

**Subject:** Why should we look forward to the Rapture with expectancy?

**Complement:** The Rapture gives hope and encouragement that he will come for you.

**Purpose:** The listeners who lack hope for the future will be encouraged to look for the Rapture and live godly lives

# Introduction

COVID

### Interest: We have heard much about death in COVID-19 lately. My own family has also seen three deaths in the past two years—my father in 2018, his mother-in-law in 2019, and my step-father this month.

Family

Map

### This reminds me of the port city of Thessalonica that knit together 26 villages on the East-West route of the Roman Empire. Believers at Thessalonica had died and those left wondered when and if they would see them again. Paul said YES!

Ready?

### Need: Paul also asked them, "Are You Ready For the Lord's Return?" Today as we experience the COVID-19 crisis I believe the Scripture has some words of encouragement for us in regard to Christ's **second** coming to earth at the Rapture.

2 Comings

#### There are two basic views Christians have of eschatology: amil and premil. Both believe that Jesus will return (explain).

Mill Views

(2 slides)

#### These views describe what we call eschatology: *eschatos* "last things" + *ology* "study of" = "study of the last things."

Eschatos + Logos

#### Within that study an important doctrine is Christ’s Second Coming, but allow me to clarify what I mean by Christ's Second Coming. I am really using this as an umbrella term that encompasses two events separated by seven years: the Rapture that is followed by the Revelation.

2 Stages

#### The Second Coming of Christ will be in two stages: the Rapture (the coming of Christ for His own in the air to take the church from the earth prior to the Great Tribulation) and the Revelation (the coming of Christ with His own to judge unbelievers upon the earth after the Great Tribulation).

Rapture & Revelation

### These two events are similar in some respects:

#### Both events are literal returns. Never does the Scripture refer to these events as only allegorical returns for in both instances Christ actually will return to the earth.

• Literal

#### Both events find Christ as their central figure. Although humanity is involved in both, Christ Himself is at the forefront.

• Future

• Christ

#### Both events are still future. They are yet to be seen on God's prophetic calendar.

#### Both events are sometimes referred to by the same word (e.g., "coming" refers to the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 and the Revelation in Matthew 24:27).

• Coming

### Despite their similarities, several contrasts exist between the Rapture and the Revelation (adapted and expanded from Charles F. Baker, *A Dispensational Theology*, 584-86):

Premil

(8 slides)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **The Rapture** | **The Revelation** |
| 1 | Pretribulational (Rev. 3:10) | Posttribulational (Rev. 19:11-21) |
| 2 | Christ will come in the air (1 Thess. 4:16) | Christ will come to the earth, His feet touching the Mt. of Olives (Zech 14:4) |
| 3 | A coming for the saints (1 Thess. 4:15-17) to bring them to the Father’s house (John 14:1-2) | A coming with the saints (Matt. 25:31; 1 Thess. 3:13; Rev. 19:14) |
| 4 | Saints (dead and alive) will be caught up ("raptured") from the earth to meet the Lord in the air and taken to heaven (1 Thess. 4:16-17)  | Saints who are already on earth will remain on the earth (no rapture) to be ushered into the Millennial Kingdom (Acts 15:16; Rev. 5:10; Matt. 6:10; ch. 24) |
| 5 | Produces comfort and hope (1 Thess. 4:18) | Produces fear and judgment (Matt. 24:27-31; Luke 21:20-28; Rev. 6:15-17) |
| 6 | Mystery truth revealed only in the New Testament age (1 Cor. 15:51) | Central in Old Testament prophecy but clarified in the New Testament (Jer. 30:7; Zech 14:1-3; Matt. 24:30; Col. 3:4) |
| 7 | Bodies of church saints glorified (1 Cor. 15:51-58; Phil. 3:20-21) and brought to heaven for seven years (1 Thess. 4:17) | Bodies of tribulation saints left in mortal state to continue to live on the earth in the millennium (Matt. 25:31-34) |
| 8 | Imminent, no signs needed (1 Thess. 4:16) | Not imminent but preceded by spectacular signs in the heavens and on the earth (Matt. 24:29-31; Luke 21:25-28; Rev. 1:7; chs. 6-19) |
| 9 | Primary purpose is deliverance of the saints from this world (1 Thess. 1:10) | Primary purpose is judgment of unbelieving (Matt. 25:31-46) |
| 10 | Invisible and private as only believers see Christ; God deludes via the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:11) | Visible and public since "every eye shall see Him" (Rev. 1:7 |
| 11 | Fulfills a promise to the Church where Jew-Gentile distinctions do not exist (1 Thess. 4:15; cf. John 14:1-3; Eph. 2:11-16) | Fulfills promises to Israel of covenants made in the Old Testament (Gen. 12:1-3; Ps. 89; Isa. 11:11-14; cf. Rom. 11:26-27) |
| 12 | Evil begins to increase (2 Thess. 2:1-12) | Evil is suppressed (2 Thess. 1:7; Ps. 37:9-10) |
| 13 | Church removed (1 Thess. 4:13-18) | Satan removed (Rev. 20:1-3) |
| 14 | Christ shown as Head of the Church and all things (Eph. 1:10, 22; 4:15; Col. 1:18; 2:10) | Christ vindicated as Messiah to Israel (Zech. 14:3-4; cf. Acts 1:6 with v. 11) |
| 15 | Judgment seat of Christ for believers (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:13) | Judgment of Israel and Gentiles (Ezek. 20:34-38; Matt. 25; Zech. 14:4; cf. p. 160) |
| 16 | The Lord is at hand (Phil. 4:5) | The kingdom is at hand (Matt. 24:14) |
| 17 | Nature subsequently ruined (Rev. 6—16) | Nature subsequently restored (Rom. 8:19-22; Isa. 11:6-9; 35:9; 65:25) |

### Subject: Today we will focus on the first stage: The Rapture. So are you looking to Christ’s return at the Rapture? Why should we look forward to the Rapture with expectancy? What reasons can we give to anticipate Jesus coming back?

Jesus

Subject

### Background: My comments today will focus upon the first of these two events: the Rapture. We'll be looking at the key passage in all Scripture relating to this very important event in God's timetable of the ages. Believers at Thessalonica had died and those left were wondering when and if they would see them again.

Two Stages

### Preview: Paul gave them *three reasons to have hope in the Lord’s return*. So today we’ll see these three reasons to look forward to the Lord’s return at the Rapture.

Three Reasons

### Text: These three reasons to anticipate the Rapture are in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

• Text

(What’s the first reason we should look to Christ’s return?)

# I. The Rapture helps us grieve with hope (4:13-14).

MP

[Knowing the destiny of Christians at death helps us to control our grief.]

13a

## Know about the future destiny of believers who die (4:13a).

Tunnel

### 1. Many people think that eschatology is unimportant. This is seen in what some say about the time of the Rapture: I'm not pretrib, midtrib, or posttrib. I am pantrib, because it will all pan out in the end!

### 2. But grief is hard enough even when you know what the Bible says about the future. Grief happens because we love people.

Grief

(2 slides)

(Why is it so important that we know about future things such as the destiny of believers? Paul saw eschatology as vital because it affects our hope. It's important because…)

Lonely Pier

## Being informed about believers who have died will prevent us from hopeless grief (4:13b).

13b

### 1. Let me ask you a question: Should Christians grieve when a fellow believer dies?

Should Christians?

### 2. Some Christians think that grief is not allowable for the believer.

#### Once a Christian family lost their son in a tragedy. Well-meaning believers counseled them that their son was in heaven, so the whole family with four kids was told not to grieve. Soon the grief so overcame one of the sons that he committed suicide (GRIEF need for in a tragedy).

#### Grief is a normal human experience with five predictable stages, though not always in this order (GRIEF five stages of).

Five Stages

### 3. Notice what Paul is really saying in this verse.

13b

#### He is not saying that Christians will not grieve.

#### He is only addressing the issue of *how* they should grieve. They should grieve in such a way that shows hope—like when Jesus grieved over Lazarus.

### 4. Why did Paul say these things though? What problem was he addressing in the church?

Man Silhouette

#### Paul had already taught the believers about the Rapture when he was with them personally. He told them that when Christ comes all who have trusted Him will be removed from the earth.

#### Apparently the Thessalonians were confused regarding the destiny of believers who have died before the Rapture.

14

##### 1) Perhaps some thought these would miss the Rapture and have to wait until the Great White Throne Judgment.

##### 2) Perhaps some wondered whether they would be saved at all.

(Paul wanted to address the issue clearly so he reveals in the following verse the basis on which the Christian can have hope…)

Arrow

## Christ's resurrection guarantees the believer's resurrection (4:14).

### 1. The death and resurrection of Christ are two of the best-attested events in history (4:14a).

#### The "if" here (in the NASB & KJV) is better translated "since" (as in the NIV & NLT) because of the Greek construction.

##### 1) Therefore, it really means "since we believe that Christ died…"

##### 2) Paul had no doubt regarding the validity of the resurrection.

#### Honest, reliable historians do not dispute Christ’s death and resurrection.

Implications

### 2. This historical basis provides assurance that the bodies of all Christians also will be raised (4:14b).

#### Paul declared that both Christ's resurrection and our resurrection stand or fall together.

#### This is taught in 1 Corinthians 15:12-20.

(So Paul has told us that when we undergo affliction to the point of death we shouldn't grieve hopelessly because all believers will be resurrected. But how will this come about when Christ comes to receive His church? Who will be the first to be bodily with the Lord—those who have died or those of us who are living? This leads us into the second reason to expect his return…)

MPI

# II. Christians who have died will meet Christ in the air before those living (4:15-17).

MP

[We who are alive when the Rapture comes will be taken up only after the dead in Christ.]

[Now the living moving faster than the dead—but then the dead will move faster than the living!]

## Our glorified bodies will not reach the Lord before those of dead believers (4:15).

15

### 1. Notice how the verse expresses that this great truth wasn't something that Paul made up. It was Christ's own promise.

#### Perhaps this was an unrecorded statement of Christ (cf. Acts 20:35).

#### Maybe Paul received this word by direct revelation.

#### In either case, there was no need to worry since the dead will have a prominent place in the Rapture because they will rise even before the living.

### 2. Notice that Paul included himself among the living group and evidently expected to be living when Christ returned.

#### Here we see more evidence for a pre-tribulation Rapture.

#### According to Paul, the next event on God's timetable was the return of Christ since it could happen at any moment.

Return

16a

(So the dead would rise before the living. But what would be the specific order of events when Christ returned? Verses 16-17 provide the answer…)

## Some future day four amazing events will happen without a moment's notice (4:16-17). These four events will happen in the following order, each event beginning with the letter "R" (cf. Ryrie)…

4 Events

### 1. **Return**: Christ will leave heaven to return to our atmosphere (4:16a).

#### Where is Christ right now? In heaven seated at the right side of the Father.

#### Christ Himself (not an angel) will return for the church.

#### His return will be accompanied by three things:

##### 1) The loud command:

Shout

###### Is this from Christ or an angel or Michael the archangel? The text isn't clear, but I like to think that it's from Christ.

###### The word for "loud command" or "shout" is "used of the cry of the charioteer to his horses or the hunter to his hounds; it is the shout of the ship's master to the rowers, or of the commander to his soldiers" (Morris).

###### What is the command? "Rise!" "Come forth!" "It's time!" ????

###### The word carries with it a ring of authority and urgency.

##### 2) The voice of an archangel

Voice

###### The Jews listed seven chief angels, but which one is the archangel?

###### The identity of this angel is somewhat unclear since Michael is the only angel in Scripture specifically referred to as an archangel, but here the word appears without a definite article.

###### "Voice" also lacks the word "the" in the Greek.

###### However, a definite article is not necessary to be definite so this is probably Michael.

##### The trumpet call of God:

Trumpet

###### Trumpets are associated with God's activity in the Bible:

 —Ex 19:16 has a trumpet at Mt. Sinai

 —Isa 27:13 uses the trumpet to signal the return to the land from Assyria

 —Joel 2:1 mentions the trumpet sounding in judgment

 —Matt 24:31 has a trumpet when Christ returns after the Tribulation

###### Through the use of the trumpet God calls attention to this event as a majestic, dramatic, spectacular one worthy of Christ who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

### 2. **Resurrection**: Christians who have died during the church age will rise first (4:16b).

Resurrect

#### The designation "in Christ" refers only to those who have died since Christ's death and resurrection in the Church Age.

#### So those who have died as Christians will be rejoined with their spirits which have already been with Christ.

#### But what happens to the bodies of these who have died? Are they changed? (RAPTURE transformation of the body= farmer's wife in elevator).

Pink

#### For sure! Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-55.

#### Exactly how these bodies are reassembled and resurrected is not stated.

### 3. **Rapture**: We who are living will rise to meet Christ in the clouds (4:17a).

Rapture

17a

#### We call this event the "Rapture," taken from the Latin word meaning to "seize" or to "snatch" or to "catch up."

Binary Vixen

Latin

#### The FedEx commercial highlights a type of rapture in “I’m Gonna Miss That Dog.”

Enoch

Ascension

Paul

#### Enoch had a rapture of sorts

#### Jesus rose into the sky at his ascension

#### Paul already had a private "Rapture" to the “third heaven” in 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4.

#### Imagine millions of people vanish in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye (ILL: Christian high jumper, "Jesus is coming soo…" signmaker, RAPTURE missing ~ panic).

Chaos

#### What is a rapturous joy for the believer will be a nightmare for the unbelievers who are left, many of whom will die (ILL: Christian airline pilots, bus drivers, surgeons).

Translated

City

#### So while the dead believers are resurrected, we are translated.

### 4. **Reunion**: We will never be separated from Jesus or believers for all eternity (4:17b).

Reunion

# III. Christ’s return helps us encourage one another (4:18).

MP

[Knowing these things brings mutual comfort, especially in times of bereavement.]

## The word for "comfort" (or "encourage") here literally means to "come alongside to help (Read Charles Swindoll, *Contagious Christianity*, 46-47).

## We're also guaranteed escape from the coming wrath of the Tribulation, which is something to be encouraged about! (A post-tribulation rapture would be no comfort to anyone!)

Subject

(So why should we be excited about Christ’s return?)

# Conclusion

MI

### The Rapture gives hope and encouragement that he will come for you (Main Idea).

### Jesus can come at any time! He will come quickly and like a thief in the night.

Any Time

(3 slides)

### So how should we live? Titus 2:11-13 provides a fitting conclusion to the Lord's imminent return by informing us what our response should be (cf. Swindoll, 47):

How to Live

Title

Title

Title

#### Make sure that you have received the salvation God freely offers you (2:11).

Titus 2:11

##### Accept the pardon available through Christ.

##### Remember that your pardon does not become effective until you accept Christ's payment for your sins.

#### Continue to resist a corrupt lifestyle (2:12a).

Titus 2:12a

##### Don't be caught off guard when He comes!

##### Be ready!

#### Live in a sensible, godly manner (2:12b-13).

Tit 2:12b-13

##### Don't fall prey to prophetic fanaticism on one hand or ignorance on the other.

##### Be balanced with a mature lifestyle that brings God glory.

##### In this way you will prepare to reign with him.

Reign

### Prayer

Prayer

# Preliminary Questions

**Verses Questions**

# Context: What did the author record just prior to this passage?

# Purpose: Why is this passage in the Bible?

# Background: What historical context helps us understand this passage?

# Questions

# Tentative Subject/Complement Statements

Text

# Possible Illustrations that Apply

### RAPTURE inevitable though not foreseeable

# Are You Ready for the Lord’s Return?

***1 Thess 4:13-18***

**Exegetical Outline (Steps 2-3)**

# *Exegetical Idea*:

# I.

# II.

# III.

**Purpose or Desired Listener Response (Step 4)**

The listeners will be ready for Christ to return

**Homiletical Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)

# Introduction

### There are three basic views Christians have of the future: amil, postmil and premil. All three believe that Jesus will return.

### Eschatology = *eschatos* "last things" + *ology* "study of" = "study of the last things"

### The Second Coming of Christ will be in two stages: the Rapture (the coming of Christ for His own in the air to take the church from the earth prior to the Great Tribulation) and the Revelation (the coming of Christ with His own to judge unbelievers upon the earth after the Great Tribulation). Despite their similarities, several contrasts exist between the Rapture and the Revelation.

### Why should we look forward to the Rapture with expectancy?

# I. The Rapture helps us grieve with hope (4:13-14).

## Know about the future destiny of believers who die (4:13a).

## Being informed about believers who have died will prevent us from hopeless grief (4:13b).

## Christ's resurrection guarantees the believer's resurrection (4:14).

### 1. The death and resurrection of Christ are two of the best-attested events in history (4:14a).

### 2. This historical basis provides assurance that the bodies of all Christians also will be raised (4:14b).

# II. Christians who have died will meet Christ in the air before those living (4:15-17).

## Our glorified bodies will not reach the Lord before those dead believers (4:15).

## Four events will happen in the following order, each event beginning with "R" (cf. Ryrie)…

### 1. **Return**: Christ will leave heaven to return to our atmosphere (4:16a).

### 2. **Resurrection**: Christians who have died during the church age will rise first (4:16b).

### 3. **Rapture**: We who are living will rise to meet Christ in the clouds (4:17a).

### 4. **Reunion**: We will never be separated from Jesus or believers for all eternity (4:17b).

# III. Christ’s return helps us encourage one another (4:18).

# Conclusion

### The Rapture gives hope and encouragement that he will come for you (Main Idea).

### Titus 2:11-13 gives what our response should be (cf. *Contagious Christianity*, 46-47):

#### Make sure that you have received the salvation God freely offers you (2:11).

#### Continue to resist a corrupt lifestyle (2:12a).

#### Live in a sensible, godly manner (2:12b-13).

### Prayer



**Dr. Rick Griffith**

31 May 2020

**Are You Ready for the Lord’s Return?**

***1 Thessalonians 4:13-18***

# Introduction

### We’re thinking of our mortality: COVID-19 and deaths in our families.

### Thessalonian believers also had recent deaths so Paul told them about Jesus’ return.

### Two major views Christians have of the future return of Jesus are amil and premil in eschatology = *eschatos* "last things" + *ology* "study of" = "study of the last things."

### Christ’s return will be in two stages: (1) the Rapture (the coming of Christ for His own in the air to take the church from the earth prior to the Great Tribulation) and (2) the Revelation (the coming of Christ with His own to judge unbelievers upon the earth after the Great Tribulation). They are similar but have significant differences.

### Why should we look forward to the Rapture with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?

# I. The Rapture helps us grieve with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (4:13-14).

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**Dr. Rick Griffith**

14 January 2018

Bethesda Community Centre

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