Grace Evangelical Free Church November 27, 2022

**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** Rapture of the Church

In approaching this study it is necessary to point out that the scriptures teach that the second coming of Christ will take place in two stages. All the prophecies of the Old Testament tell us of His coming in power as the Son of man to reign and to rule. But there are two important passages in the New Testament which tell us that before our blessed Lord returns to the earth (**Zechariah 14:4**), as Son of man (**Matthew 24:27**, **30**), for Israel’s deliverance (**Zechariah 14:3**), publicly (**Revelation 1:7**) and to take vengeance on His enemies (**2 Thessalonians 1:7-8**) - before He comes like this, He will come into the air to gather to Himself all His saints (**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**). His coming in power and glory will be ushered in by signs (**Matthew 24**), but His coming into the air for His Church could happen at any moment. This is called “the rapture of the Church”, because when He thus comes He will “catch away” all His people and take them to be with Himself. The two important passages which reveal this truth are: (1) **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**; (2) **1 Corinthians 15:51-53**.

* Notice the significant words in **1 Thessalonians 4:15**: “**According to the Lord’s own word….**” That is, Paul was speaking, or writing, what the Lord had expressly revealed to him. This was not simply Paul’s idea;
* Notice also the significant word in **1 Corinthians 15:51**: “**Listen, I tell you a mystery….**” A “**mystery**” in the New Testament always refers to truth which, while alluded to was not previously defined. The truth of the rapture was referenced in the Old Testament (**Isaiah 26:19-21**), promised by the Lord Jesus (**John 14:3**), but it was only fully revealed and explained by the apostle Paul.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**: **“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. 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.**”

* **Grammatical Usage: V 16**: “**dead**” in the Greek is, “nekros” meaning, “lifeless; powerless”; **V. 17**: “**caught up**” or in the Greek, “harpazó” means, “suddenly, decisively seized by force.”
* **Literal Interpretation:** **One word of command, one shout from the archangel, one blast from the trumpet of God and the Lord himself will come down from Heaven! Those who powerless yet in Christ will be the first to rise, and then we who are still living on the earth will be suddenly, decisively seized by force joining them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.**
* **Contextual/Comparison:** God keeps His Word: God continually uses His Word. What exactly will take place when Jesus comes to rapture His people into His presence?

1. His Coming will be Personal.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16**: “**the Lord himself**”; “**this same Jesus**” (**Acts 1:11**), the unchanging One (**Hebrews 13:8**). Yes, the same glorious One who in the days when He was upon earth was so loving and gracious and kind, and the One who died for us upon Calvary’s Cross, is the One who is coming again for us. Jesus Himself is coming!

2. His Descent into the air will be sudden and dramatic.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16**: “**loud command…voice…trumpet…**” Whether the “world” will hear or understand what is happening we cannot say, (compare **Acts 22:9**), but that every believer will hear and understand we can be quite sure! Divine intervention has always been sudden and stupendous (compare the Flood, the Exodus and Pentecost). The ascension of our Lord was dramatic (**Mark 16:19**; **Luke 24:51**; **Acts 1:9**).

3. When He descends, “**the dead in Christ shall rise first**”

**1 Thessalonians 4:16**: not all the dead, but all the dead “**in Christ**”, that is, all believers. This will be “the first resurrection”. All who were saved before Christ came to die, and all who have been saved since and who have died, will rise from the dead in their glorified bodies. Until He comes their bodies “**sleep**” (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-15**; **1 Corinthians 15:51**), but when He comes, their spirits, which are with Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:8**; **Ephesians 3:15**; **Philippians 1:23**) will be clothed with bodies which are incorruptible (**1 Corinthians 15:52**).

4. Every living Believer will be changed and caught up

**1 Thessalonians 4:17**. This is what **1 Corinthians 15:51** means - “**we shall not all sleep**”; some Christians will never die, for they will be alive on the earth when the Lord comes and will be clothed upon with immortality (**1 Corinthians 15:53**), and in place of their earthly body they will receive their new heavenly body (**1 Corinthians 15:35-49**) - and this will take place “**in the twinkling of an eye!**” Every true believer will suddenly be raptured into the presence of the Lord. The millions of Christians who are alive when He comes will suddenly disappear, as Enoch disappeared (**Hebrews 11:5**); as Elijah disappeared (**2 Kings 2:11**); and as Jesus Himself disappeared (**Acts 1:9**).

5. Then will follow a time of glorious reunion for the Saints of God.

**1 Thessalonians 4:17**: “**together with them**”. What a gathering that will be! To be “**together**” implies recognition of our loved ones and of all the saints of God.

6. Above all, we shall meet the Lord Himself: “**to meet the Lord in the air**”

**1 Thessalonians 4:17**. What a meeting: to meet the Lord, our own beloved Savior!

7. “**So shall we ever be with the Lord**”

**1 Thessalonians 4:17**. This is the goal (**Psalms 23:6; 16:11**; **John. 17:24**).

What comfort there is in this blessed hope (**1 Thessalonians 4:18**; **Titus 2:13**)! After our Lord has returned and gathered His saints to Himself, He will come in power and great glory to reign upon the earth (**Luke 1: 32-33**).

* **Conclusion**: Are you ready for the rapture?