

The Christian's Future

As God's prophetic plan unfolds in the world, the Christian has a day of hope and desire ahead of them when Christ appears to gather His church. But another day looms for those who reject the gospel. Knowing that we have hope in Christ, we must carry that hope to as many as we can here and now.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

BIBLE VERSE

[2Th 2:1-17 NKJV] 1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. 3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for [that Day will not come] unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains [will do so] until He is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of the [lawless one] is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. 13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit

and belief in the truth, 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given [us] everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

INTRO

Sometimes in teaching the Bible, I feel like an astronomer who is trying to fit the expanse of the universe into a 30 minute lecture.

Today's message is one of those times. We come to a chapter where I could spend (literally) one week per verse for the next 17 weeks, but I have 40 minutes to give an overview of one of the most debated eschatological (study of end things) passages in the Bible.

- Now in tackling this passage, I can certainly respect the various debates and interpretations that people who love the Word have come up with. While I don't agree with them, I can respect the debate.
- As I'll try to show today when you look at this passage by itself, it can seem to say one thing, but when you look at it in the context of the teachings of Jesus and the other letters of Paul, the puzzle starts to connect.
- This is yet another reason it's important to always be growing in a compressive knowledge of the Word of God to understand all of its intricate connections.

BIBLE VERSE

[2Th 2:1-17 NKJV] 1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ (the Lord) had come (is present).

[2Th 2:2 NLT] 2 Don't be so easily shaken or alarmed by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Don't believe them, even if they claim to have had a spiritual vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us.

ESCHATOLOGICAL CONFUSION

Before we get into the nitty-gritty details of the events in this chapter, I'd like to point out something that was going on back then that has continued until this day. People were getting overly worked up, fearful, anxious, and confused about the end times and the days leading up to Christ's return.

- Some of them were listening to the wrong podcasts, reading the wrong blogs, and watching the wrong YouTube videos about the Day of the Lord.
- As a result, they were confused and afraid. Paul will tell us that a correct view of the end times should not make us fearful and anxious, but rather comforted and hopeful. Yes, when we understand God's prophetic timeline, we do gain a sense of urgency, but not anxiety. We do gain boldness and courage, but not frantic panicking.

There were people in the early church who were having "prophetic visions", making drastic and unfounded claims about dates and times, and even forging Paul's signature of letters that they had written to try and control people. The same thing happens today from so many angles, which is why I am going to do my best to stick to the Bible.

EXAMPLE: My wife asked me what I thought about a news story she saw the other day. My response was, "Honestly, I don't know what and who to believe anymore, all I know is I believe what's in God's book."

- Even Peter recognized that Paul wrote about things that are sometimes difficult to understand. I'm certainly no prophecy expert, but I do believe that if we take a careful look at Scripture, we can come out prepared for what lies ahead of us.

TWO EVENTS

1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him

THE GREAT DEBATE: Paul introduces his topic: "The coming of the Lord and our gathering together to Him."

- Is Paul describing one event or two separate events.
- The Greek structure indicates that it is actually both.

Ph.D. and Greek scholar Robert Hiebert points out:

QUOTE

“The government of the two nouns (coming and gathering) under one article makes it clear that one event, viewed under two complementary aspects, is thought of.”

Robert Hiebert,

ILLUSTRATION

You might think of it like this. If I said to you, “regarding our weekend at Disney World and our flights to Florida...”

- I’m talking about one event that encompasses multiple aspects.
- The coming of the Lord and our being gathered together are two occasions within a timeline of events.
 - The coming of the Lord is referred to as the second coming of Christ and takes place within a time period that Paul calls “The Day of the Lord.”
 - I believe our gathering together with Him is a secondary event that precedes the Day of the Lord. We have commonly referred to this as “The Rapture.”
 - For this morning’s message and your notes, I have put two points in our message: The Day of Desire (The Rapture) and The Day of Destruction (The Day of the Lord)

1**The Day of Desire (Rapture)****LESSONS FROM 1 THESSALONIANS:**

BEFORE WE DIG IN: let’s pull out a couple of very important contextual items:

First, look at verse 5 – **“Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?”**

- Behind this chapter was some teaching that Paul gave in person to the church. Thankfully for them, they could remember the context of what Paul was expounding on. Unfortunately for

us, we cannot. So we have to pull from some context in 1 Thessalonians, and from Paul's other letter's to build context.

- So, let's try to do that a little before we even read the letter: First, whenever Paul talks to the church about the final wrath and judgment of God at the second return of Jesus, he speaks of hope and rescue for the church.

We will take a more in-depth look at this in a moment, but a brief outline:

- **1 Thessalonians 1 – CONTEXT**

[1TH 1:10 NKJV] 10 ...TO WAIT FOR HIS SON FROM HEAVEN, WHOM HE RAISED FROM THE DEAD, EVEN JESUS WHO DELIVERS US FROM THE WRATH TO COME.

- **1 Thessalonians 4** – Paul describes the event when Jesus appears in the clouds with all those who died in Christ before to gather his church who are alive, take them up to be together with him forever. He ends that section by adding the exhortation, “Comfort one another with these words.”
- **1 Thessalonians 5** – He intros another season of time called “The day of the Lord” which is characterized by sudden destruction and the wrath of God like a thief upon the unexpected earth. He ends, in the same way, he began in chapter 1 by saying,

“[1TH 5:9-11 NKJV] 9 ...GOD DID NOT APPOINT US TO WRATH, BUT TO OBTAIN SALVATION THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, 10 WHO DIED FOR US, THAT WHETHER WE WAKE OR SLEEP, WE SHOULD LIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM. 11 THEREFORE COMFORT EACH OTHER AND EDIFY ONE ANOTHER, JUST AS YOU ALSO ARE DOING.

So just gathering what we know about Paul's first letter, we have a series of events happening in the future, and as Christians, we should derive great hope, comfort, and encouragement from them:

- That we, as Christians along with all those who have died in Christ, will be caught up in the air when Christ appears in the clouds to forever be with the Lord.
- That we as Christians, though we will not escape persecution from the world, will escape the time of wrath that is coming from God upon the world through Jesus Christ. This should bring us comfort.

The word gathering together in verse 1 is **ep-ee-soon-ag-o-gay'** – **The call of an assembly to one place.** This is what we are doing this morning; we are all gathered together into one place.

- Describing this same event in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians, Paul uses the word, “Caught up.” This is the Greek word, “Harpazo” which translates into Latin, “Rapturo” which we have translated into the English “Rapture”.
- It’s technically true that the word rapture isn’t in the Bible, but that doesn’t mean that the event itself is not biblical.

There are those who do not believe in a rapture at all, and we are not going to deal with that in-depth today for sake of time. Among pre-millennialists (those who believe that we are still living before the literal return of Christ and establishment of his 1000 year reign on earth) who believe that there is an event when Jesus will receive His church to himself, the matter of discussion and debate has always been the timing of the event.

There are 4 prevalent views regarding this discussion. Within those views and multiple variations of that particular perspective.

- Post-tribulationist – The rapture of the church occurs directly before (almost simultaneously with) the second coming of Christ when He comes to judge the world and establish His reign on the earth.
- Mid-tribulationist – The rapture occurs directly at the time when the anti-christ stands in the temple and proclaims himself to be God breaking his 7-year peace covenant at the 3 1/2 year mark in the tribulation period.
- Pre-tribulationist – The rapture of the church precedes the beginning of the 7 year tribulation period, the rescuing the church from the supernatural wrath of God on the earth.
- Pre-wrath – the wrath of God does not actually start until the 3 1/2 year mark and that Christians can be raptured any time between the beginning of the tribulation period and the middle of it.

Now, there are highly respected theologians and scholarly minds that accept all of the above-mentioned. There are some strong biblical arguments for each, and some claims from each that leaves you wanting a little more light shed on the subject. The most essential thing is that we affirm a rapture.

Having said that, I believe that there are implications to each belief system that are important. At this stage in my growth, I believe that there is an appearing of Christ to His church when He gathers them together in the clouds to forever be with Him before the Great Tribulation period.

Some might say, “Well that’s great, but the Bible never plainly says that the rapture will happen before the tribulation.” Great, but take the full view on that. The bible also never plainly says that the church will suffer through the tribulation or that the rapture occurs at any of the other stated times. It’s a matter of how you interpret the passages that we have before us.

- Now, I realize that there are some who claim that the “pre-trib” view of the rapture is not historical and arrived on the scene in the 18th century through some puritan teachers at that time and was popularized by some in the early 19th century such as Darby and Schofield.
- I think it’s important though to look further back. Can it be supported scripturally? In the course of church history, there have been many biblical doctrines that have been believed by the early church, forgotten, then revived.
- The reformation is a perfect example of this. The church went off course in its view of how salvation is obtained. The reformers came and talked about grace and faith and turned everything upside down. But still, it originated in scripture.
- On top of that, there ARE historical writings from church fathers that indicate back to 100 AD that there was an expectation of the imminent return of Jesus for His church, and of course, this is pretty clearly evident in scripture as well.
 - Irenaeus (AD 180) – a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John. Presents Enoch as a picture of the church being raptured and rescued from the coming tribulation.
 - Didache (Teaching of the apostles) – The earliest sets of doctrine that we have from the early church specify an order of events where the church is clearly rescued from the curse of the wrath of God prior to the tribulation and second coming.
 - Pseudo-Ephraem – (AD 400) – Latin sermon that clearly lays out a pre-trib rapture interpretation.
 - “All the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins.”
–Pseudo-Ephraem (c. 374-627)
 - Let’s start at the beginning and briefly examine the rapture itself.

1. THE RAPTURE IS A PROMISE

[1Th 4:13-17 NKJV] 13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep 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 will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will 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.

APPLICATION

By the Word of the Lord – the rapture was not a concept invented by Paul’s imagination. It was either Paul referring to the teaching of Christ, something the apostles taught him, or a direct-divine revelation from God, this event is a reality because God promised it.

- There will be a day when everyone who has passed from this life in Christ will return with Jesus, receive their new resurrection bodies, and those who are alive at that event will be instantaneously transformed and raptured to meet them in the air and forever be with the Lord.

[Jhn 14:1-3 NKJV] 1 “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

APPLICATION

The Form of the Rapture: The Dead in Christ (this is not the final resurrection of all people at the final judgment, he is talking about ONLY the bride of Christ.)

- **The Lord Himself** – this is important because when Jesus comes at His second coming to judge the world, Matthew 24 says that Jesus will “send His angels... to gather his elect from the four corners of the world.” The saints that come out of the tribulation period along with the 144,000 Jewish witnesses will be collected by God’s angels when Jesus returns to judge the world. But in the rapture, the Lord Himself comes and calls His church up.

- **A loud command, the voice of an archangel, the trumpet of God** – It's not certain if Paul is being literal, or describing the types of sounds that will accompany the rapture. One thing is for sure, the rapture will be a loud event. It's even possible that the world will hear these heavenly noises and be confused but won't see or understand what is happening. Much like when Paul was converted. The people traveling with Paul heard a noise, but only Paul saw the vision of Jesus.
 - Perhaps the archangel Michael will announce his appearance and blow the gathering trumpet.
 - **Trumpet** – Trumpets were the main mode of communication among the nation of Israel. They were used to gather the people for worship, call the people to war, and even celebrate one of the seven sacred feasts of the Lord, the Feast of Trumpets.
 - **The church in Corinth was mostly made of Gentiles who understood the trumpet blasts of the Roman army. Interestingly, when Rome knew that a battle was won, they would give a final trumpet call signaling the victory. It was unique and was called the last trump.**
 - Paul calls it the last trump (not Donald) in 1 Corinthians 15.
 - I believe this is the final (last) trumpet that signals the gathering of all the church to Christ before his judgment begins. After that 7 more trumpets will be blown, representing further judgments.

[Rev 4:1 NKJV] 1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door [standing] open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard [was] like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

- **Meet the Lord in the air** – Paul ends here. In this event, he doesn't describe Jesus touching down on the mount of olives as the OT prophesies (Zech. 14:4). at Jesus' 2nd coming, He arrives upon the earth to establish His rule, but in the rapture, He arrives above the earth to gather His church.

2. THE RAPTURE IS A MYSTERY

[1Co 15:51-53 NKJV] 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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

The word mystery – In the Bible means something never before revealed before that moment.

- Many times Paul spoke of mysteries. These mysteries were hidden from those under the Old covenant and revealed to the apostles for the sake of the church.
 - **Mystery of godliness – Trinity (1 Timothy 3:16)**
 - **Mystery of marriage (Ephesians 5) – The church and Christ.**
 - **Mystery of resurrection (1 Cor. 15) – The rapture of the church.**

– This is why we don't go to the Old Testament to get our doctrines about the rapture, though there are inferences (Noah, Enoch, and Elijah).

NOT MYSTERIES –

- The day of the Lord, the judgment of God, the second coming, the kingdom of the Messiah, the great tribulation... those are not mysteries and are clearly defined and scattered throughout the Old Testament.

The rapture on the other hand was a mystery that God revealed to Paul regarding the church's part in the prophetic timeline.

3. THE RAPTURE IS A RESCUING

[Tit 2:13 NKJV] 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...

APPLICATION

Whenever the NT discusses the rapture of the church, it does not attach it to a judgment event except in that it begins the judgment of God that follows it. Whenever the NT discusses the coming judgment of God, it doesn't include the Church within the tribulation or coming wrath.

BIBLE VERSE

[Hbr 9:27-28 NKJV] 27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, 28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

APPLICATION

To the world, the next time they see Jesus he won't be bringing them salvation, he will bring them justice, but when we see Jesus, he brings the fulfillment of His salvation. If we are eagerly awaiting His return, He will rescue us from judgment.

SEVENTY WEEKS OF DANIEL

Daniel 9:24 (NKJV) "Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy.

69 of those weeks have been fulfilled leading up to the first coming of Jesus. The church age set in and God's clock paused on Israel.

The seventieth week is still coming, as Revelation outlines those seven years as a time of unbelievable anguish on the earth. And it's purpose is to both test the world and to finish God's prophetic timeline regarding Israel. That time is not for the church!

BIBLE VERSE

"[1TH 5:9-11 NKJV] 9 ...GOD DID NOT APPOINT US TO WRATH, BUT TO OBTAIN SALVATION THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, 10 WHO DIED FOR US, THAT WHETHER WE WAKE OR SLEEP, WE SHOULD LIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM. 11 THEREFORE COMFORT EACH OTHER AND EDIFY ONE ANOTHER, JUST AS YOU ALSO ARE DOING.

4. THE RAPTURE IS A COMFORT

Twice in 1 Thessalonians, Paul tells us that the hope of Christ's appearing should bring us comfort in our current troubles.

- Our comfort as Christians is the hope of this glorious reunion with those saints that went before us and our forever union with Jesus Christ.
- When the current circumstances of life trouble us, we can remind each other that the best is yet to come, and we will be saved from the worst that is to come!
- The rapture brings us hope and comfort, not fear of judgment and wrath.

BIBLE VERSE

[Rev 3:10 NKJV] 10 “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

IMMINENCE

It’s also exciting that the promise of this hope is something that is not predicated on any specific events. In other words, Jesus could come for us any time!

BIBLE VERSE

[Phi 3:20 NKJV] 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

E. THE RAPTURE IS A MOTIVATION**For purity**

[1Jo 3:2-3 NKJV] 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

For Obedience

[1Ti 6:13-14 NKJV] 13 I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, 14 that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing...

CONCLUSION

Well, that’s a lot surrounding five words in verse one “our gathering together to Him...” But we needed to focus there because that is the ultimate hope for the Christian.

Knowing that Christ can return at any time for me causes me to want to be ready. It causes me to daily be aware of the time and how I am redeeming it. It causes me to live a life of expectation. It

allows me to see people differently, the lost and my fellow Christians. It reminds me daily that my home is not here but in heaven, and it causes me to want to live a pure life. Christian, this is our blessed hope!