

## The Greatest Story (Part 46):

Our Hope In The Second Coming of Christ

*1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

*Memory Verses: 1 Thessalonians 4:17*

### MANUSCRIPT

#### Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

We've spent a tremendous amount of time this year in the Old Testament. Most of that time focused on the coming of the Christ. The purpose of his coming? To pay for the sins of mankind and take the wrath of God upon himself by becoming the atoning, substitutionary lamb of God and sacrificing himself on the cross.

After dying he rose again, and after 40 days ascended into the clouds. Ever since we have been awaiting his second coming. A day that he himself promised, where he would come back to gather his church and take them to the place that he had been preparing for them.

**John 14:1-3.**

I remember being a young boy... six or seven... thinking... could today be the day that Christ comes back to take me to heaven. I remember going to sleep thinking.. why wasn't it today? Maybe tomorrow. I was so influenced by the preaching of my church on the subject that I truly thought that I would not live to see the year 2000. That the world had grown to crazy and surely Christ would come to get us before then. And alas, here we are about to see the year 2020.

Perhaps we've been waiting too long. The longer we wait the more trivial his coming feels. At one time we waited eagerly... now we wait with little expectation that it could happen within our lifetime. Where once we dreamed of flying in the sky with our Lord... now we dream of just making it though the day. Where once we had hope... that hope has faded. Has it faded? Has your hope begun to fade?

Maybe we haven't waited long enough? Or perhaps our hope merely needs a little redirection. You see there is a hope in the second coming of Christ... and it is a legitimate hope, regardless of how long we must wait... but it is not our greatest hope... and without it we should not be hopeless. There is a hope in his second coming... but there is an even greater hope in simply being with him at all. And I can guarantee this... if you are in Christ... you will be with him! **There is one fundamental hope for all mankind; that where Christ is, there you may also be.**

So read with me if you will **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** where we see one of the most popular passages of scripture concerning the second coming of Christ and what it means for us this morning.

#### Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we are going to see here is... **A Good Hope: Christ Is Coming & Will Rapture The Church (vs15-17).** What good news, amen? Are you looking forward to Christ's second coming when he will rapture the church?

Let me add a very quick aside here... the second coming of Christ is the rapture. I know that there has been this debate for centuries that the second coming may be the rapture or it may be the time when Christ comes after the tribulation to establish his millennial reign here on earth. Listen... most of the verses that describe the rapture say the phrase... "when he comes." Regardless if he comes in the air or sets foot on dry ground... he is coming. The rapture is the second coming... the end of the tribulation and beginning of the millennial reign is the third coming. Enough said. Im glad we got that covered now. The debate is ended for all time.

Now... the rapture. Look at **verse 16** again. The Lord will descend. Just as he ascended into the clouds he will descend from the clouds... and it will be a spectacle to behold. There will be a cry from one of the archangels... a cry like none that has ever been heard. Then there will be a trumpet sounded... the trumpet of God. I wonder what that will sound like. And then the dead will rise... and not in the zombies coming out of the ground way either. No, the dead in Christ... will have glorified bodies and will come with Christ in the clouds. It will be like nothing we've ever seen or could ever imagine.

And then the best part... look at **verse 17**. Those of us who are still alive will fly. We will rise up in the air and meet Christ and those who have gone on before us... and at that moment we will be transformed to be like Christ too. What an amazing experience that will be when it happens.

So when will it happen? Well we don't know. In fact **Mark 13:32** tells us that not even Jesus knows. According to **Luke 12:40 & Rev 3:3** It will be at an hour that no one will expect. But there will be some clues. We will be able to interpret the times... when there will be false Christs, anti-christs, wars and rumors of wars... a time when good will be called bad and bad will be called good. It seems like it could be soon huh... but we don't know. What we do know however is that it will be in conjunction with the end times tribulation period when God pours out his wrath on the world for a 7 year period of time.

But even then we have multiple theories of when during the tribulation. Pre-tribulation, midtrib, posttrib?  $\frac{3}{4}$  trib? So without going into the support and rebuttal to each of these positions let me first say... it's not a big deal so don't get carried away with figuring it out. Secondly... with the full counsel of scripture I think the best thought is a pre-tribulation rapture. The evidence is simple. For one, there is no mention in the Bible of the

church during the tribulation period... leading us to believe that the church isn't around for it. Secondly... **Rev 3:10** tells us plainly that the church will be kept from the hour of trial. The hour of trial seems to be an indication of the tribulation period.

Regardless of it's in the middle, the end, or the beginning of the tribulation period... the rapture of the church by our Lord Jesus is going to happen. So be ready. I believe this is the whole point of the rapture... that we would be ready. Let me explain. Very few people will experience the rapture from the perspective of the living. If that is the case... then why is it emphasized in passages like this? If very few people will be raptured why point all of us to the second coming? Simple. **The hope of the rapture reminds the living to remain vigilant and expectant of the Master's return.** **Luke 12:35-48**, which I recently did a facebook live daily devotional on, lays out this perfectly. The master is away... and instead of taking a break, becoming lazy, or partying our lives away... we should remain vigilant as good servants for his return. The main point of the rapture isn't that we put all our eggs in the basket that we will be a part of it... rather it is an event to help us stay focused on the matter at hand. **Mark 13:33** tells us to be on your guard and stay alert. **Luke 12:35** tells us to be dressed for action (be fighting and serving).

We can so easily become complacent and comfortable in this world and forget that this is not our home... a mind on the coming of Christ helps us keep focus on what's important. The hope of the rapture is not the experience of being raptured from this world... or escaping death – it's to be with Jesus our master and to be found serving him when we meet him again. **There is one fundamental hope for all mankind; that where Christ is, there you may also be.**

But there is... **A Better Hope: The Dead In Christ Are Merely Asleep (vs13-14).** I think most feel that the rapture is better than death because they will escape dying. No one wants to go through the experience of dying right? But there is a gift in dying that those who are raptured will not receive. Look at this passage... the dead precede the living. The dead rise first. There is something special about being with Christ first. But in order to be with Christ as one who has died... you will have to be resurrected. As we've said... only a few will experience the rapture... but a vast majority will experience death... so don't hope in the rapture as much as you hope in being resurrected with Christ (vs14). Get this... **only those who die will experience resurrection.** The raptured will say... I never saw death... but they will never be able to say that they were dead and now they live again.

But even more than that... those who die should be viewed by the living as merely asleep. We must understand... they aren't really dead. To us they are in a long blissful sleep to us... in reality they are with

Christ. (vs13). **2 Corinthians 5:8** tells us that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. As soon as they are with the Lord they are radically changed to be like Christ in ways that we are not. Listen to **1 John 3:2 & Phil 3:20-21**. If this is true... and it is... then we shouldn't grieve like the world (vs13). You see... the greatest oppression of this world is the looming fear of death. Satan's true power is the fear of death (Hebrews 2). Those without Christ have no hope beyond the grave... that is why they grieve the dead so greatly... to them they are truly gone. But Not US. We know that those who are in Christ are not dead... they are alive and we will see them again! So instead of grieve... we should do the opposite... we should rejoice that they are finally enjoying their reward. And the only grief we will experience is that we will miss them until we see them again. **What an amazing hope; the dead in Christ are more alive than we could possibly imagine. We don't fear death because we have eternal life.** And that eternal life is with Christ. **There is one fundamental hope for all mankind; that where Christ is, there you may also be.**

But there is a greater hope... than the rapture... and there is a greater hope than eternal life... You see... **The Best Hope: We Will Always Be With The Lord (vs17-18).** **Our greatest hope isn't in the rapture or in life after death... our greatest hope is being with Jesus our Lord forever.** We must remember this fundamental thing... Christ is the reward. What is a rapture without Jesus. What is life after death without Jesus. I know that it is a hard perspective to grasp... but life is only life with Christ. If you are merely alive but void of the giver of life... you have no life. We are hoping to be with Jesus... plain and simple!

### Application (Resolution, You)

And so what is the application of this passage. Well we find it in **verse 18**. We encourage one another with this message. **The cure to our hopelessness – is eternal life with Christ** (vs18). Listen, I know life is hard – but we are living for another life with Christ. Listen, I know that your situation is a struggle – but we persevere for a day with no more struggles. Hey, I know that the death of your loved one has been hard on you – but they aren't really dead... they are with Christ and one day we will be there too. This is true hope! That death is not the end... that hell is not destination... but that you will live forever with your Lord Jesus Christ. This is what all of life is pointing towards now. This one fundamental truth sets you free from fear... from depression... from meaninglessness. This is the hope of mankind... to be with Jesus forever. **There is one fundamental hope for all mankind; that where Christ is, there you may also be.**

## Conclusion

So what is the second coming really? Technically it is the second time Christ comes to this Earth to rapture the church. But for each of us who will die before the rapture... the second coming is when we see him and are transformed from death to life for all of time. So regardless if we meet him in the rapture or meet him before then... our hope is in the second coming of Christ when we will be with him forevermore.

So be vigilant... expecting his return, living as a warrior and servant. Share the gospel, serve the needy.

So be hopeful... knowing that death is nothing more than a quick nap and then eternal life with Christ. **There is one fundamental hope for all mankind; that where Christ is, there you may also be.** I just want to be with Jesus! And I will!