**“Watch & Be Ready”**

 **(For the Rapture)**

**Let’s study 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

v.13 - ***But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.***

* In the few weeks Paul was with the Thessalonians, he emphasized the soon return of Jesus, and the Thessalonians believed it earnestly.
	+ After Paul left, they wondered about those Christians who died before Jesus came back.
	+ They were troubled by the idea that these Christians might miss out on that great future event and that they might miss the victory and blessing of Jesus’ coming.

v.14-15 - ***For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.***

***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 not precede those who have fallen asleep.***

* For the Thessalonian Christians, their troubled minds were answered by the statement ***“God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.”***
* Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that those who are asleep – Christians who have died before Jesus returns for His church – will not be *Left Behind*.
	+ Those who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will not precede them.

v.16 - ***For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.***

* There will be an audible signal at the beginning of this remarkable event.
	+ It may be that all three descriptions (shout, voice, and trumpet) refer to the same sound; or there may be three distinct sounds.
	+ The rapture will not be silent or secret, though the vast majority of people may not understand the sound or its meaning.
		- For those who are left behind, there will be mass confusion, probably even panic.
* What is the significance of the sound of a trumpet?
	+ In the Old Testament, trumpets sounded the alarm for war and threw the enemy into a panic, as in the case of the seven trumpets described in Numbers 10:9 and Revelation 8 and 9.
	+ Trumpets also sounded an assembly of God’s people, as in Leviticus 23:24 and Numbers 10:2.
	+ At the rapture, the trumpet of God gathers together God’s people.
* There are three other associations of trumpets and end-times events.
	+ One is the last trump of 1 Corinthians 15:52, which seems clearly to be connected with this same trumpet of 1 Thessalonians 4.
	+ The others are the seven trumpets which culminate at Revelation 11:15,
	+ And the trumpet gathering the elect of Israel at the end of the age in Matthew 24:31.
* Many wonder how the dead in Christ are raised first.
	+ Some believe that they now have temporary bodies and await this resurrection.
	+ Others believe that they are now disembodied spirits who wait for resurrection.
* There will come a day, when in God’s eternal plan, the dead in Christ will receive their resurrection bodies.
	+ Until that day, we are confident that the dead in Christ are not in some kind of soul sleep or suspended animation.
		- Paul made it clear that to be absent from the body means to be present with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8)
	+ Either the present dead in Christ are with the Lord in a spiritual body, awaiting their final resurrection body; or, they have received their resurrection bodies already because they live in the eternal now.
	+ Either way, we are confident that God’s promise is true.

v. 17 - ***Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.***

* Those alive and remaining until this coming of Jesus are caught up to meet Jesus in the air, together with the dead in Jesus who have already risen.
* This passage is the basis for the New Testament doctrine of the rapture, the catching away of believers to be with Jesus.
	+ The word rapture is not in the ancient Greek text.
	+ The Greek word “harpazo” is used in the original and means “to be taken away by force as in taking hostages.
	+ The Latin Vulgate, translates the phrase “harpazo” as “raptuse”, which is where we get our English word “rapture”.
* Paul’s statement, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is both dramatic and fantastic.
	+ He speaks of Christians flying upward, caught up... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.
	+ We wouldn’t believe this unless the Bible told us it was so, not any more than we would believe that God became a baby, that He did miracles, that He died on a cross and that He lives in us.
* Paul’s plain language leaves no doubt regarding the certainty of this event. But the timing of this event in the chronology of God’s prophetic plan is a matter of debate among Christians.
* The Bible teaches that there will be an important seven-year period of history before the Battle of Armageddon and triumphant return of Jesus. The debate about this catching away centers on where it fits in with this final seven-year period, popularly known as the Great Tribulation, with reference to Matthew 24:21.
	+ Calvary Chapel believes in a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church – I’ll provide reasons for this later in the study
	+ Some believe in a mid-tribulation rapture
	+ Some believe in a pre-wrath rapture (2nd half of the tribulation)
	+ Still others believe in a post-tribulation rapture
* 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 assures us that believers who died would share equally with the living in the events of the rapture and the resurrection, answering their fear that somehow the dead in Christ were at a disadvantage.
	+ But if Paul believed Christians would go through the great tribulation, he would count the dead in Christ as more fortunate than those living Christians who might very well have to endure the great tribulation.
* It would have been logical for Paul to comfort the Thessalonians with the idea that the dead in Jesus were better off because they won’t have to experience the Great Tribulation.
	+ But he didn’t, so this is more evidence for the pre-trib rapture

v. 18 - ***Therefore comfort one another with these words.***

* What words?
* Paul was trying to alleviate their fear that their sleeping, believing brothers and sisters in Christ would somehow be excluded from experiencing the resurrection and having eternal life
* I think he accomplished his goal especially well when he said
	+ ***and so we shall always be with the Lord.***

So now I’d like to talk about some of the reasons we believe in a pre-trib rapture and try to clarify the difference between two end times events.

* The first event is called the rapture of the Church and the second event is called the second coming of Jesus Christ.
* In today’s study we’ve looked at the rapture of the Church
	+ When Jesus will come for his Church
* One reason we believe that Jesus raptures His Church is found in Romans 5:9 - ***Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.***
* Another reason is 1 Thessalonians 5:9 - ***For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ***

**Chuck Smith in “Calvary Distinctives” states the following:**

*I do not believe that the Antichrist can take over the rule and authority of the earth while the church is still here. I believe that the Holy Spirit within the church is the restraining force that is holding back the powers of darkness from completely engulfing and overwhelming the world right how. But the moment the church is removed, there will be nothing to hinder or hold back the powers of darkness from taking total control. That which restrains shall restrain until he is taken out of the way. Then shall the man of sin, the son of perdition, be revealed. This is the reason why I’m not looking for the Antichrist. This is just another subtle and deceitful device of Satan, that leads people to be looking for the Antichrist rather than looking for Jesus Christ.*

**The second event, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ,**

* Will be when Jesus will come again with His church to establish His kingdom upon the earth. (Revelation 19:11-19)
* In Revelation 1:7 John says, ***Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.***
* In Colossians 3:4 we read - ***When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.***
	+ We, the Church, will be revealed with Him when He returns.
* Jude 14 speaks of the Second Coming when it states, ***“It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones”***
	+ We believe this reference to ***many thousands of His holy ones*** is referring to His Church
* Zechariah also spoke of this when he wrote, “***In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then*** ***the Lord, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him!”*** (Zechariah 14:4-5)
	+ This also references His Church when he says, ***all the holy ones with Him***

**The Rapture can take place at any time. There are no prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled before the Rapture occurs.**

* It could happen before we finish this study.
* But there are some prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled before Jesus comes again.
	+ The Antichrist must be revealed, and the earth must go through a time of great Tribulation and judgement.
	+ The events in Luke 21:20-27 relate specifically to the Second Coming of Jesus and have yet to come.
	+ Jesus finished speaking about when the second coming will take place in Luke 21:28 saying, ***“But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”***