

The Resurrection, Rapture, and Return of Christ

Living in Light of Christ's Return, *1 Thess. 4:13-18*

Introduction

- We have so many amazing things we can learn from God's creation. Did you know that when a tree's life is threatened and stressed by the elements of fire, drought, or high winds, it twists beneath its bark to reinforce and make itself stronger? On the surface, this new inner strength is not visible because the bark usually continues in the same vertical direction. But when the exterior is stripped away, or when the tree is cut down, its inner struggles are revealed." God works in similar ways in our lives as well. He uses heartache and grief to strengthen us in ways that are not be immediately visible to the world.
- As we discussed before, Paul's discipleship and instruction time with the church in Thessalonica was cut short after just 3 short weeks.
 - Paul sent Timothy his assistant back to church twice encourage them and to bring back a report on their status.
 - The letters of 1 & 2 Thessalonians contain some basic Christian training along with the answers to their most pressing questions.
 - One of their most pressing questions was the fate of their believing loved ones who had died before Jesus Christ came back.
 - Would they ever see them again?
 - Would they miss out on Christ's return & the final resurrection?
- If you've wondered about the believer when they die, I've got good news for you (*Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*)
- Becoming a follower of Jesus Christ doesn't excuse someone from the possibility of suffering and sorrow – it changes it.
 - Jesus changes the expectations of everyone who comes to him in faith.
 - Here we see that **JC even changes the way we grieve over our loved ones.**
- While this passage doesn't answer all the questions that we may have about Christ's return, or eternity, it does reinforce our reasons for hope.
- Follow along with me as we rediscover hope together.

Body

I. The way we grieve reveals what we believe (v. 13, 18)

- A. Ignorance is not always bliss.
 - 1. The Thessalonians didn't know what happen to those had passed away "in Christ" before Christ's 2nd coming – they were miserable.
 - 2. With the help of the HS, Paul satisfied their curiosity and ours.
- B. "Sleep" was a common euphemism for death in the 1st century, but Paul uses it to underscore the temporary nature of death.
- C. The promises outlined here don't erase our need to grieve for those we've lost, but they help us grieve differently.
 - 1. Bible teacher, Zig Zigler says, "Grief is the price you pay for loving someone, because if there were no love, there'd be no grief."

- 2. But our grief should be tempered by the hope that we will see our loved one again someday in the resurrection, rapture, & return of Christ.

D. The way we grieve shows weather or not we really believe in promise of the second coming of Christ.

- 1. Christian grief can co-exist with hope and joy.
- 2. Christian grief points us to our ultimate home in heaven.
- 3. Christian grief draws us close to God.

II. If Jesus kept his first promise, we can trust Him to keep His second promise to the Church (v. 14)

- A. Paul minded readers that JC kept His first promise to rise from the dead.
 - 1. The OT is full of references to resurrection on the 3rd day (Hosea 6:2)
 - 2. JC told his critics that he would be rescued from the tomb the 3rd day just like Jonah was rescued from the great fish (Matt 12:40).
 - 3. JC told his disciples that he would rise up on the 3rd day after being killed by the religious leaders in Jerusalem (Matt. 16:21).
- B. If Jesus kept His 1st promise, He can be trusted to keep His 2nd promise.
 - 1. He promised that even though He would be leaving earth, He would come again and gather His follower to Himself (Jo. 14:3)
 - 2. When He ascended into heaven in front of His disciples, an angel explained that He would eventually come back in the same way that He left (personal, visible, glorious, Act 1:11)
- C. We live our life based on promises. (exceptions? no exceptions w/ God)
 - 1. We trust that the utility company to keep the water & power on.
 - 2. We trust that our spouses will faithful and committed.
 - 3. We trust that the banks will keep our money safe.

III. Jesus will not leave any of His children behind (v. 15-17).

- A. Paul described the events that will usher in Christ's 2nd coming.
 - 1. **The Resurrection:** The Lord will descend from heaven with a lot fanfare (a shout & a trumpet) and the dead in Christ will resurrected in their glorified bodies.
 - 2. **The Rapture:** Those who are still alive in Christ will be "caught up" to meet Him in the clouds. (If you've ever wanted to fly)
 - 3. **The Return:** The raptured & resurrected will be with Lord for eternity.
- B. Bible students still have some questions about this passage.
 - 1. Some believe there will be a 7-year period of "the great tribulation" between the rapture & Christ's final return to earth.
 - 2. Some believe that God has a distinct plan for the nation of Israel during his 2nd coming & the 1,000 earthly reign that follows.
 - 3. All believe that Jesus could come back again at any moment – so the most important question is, "Are you ready?"
- C. I'm proud to say that as parents, Sarah & I have almost never left our kids behind/except for that 1 time when we left R behind at a Cracker Barrel.

Conclusion

- The Gospel is a message of change and transformation and **Jesus even changes the way we grieve over our lost loved ones.**
- The resurrection, rapture, and return of Christ are all established realities, but we need to unpack some of the implications of those realities.
 - Take time to grieve well.
 - Grieving people often travel through similar stages (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance) – but you have to make it your own
 - Don't lose hope – you will see your loved-one again!
 - Bake a cake
 - I'm really proud of the way our church comes together to encourage and support those who've lost family member.
 - I stopped and counted the other day – I've officiated at 32 funerals since I've been here as your pastor.
 - It may be through food, or some other form of encourage, but look for ways to share hope.
 - Make sure you are ready
 - You will only see your loved one again if you are both “in Christ”
 - Those who ignore or reject Christ will experience a much different fate – an eternity separated from God and others in hell.
 - Admit your sin before a holy God, Believe that Jesus died and rose again for you, and Confess him as your Savior and Lord.
 - You can find hope in a hopeless world.
- Just like a funeral service – these words aren't for the deceased – they've already received their reward. These words are for those are “alive and remain.” – so that you may grieve, with hope.