

# Rapture Readiness and Comfort

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18  
**Preached on:** Sunday, March 6, 2016

It is once again a great joy to be able to minister the word of God to you this morning and in his providence we come to 1 Thessalonians 4. If you have not been with us, we have going through this epistle verse-by-verse and this morning we are in verses 13 through 18 of 1 Thessalonians 4. Let me read the passage to you, 1 Thessalonians 4, beginning in verse 13.

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. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep 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, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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 shall 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. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

We have before us in this text another amazing example of how God in his infinite love for his own pursues us with his grace and he does this many times by the power of his Spirit through the preaching, the teaching of his word, and in this case, the revelation of his word to his inspired apostle. He wants not only to instruct these dear saints and all of the saints down through history with these great truths, but he also wants to therefore comfort them because you must understand that ignorance of divine truth will always weaken your faith; it will always steal away your joy; it will rob you of comfort. You may proudly hold some errant position, you may hold it with earnestness but know this: when the storms of life prevail upon you, your anchor will not hold.

Evidently some of the folks at Thessalonica had lost a believing loved one and they were confused about what was going to happen to them, especially when Jesus returned and doctrinal confusion will always deprive a believer of comfort and so the Lord needed to deal with this. I like to think of doctrinal error is to a believer what radioactivity is to the body: the more the exposure, the worst the outcome. And so like every faithful shepherd, the Apostle Paul now comes along to correct this misunderstanding and thus restore their comfort and their joy. Far too many times, I have been at the bedside of someone who is dying, far too many times I have experienced people who really do not know Christ agonize with a sense of hopelessness and helplessness, and then when they pass to try to deal with a family who really has no hope. And what a difference it is to be around those

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who know Christ, instead of you comforting them, they're comforting you on their deathbed.

But some of the people in Thessalonica did not fully understand the details pertaining to Christ's return to gather believers to himself, especially the amazing promise of what we call the rapture of the church. Now, this is a doctrine that Jesus only referred to in a very general sense. For example in John 14:1-3, Jesus says, "I go to prepare a place for you. 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." Obviously, Jesus didn't explain the details of this until later on through the Apostle Paul in particular. In fact, Paul speaks of this not only here in the passage before us and other passages in the Thessalonian epistles but in 1 Corinthians 15, beginning in verse 51. He says, "Behold, I tell you a mystery." Now, a mystery in the New Testament refers to a truth that was formerly hidden but now it has been revealed. Here's the mystery, "we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

Now, before we look at the text before us this morning in detail, I need to give you some important background. I know for some of you the things that I'm about to say, about to teach, are a bit foreign, certainly that is true with our listeners, many of our listeners, but this is very foundational. First of all, what does "rapture" mean? Well, the English noun and verb "rapture" comes from the Latin noun "rapturo" and the verb "rapio" which refers to the Greek word "harpazo" which is translated "caught up." We see it in verse 17, "we who are alive and remain will be caught up," harpazo. It comes from that Greek word and that's the way it's used 14 times in the New Testament. And as we look at the way the word is used in the New Testament in various contexts, we see that it's used to describe something that is removed suddenly; something that is snatched away. It's also used in reference to stealing or plundering and removing; a number of passages speak to that. But also, a third use is really one which focuses on being caught up to heaven; snatched away into heaven. It is used of Paul's third heaven experience in 2 Corinthians 12. It's also used of Christ's ascension to heaven. In Revelation 12:5, John says that Christ who was "caught up to God and to His throne." So this is the perfect term to use to describe God suddenly snatching away his bridal church from earth to heaven at really the first stage of Christ's second coming, and without even employing this term but by using similar contextual language in 1 Corinthians 15 that I just read, this refers to the same eschatological event.

So some of these dear folks did not understand the details pertaining to Christ's return to gather believers to himself. For example, they're wondering, "What happens to my dead loved one who has died in Christ? What's going to happen to us who are alive when he

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returns? What happens to the bodies of believers in relation to their souls when Christ returns?" And you might also recall that some of them were suffering and thinking therefore that they're in the pre-kingdom judgments; that they're living in the tribulation; maybe this is the day of the Lord. Obviously, they were taught that they weren't supposed to endure this as we see in 2 Thessalonians 2. Remember we looked at this last week. There were some false teachers that Satan had planted in the church and Paul addresses the confusion and chaos that they were bringing. In 2 Thessalonians 2, beginning at verse 1, he says, "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come." Then he says this, "Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction. Then he goes on to explain a number of the events and the sequence of those events that will occur after the rapture, after we've been snatched away, those things that will lead up to the final outpouring of God's wrath known as the day of the Lord.

So what we see in 1 Thessalonians 4, beginning in verse 13 all the way through verse 11 of chapter 5, is Paul explaining to them that the Lord's return will be two things: impartial and sudden, and we're going to look at the first part of that today. It will be impartial. He's impartial toward all believers. Those who are alive when he returns will have no advantage over those who have died in Christ. And then, secondly, that we'll look at the next time I'm with you, his return is going to be sudden; it's going to be unexpected. We await that rapture right now. It could happen right now. We don't know when it's going to happen but it will be a surprise. We all need to be ready. We all need to be prepared. In Matthew 24:36, Jesus says, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." And in Acts 1:7, he says, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." And you may recall in Matthew 25 after he gave the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins which illustrates the foolishness of not being prepared for the Lord's return, he warned, "Be on the alert then for you do not know the day nor the hour."

So obviously, these great truths apply to all of us and it's for this reason that I've entitled my discourse to you this morning "Rapture Readiness and Comfort." And I might add that as believers we tend to be like little children that grab at anything that sparkles. We get distracted with all of the things of life and we live as though Christ isn't coming again. It's as if we're indifferent to it. We're fascinated with the things of the world that are passing away and care little for eternal things. I mean, who cares about heaven when you live in America, right? Who needs heaven. We've got Costco. We've got television. We've got all of these things. And, folks, remember, Jesus is coming again. He has

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promised that and we need to be ready. We're citizens of another kingdom. We're aliens here. It's for this reason Paul says in Colossians 3, "Therefore," in other words, "Since you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." He goes on to say, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." And here's why, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God," and then he adds this amazing statement that we will understand better before this hour is over, "when Christ who is our life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

Can I make this real practical to you, folks? Don't get sucked into the black hole of presidential politics. None of that really matters. I mean, go vote your conscience but only a fool would deny that our country is in an economic and a moral free fall and no egotistical, ambitious, greedy person is going to somehow bail us out of all of this. We are on the same trajectory as every other empire of the world that has mocked God. The country is gone and so political activism and fervor is merely rearranging the deck furniture on the Titanic. Practically, the world is being prepared for the antichrist. The US and all the rest of the nations of the world are going to be destroyed; they're all going to come against Israel and God is going to destroy them. Jesus is coming again, however, to take us away before ultimately all of those terrible events of the tribulation will happen.

Now, it's also important for you to understand that Christ not only could come at any time but his coming will be one event in basically two stages or two parts. First, you will see that Christ is coming in the air to rapture the church, and then he's going to later on come to the earth to conquer, judge and set up his kingdom. Think of it this way: at the rapture of the church, he comes for his saints; at his second coming, he will come with his saints. And after the church has been removed from the earth, God will then turn his attention once again to unfaithful Israel because God has a distinct plan for Israel. The church has not replaced Israel as many dear brothers teach. As a footnote: unfortunately the reason there is so much confusion about eschatology, the reason there is so much debate, especially with respect to the distinction between Israel and the church is because many of us have a very different hermeneutic; we have a different understanding of how to interpret the Bible. I believe that we should hold to a consistently literal interpretation of Scripture and this method of interpretation attempts to really explain the original sense of what the writer was saying, what we call authorial intent, according to the normal use of words and languages. You will not hear me say, "Well, I know that's what Scripture says but that's not what it means. It can't mean that so let me and some other scholars tell you what it means." I'm very uncomfortable with that line of thinking and so a consistent literal interpretation interprets the Bible in a normal and plain way while at the same time understanding that the Bible at times uses symbols and figures of speech and types and so on.

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So given this method of interpretation, God has made it clear that because of Israel's sinful rejection of her Messiah King, the nation of Israel has been temporarily set aside. Romans 11:11-15 makes that clear as well as some other passages. And now the church is the temporary custodian of divine truth, but a day is coming when ethnic national Israel will once again appear as the object of God's special concern as he prepares judicially to establish his kingdom on earth, that long expected kingdom promised in the Old Testament but those of us in the church today will be snatched away prior to that time. May I remind you that we are the very body of Christ. We are the bride of the Messianic King and so the church is going to be delivered from the future wrath of God that he will pour out upon the nations of the world in preparation for his glorious kingdom. In fact, Paul prays the saints at Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, because they waited, he says, "for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come." 1 Thessalonians 5:9, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Moreover in Revelation 3:10, he says, "I will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."

So here in verses 16 and 17 in particular, we learn that he will come to gather his own and he will take us to that place that he has prepared for us. This is going to happen before that time of terrible tribulation upon the earth. He is going to take us to heaven. During that time, we will receive our rewards. And then at his final stage of coming, his second coming, we will return with him. That's what Paul said as we read earlier in Colossians 3:4, "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." And if we look, for example, at Revelation 4 all the way through chapter 19, there are at least three references to a body of saved people in heaven during that period of tribulation on earth. We are called the wife of the Lamb. We are called the tabernacle of God, Revelation 13:6, which is a specific reference to a body of personal beings that will be dwelling in heaven during the career of the antichrist who is also called the beast. He will be down on earth. And then there is also the 24 elders in Revelation 4 and 5, that is symbolic of the glorified church that has been taken into heaven. They are seated upon thrones, clothed in white garments, wearing crowns of gold on their head, singing a new song and so forth.

So God has promised that he will remove the church from the earth prior to that seven years of tribulation which is also known as Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week. This is a period of time when God will be exclusively dealing with national Israel. You can read that, for example, in Daniel 9:24. And I might add as we look at Scripture, the church has never and will never be present on earth during any of Israel's 70 weeks of judgment that are prophesied in the Old Testament. Think of it this way: just as the church had a very

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abrupt beginning on the day of Pentecost, shortly after the conclusion of the 69 weeks of judgment upon Israel, so it should be expected that the church will have an abrupt removal shortly before the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. And, of course, this is consistent with the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants that God has given to Israel. The future Messianic kingdom of Old Testament prophecy belongs to national and ethnic Israel even though we will also be there to rule and to reign with Christ. Daniels 70<sup>th</sup> week just by way of foundational review, all of that will conclude with unprecedented judgments poured out upon the nations of the world and upon the earth. If you read Jesus' Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, you will see how they parallel, the things that he says parallels what we read in the book of Revelation in chapter 6 through 19. Unprecedented and unimaginable judgments during that time. Three-fourths of the world's population will be destroyed. The earth will be left in absolute ruin and rubble. And even Israel will be judged, but in the end a remnant of Israel will be saved, will be spared. We see this, for example, in Romans 11:25, and before that we learn that God has temporarily and judicially hardened Israel, he says, "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and so all Israel will be saved just as it is written," and here's the promise, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. This is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." Then at that point, Bible prophecy tells us that they will emerge as the people of God over whom Christ will reign as promised to David in 2 Samuel 7, as well as prophesied in Ezekiel 37 and other passages.

So at the rapture, he comes for his saints, and at his final return, he comes with his saints. Then we will come to judge the world, 1 Corinthians 6:2. And as I read to you earlier, Jesus confirmed the disciples' expectation of an earthly kingdom yet to come when he promised them that they would reign with him, Luke 22:29, "I assigned you as My Father assigned Me a kingdom that you may eat and drink at My table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Paul told Timothy in 2 Timoth 2:12, "we shall also reign with Him." And John declared that we would be as a kingdom of priests on earth in Revelation 5:10. He says, "And thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God and they will reign upon the earth."

So this is a bit of background here of eschatology and I'll give you some more after a little bit, but hopefully this will set the stage for what Paul is telling the saints and all of us here in 1 Thessalonians 4, beginning in verse 13, and I believe this can be divided into three categories. Here I see that Paul wishes to 1. establish their hope. Secondly, he wants to explain their hope. And 3. he wants to encourage their hope. And when all of this is properly understood, this will alleviate their grief and their confusion.

So notice what he says with respect to establishing their hope, verse 13, "we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as

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do the rest who have no hope." You see, to be uninformed is to be unprepared, especially when a believing loved one dies and you don't know what's happened to their body; what's going to happen to their soul when Jesus comes again. The danger here with that kind of ignorance is it can cause you, as he says, to grieve as do the rest who have no hope. Now, the Greeks and the Romans of that day had absolutely no hope. They were so utterly confused. In fact, Paul says in Ephesians 2:12 that they were "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." As we study what they believed, we learn that they thought that there was no future for the body; that the body was literally the prison house of the soul; and at death therefore the soul enters into Hades which was a shadowy dismal realm without the sun where the dead bemoaned their very existence. I mean, that's not too exciting, is it? You're not going to find much comfort in that. The Stoics and Epicureans of that day had real doubts of any afterlife at all. At best, the soul is assimilated, they thought, into a fiery substance which is identical to deity. And the mystery religions of that day had bizarre beliefs about resurrections and if you read what they thought, they would talk about how they believed that suddenly hair would begin to grow and a little finger would begin to form and a leg or a foot would begin to twitch and then certain sections of a dead body would begin to reunite and become alive. All kinds of silly stuff. None of that is true. Of course, Satan doesn't care what you believe as long as it's a lie. So a person had to convince himself of these things so the pagans had no basis for their hope.

Then, of course, today you have many people, countless people who believe in reincarnation or annihilation and, I think, most in our culture believe that everybody goes to heaven. It doesn't matter what a scoundrel you are. "Oh, isn't it great that he's with God now. He's looking down on us." And you hear all that silly stuff but, folks, I'll tell you, at death there's no comfort in convincing yourself of those things because if you do not have Christ dwelling within you, the Spirit of God will not cause that truth to bring comfort to your soul because it's not true with you.

Some people even today believe in what's called soul sleep and it's based upon verse 13 where it says, "those who have fallen asleep." This is a heresy that says that souls of the dead are in a state of unconscious existence in the afterlife but as we look at the term that Paul uses here translated "asleep" in the original language it's often used to describe believers who have died. In fact, we see right here in verse 16, those who are asleep are identified as "the dead in Christ." In Philippians 1, beginning in verse 21, Paul says, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better." Boy, don't we all feel like that at times? In 2 Corinthians 5:8, he says, "I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." And think of

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what Christ said to comfort the thief on the cross that had placed his faith in him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in paradise."

So Paul goes on to establish a basis for their hope in verse 14. He says, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." So he first speaks of believing that Jesus has died and we understand that in his death atonement was made. Atonement required two things: satisfaction and substitution. A perfect substitute had to satisfy the holy justice of God and that satisfaction also had to be a substitute for sinners and all of that is true in the Lord Jesus Christ. God made him who knew no sin to become sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. So we are united to Christ when we are born again. These people are asleep in Jesus. So a person who has trusted in Christ as Savior goes immediately, his soul goes immediately into the presence of the Lord, but the body stays in the ground. It decomposes and it temporarily stays asleep until the Lord comes to snatch it up at the rapture. Then at that point, the soul goes immediately into the presence of the Savior where, or I should say when a person dies the soul goes immediately into the presence of the Savior where one enjoys conscious fellowship until all of this occurs. But the basis of their hope was also found in Christ's resurrection. Notice he says in verse 14, "if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." So because we have been united to Christ in faith, in his death and resurrection, our bodies will one day rise just like his body rose. Jesus says, "Because I live, you will also live." 1 Corinthians 6:14, "Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power."

Now if we go back to 1 Corinthians 15 as we read earlier in verse 51, Paul says the same thing. "Behold I tell you a mystery, we will not all sleep but we will all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed for this perishable must put on the imperishable and this mortal must put on immortality." So even as God raised Jesus from the dead, he's going to raise us all up who belong to Jesus. He will cause them then to come along with Jesus from heaven so that he will bring with him their souls that will be instantly reunited with their bodies. There will be this amazing transformation and in that glorious state, then they will go forth to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever.

Now, as a footnote because I know I'm going to be asked this by about 30 of you, okay, and that's fine: what about the order of the resurrections? Well, as we look at Scripture, for example in 1 Corinthians 15:23, we see that there is an order of the resurrection harvest and it comes in three stages at Christ's coming. First of all in verse 23, "But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming."

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As we look at Scripture, we see that those who have come to saving faith from Pentecost to the rapture will be resurrected and joined with living saints at the rapture to meet the Lord in the air and ascend into heaven, 1 Thessalonians 4 where we're at. And then we learn in Scripture that those who have died during the tribulation and all of the Old Testament saints are going to be raised up to reign with him during the millennium, Revelation 20:4; Daniel 12:2; Isaiah 26:19 and so forth. And then finally those who die during the millennium, during the millennial kingdom will probably, we can't be dogmatic here, will probably be instantly transformed at death into their eternal bodies and so forth. The only people that are left are the ungodly and they will be raised as well. They will be raised with a resurrection body that will be suited for an eternal hell and their resurrection occurs at the end of the millennial kingdom and at the great white throne judgment. You can read about that in Revelation 20. Acts 24:15, "be a resurrection of the dead both of the just and the unjust." And in John 5:29, John describes a resurrection of life and a resurrection of judgment.

So having established their hope, he seeks next to explain their hope and here's where it gets really exciting, "For this we say to you," verse 15, "by the word of the Lord," in other words, Jesus has revealed this directly to him, "that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep." In find it interesting that Paul says "we." It indicates that he understood that this could happen in his lifetime and yet he lived in preparation therefore but also taught that it could happen beyond his life and that's why he says in Titus 2:13 that we should be "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus who gave Himself for us."

So he says "we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself," now catch this, "the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout." Oh, I get excited about this. Think about it. Where do you remember the Lord shouting at someone and bringing them back to life? With Lazarus. This is going to happen again. Remember in John 11:43, "He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth.'" Now, folks, think about this: what are people on earth going to think when they hear and they see this? Because you must understand what the Apostle Paul is telling us here is that this astounding supernatural event is going to be public. It will be visible to all. It will be audible to all. There will be a reverberating sound going across this planet like one that has never been heard before and it will be the voice of Almighty God calling his own; the voice of authority. People are going to hear this. They're going to see this in astonishment. And I want you to ask yourself: am I looking for the Lord to descend from heaven to deliver me or am I caught up in all of the other stuff of this life? All of the stuff of the world that's passing away, that's eternally insignificant? Are my ears constantly listening for a shout that no one will miss? Folks, I

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have to tell you, every day of my life my heart is filled with exhilarating joy because my Redeemer lives and he is coming to carry me home, as the old spiritual says. "He is coming for to carry me home."

And notice, his shout will be joined by the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God. Now, we must understand the trumpet blasts in the old dispensation, in the old covenant were used to announce that God had come down to meet his people and it was also used to gather his people together. For example, in Exodus 19 you will recall the story of how God came down to Mount Sinai to give Moses the law in sight of all of the people and the Lord said this to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow and let them wash their garments and let them be ready for the third day for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people and you shall set bounds for the people around the mountain." He goes on to say, "Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death." Then in verse 16 it says this, "So it came about on the third day when it was morning that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound so that all the people who were in the camp trembled." And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God and they stood at the foot of the mountain, verse 19, "When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder." You go on to read how that God then called Moses to come up to the top of the mountain and he told him then to go back down and warn the people lest they break through to the Lord to gaze and perish. Now my point is simply this, dear friends, this same holy unapproachable God that gave us a law that none of us could possibly obey, a law that would point us to a need for a Savior, this same God has sent his Son and when we place our faith in him, we are reconciled to that holy God and we are given his righteousness so that we can come into his presence without any fear. And a day is coming when all of the redeemed, both the dead and the alive along with all who mock him, will hear that voice and will hear that trumpet sound like that trumpet that was sounded at Mount Sinai and once again people will see his appearance and it will be terrorizing to some, but it will be a magnificent glorious sight to those of us who are waiting for our Redeemer. You see, our Deliverer is coming for his people and if you're a Christian, you will believe that with all of your heart.

Paul goes on to say, "and the dead in Christ will rise first." In other words he's saying to the folks, "Hey look, your dead loved ones, don't worry, they're going to be taken care of here. There is no disadvantage to them having died. They're going to enjoy all of this glory as well. The dead in Christ are going to rise first." Then verse 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." Now clouds in Scripture are often

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# Rapture Readiness and Comfort

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18  
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associated with the visible manifestation of the glory of God. Remember when he appeared on Mount Sinai in Exodus 24:16, "The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days." Boy, wouldn't that have been a sight. And then we read that a cloud of God's glory came and filled the tabernacle in Exodus 40. Then later on it came and filled the temple in 1 Kings 8. And we see that at Christ's transfiguration it was there. And it's even described with respect to Christ ascending back into glory. In Acts 1:9 we read this, "He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

Now, think about what the Apostle Paul is telling us here and this is so fascinating, this transformation of decayed corpses to a glorified body as well as this transformation if he were to come right now, if I watched you and you watched me there would be a pretty spectacular before and after picture, you see those all the time. This transformation of these old living bodies to a glorified body is going to happen instantly, Paul says, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, 1 Corinthians 15:52. But I want you to understand there is no indication that our being caught up together will likewise be instant. We're going to be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air but it doesn't say that's going to happen in an instant. Scripture doesn't say and I can't be dogmatic here, but I believe it will be probably a slow ascent, certainly one that the world will witness in absolute utter dismay. Imagine talking to someone and you're an unbeliever and they're a believer and suddenly that old woman looks totally different and begins to go up into the sky. Imagine if you're in a boardroom. Imagine if you're on an airplane.

And we know that this event is going to absolutely terrify every person that is left behind and it is therefore going to demand a plausible explanation and Satan is going to be right here to provide one and he will do that through his servant the antichrist who is also called the beast. He will be seeking political supremacy over the world. By this time Paul describes him in 2 Thessalonians 2 as "the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan with all power and signs and false wonders and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved, and for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might not believe or so that they might believe what is false in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth but took pleasure in wickedness."

Now, we're not told what kind of lie he's going to tell them but it will probably be something along the line of, "Well, isn't it great that God has finally rid us, rid the world of these bigoted, Bible thumping Christians who oppose all social progress and religious unity. They're finally going to be gone." We know whatever he says, it will be a strong delusion that the world will applaud but it will be a blasphemous delusion. According to Revelation 13:6, speaking of the antichrist, John says, "he opened his mouth in

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blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and," here's the church in heaven, "His tabernacle, that is, those who are in heaven." Can you imagine what the saints at Thessalonica must have thought and the looks on their face when they heard this read to them for the first time? Talk about a comfort. The Lord is going to descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trumpet of God. The dead in Christ are going to rise first, 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. And yet so many believers today are indifferent to all of this as if, "That's probably never going to happen." Or many will spiritualize it all away, "Well, you know, that's not really what it means. It's got to mean something else."

Well, that's not what the saints in Thessalonica would have thought. I mean, notice what Paul says, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." And this is the final thing that Paul does. He has established their hope and explained their hope and now he encourages their hope. "Therefore comfort one another with these words." Talk about an understatement. I said to the other congregation, it just hit me, this is such an understatement. This is so far beyond comfort. This is when I can safely use the word awesome. I mean, now this is awesome. Oh dear child of God, learn to set your mind on things above, not on the things of earth. Live in light of eternity. Jesus is coming to snatch us away.

And if I can take just a few minutes because I know that there are a lot of people listening that are going to be confused. You're wondering, "What's going to happen in the chronology after the rapture of the church?" Let me take just a few minutes in closing to tell you and I'm just hitting the highlights. After the church has been translated into heaven, God will resume the final seven years of judgment upon the earth, Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week. He will deal once again with Israel. The first half of the tribulation, the first 3 ½ years, we see that the antichrist is going to rise to power. He will promote a one world economy and a one world political system. He will have a false prophet that will come along beside him that will be kind of a one world religion. We also know according to the prophecies of Ezekiel 38 and 39 that God is going to put hooks in the jaws of a number of Muslim nations and he will bring them down upon the northern mountains of Israel, and we read that he is going to destroy them on the northern mountains of Israel so that the nations of the world will know that, "I am the Lord, the God of Israel." And at that point, Israel will be kind of the nation of nations in the world. People will wonder, "My, what is happening here?" And so the antichrist will sign a peace agreement with Israel and that will really begin to trigger the tribulation. The Jewish temple is going to be rebuilt. Sacrifices will begin once again. And during the first half of the tribulation, you will have what is called the seal and the trumpet judgments that Revelation talks about. They will begin to rain down upon the earth causing catastrophic destruction. And during that

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season of divine judgment, the antichrist who will co-exist with the false prophet, will be heading up this monolithic false religious system. He will allege his abilities to work miracles. He will require people to worship him and wear the mark of the beast. Towards the end of the first half of the tribulation, the antichrist is going to fake his death. He's going to fake a resurrection. Satan always has a counterfeit for what Christ does. We're going to see this happen or the world will see this. We're not going to see it, we're going to be in glory.

At the midpoint of the tribulation, the antichrist is going to violate his covenant with Israel by desecrating the temple. He is going to invade Jerusalem. He is going to invade the Temple Mount. It's known as the abomination of desolation. He's going to demand that the world worship him.

At the last half of the tribulation, God is going to send two supernatural witnesses that will don sackcloth in mourning over the desecration of the temple. They will oppose the antichrist. And during that last half of the tribulation, God is going to pour out his bowl judgments that will plague the beast worshipers and wreak havoc upon all of the ecosystems of the world. It will cause men to blaspheme God. And during these final days of suffering, the antichrist is going to expand his empire to include ten nations and each will have a ruler or an administrator that will serve under him and the ultimate goal of those nations is to eradicate the Jews, God's covenant people, prevent the kingdom from coming and also destroy all worshipers of Christ, all Gentile believers and by this time, the Jews that are remaining are worshiping Christ even as we do today. They will wage war. The antichrist will wage war against the Lamb at the battle of Armageddon. The antichrist will move against Jerusalem in a satanic plot to destroy them. Ultimately half of the city will fall to the forces of the antichrist but a Jewish remnant will occupy the eastern part of the city with the Temple Mount. The two witnesses will be killed and then their bodies will be put on public display but then they will be raised again and then at the moment of Israel's greatest peril their Messiah King is going to return and his glorified bride, his bridal church, will return with him. He will come to establish his kingdom and to rescue his people. He will ascend the Mount of Olives in an unimaginable triumph. There will be a great earthquake that will split Jerusalem, it will create a massive valley leading from the Temple Mount to the desert, a valley that the remaining Jews will have to flee to safety.

Then you have him establishing his kingdom. He will renovate the earth to return it to Edenic splendor. He will rule from Jerusalem in a magnificent temple that is described in great detail at the end of Ezekiel's prophecy. The antichrist and the false prophet will eventually be thrown alive into the lake of fire. The abomination of desolation in the temple will be removed. The Gentile nations will be judged. Satan will be temporarily

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bound at the beginning of the millennial kingdom. The Old Testament and tribulation saints will be resurrected and finally Israel's long awaited King will reign in all of his glory and we will reign with him. You see, the millennial kingdom is the consummating bridge between human history and the eternal state and at the end of the millennium, God will judge Satan and the wicked at the great white throne judgment. He will then uncreated the world. He will purge it forever from any remnant of sin and he will create a new heaven and a new earth where only righteousness will dwell and we will forever dwell in the presence of his glory, blameless with great joy. Comfort one another with these words and live in light of his return.

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you for these eternal truths. Impress them deeply upon our hearts that we may live lives that reflect and refract your glory so that others can be saved. Lord, may we be a second coming people looking for your return, serving you faithfully until we see you face-to-face. Lord, thank you for these promises. Thank you that you are a God that can do every one of these things. We give you praise in Jesus' name. Amen.*

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at [otcr.org](http://otcr.org).