

The Day of Christ's Return

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Thessalonians series #10

June 18, 2023

PreSermon Comments

- Insight from wife: all about brothers and sisters. Sexual immorality (, brotherly love by working hard, seeing them again in eternity

Introduction

- 3 of my daughters (so far) have done a play
- End of a scene: darkness, instrumental music playing, all black clothes moving furniture
 - If someone hadn't been to a play before, "what does this mean"?

Redemption in Six Scenes

Scene 1: God creates | Genesis 1-2

Scene 4: God's Messiah | Matthew-John

Scene 2: Great rebellion | Genesis 3-11

Scene 5: Gospel people | Acts-today

Scene 3: Abraham's family | Genesis 12-OT

Scene 6: Final victory | Someday

Scene 4 / Scene 5 Pivot

Acts 1 ⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹ After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven."

- Jesus ascended into heaven, where he now rules and reigns over all things
- Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit, now we're empowered to get the message out
- We're to await the pivot between scene 5 and Scene 6 | No SCRIPT TO FOLLOW

The disciples asked (Matt. 24), what's the sign gonna be for the end of all things?

- War? Nope, that's not it. Famine? Just getting started.
- Persecution, apostasy, lawlessness, lovelessness
- Jesus: don't be afraid, persevere to the end.
- Here is the surefire sign...

The True Sign

Matthew 24 ¹⁴ This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

- After Acts 2, virtually all NT writers said “we’re in the last days,” Scene 5 waiting for 6
 - 1 Jn 2:18 “Children, it is the last hour”
 - 1 Pt. 4:7 “The end of all things is near”
 - Hb 1:2 “In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son”
- Super close to the last minutes of the last hour | We’re closer than we’ve ever been

Transition to Thessalonians

- Largely a pagan / Gentile audience | Widespread misunderstanding about death, afterlife
- **Catullus** [Let’s live, and love, ignore what boring old people say] Suns may set and rise again. For us, when once the brief light has set, an eternal night must be slept.
- (big question) What about Christians who die before Jesus’ return?

Encouraged Through Understanding

1 Thessalonians 4 ¹³ We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope... ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

- Pause: how do we feel about the end times? | Scared? Sad? Overwhelmed? Ignorant?

(big idea) Understanding the return of Jesus is a great encouragement

Understanding the Pivot

1 Thessalonians 4 ¹³ We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

- For those who trust in Jesus, death isn’t the final word. It’s like sleep, you’ll rise
 - Death means the ripping apart of spirit and body
- Resurrection of Jesus means the bodily resurrection of those who believe
 - We won’t exist forever as disembodied but embodied (**1 Cor 15**)

Order of Operations

¹⁵ For we say this to you by a word from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord’s coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel’s voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with

them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Encouraging Truths

1. Death is temporary | “sleep”
2. Eternal life will be embodied | “rose again...in the same way”
3. Those who die won’t miss out
 - Side point: this is why they need to keep working with their hands

Jesus the Archangel?

1 Thessalonians 4 ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel’s voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

- JW’s arguments: 1) Jesus leads an army of angels, so does Michael, 2) here it says that Jesus has an archangel’s voice.
- Response: Revelation also says that Jesus has a voice like rushing waters, but that doesn’t mean he’s the Snoqualmie Falls, *have you ever seen them in the same room at the same time?*
- JW’s are starting from a foundation of Jesus being a created being, so it’s a longer chat

Raptured Into Heaven?

1 Thessalonians 4 ¹⁷ Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

- Common teaching called “the rapture” that comes from this verse
 - Caught up = Gk. *harpazo* = Lt. *raptus*
- Main point of common rapture teaching is 2 events: partial return w/ rapture, final return
 - Raptured into “heaven” (the air) until the final (2nd) return of Jesus
 - Popularized by recent works like *Late Great Planet Earth* and *Left Behind*

Rethinking Rapturism

1. Now-common rapture teaching is historically new
 - a. Nothing like modern CRT until 1830
 - b. Ultimately, scripture is our authority. But new teaching should be evaluated.
2. Bonus: Matthew 24:40-41 is not about a rapture
 - a. Parallel to Noah’s flood, swept away in judgment
3. 1 Thessalonians 4 is about one specific question (fate of dead believers)
 - a. Dead and living together with Jesus forever, don’t stretch into a whole construct
4. Rapture teaching never mentions the dead
 - a. “In case of rapture, this car will be unmanned” | What about a cemetery?
 - b. This verse clearly links Jesus’ return and bodily resurrection of believers
5. Verses about the end invariably encourage endurance
 - a. Maybe escape the great tribulation? But overall the call is to endure.
6. One “Day of the Lord” both joyful and fearful
 - a. Argument for CRT is that we will escape | What about Israel in the Exodus?

- b. 2 Thessalonians 1 *you're enduring suffering...relief will come. This will happen at the revelation of Jesus, when he also inflicts vengeance on those who reject him*
- 7. Our ultimate destination is not heaven, but new creation
 - a. We will not be "in heaven" for eternity, but in a new heavens and earth
- 8. We're caught up to welcome the King home

Michael Holmes The word for "meeting," *apantesis*...was frequently used in secular Greek as a technical term for the formal reception of a visiting dignitary, in which a delegation of citizens or city officials would go out to meet a guest on his way to the city and escort him back into town with appropriate pomp and circumstance. In the New Testament (Matt. 25:6; Acts 28:15) *apantesis* describes exactly this same kind of movement of a welcoming party going out to meet someone and escorting him back to the destination. **the parable of the bridegroom, paul's arrival in rome** The implication of Paul's use of this word here is that the resurrected dead and raptured living together will meet the descending Lord "in the air" and accompany him in glory and honor the rest of his way to earth.

What's the Big Deal?

1. Biblical understanding is always desirable
2. Potential for fear, for legalism, and for escapism
3. The Bible always calls us to endurance

***You can disagree with me, and we're gonna be OK. We'll sort it out eventually.*

Alan S. Bandy A person's fidelity to Christ and theological orthodoxy does not depend on belief in a two-stage return of Christ or a singular return. When Christ returns and the church is with him in glory, nobody will be disappointed or argue about how or when it all occurred.

(final big idea) Both those who die and those who are still alive at the return of Jesus will be together forever with him in a new heavens and a new earth. This truth should encourage and comfort us while we patiently wait.

While We Wait

1. Pray for, long for, and imagine the day
2. Cultivate endurance and hope
3. Share the gospel with anyone you can