



73 Twenty Ministries
BIBLE STUDIES FOR THE ENTHUSIAST

THE BLESSED HOPE

UNDERSTANDING THE RAPTURE IN 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

73 TWENTY MINISTRIES

A TEACHING MINISTRY OF DR. ROBERT C CROWDER

73TWENTY MINISTRIES: CHARTING THE WORD, NAVIGATING FAITH

Rooted in a lifelong passion for teaching and guiding others in Biblical truth, 73Twenty Ministries is devoted to helping believers navigate the depths of Scripture with both clarity and conviction.

The name 73Twenty holds deep personal significance: it comes from my childhood home at 7320 Greenwood Boulevard in Denver, Colorado. It was here that the foundations of my faith, study, and service were first laid. With the majestic Rocky Mountains ever-present on my horizons, God's Word has been a constant guide and presence throughout my life. The logo of 73Twenty Ministries, with its three mountain peaks in gray, blue, and orange, symbolizes not only the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but also the unwavering foundation of Biblical truth upon which our faith is built.

For more than twenty years, I've served as a pastor, teacher, mentor, and author, committed to making Biblical truths accessible and applicable. Through sermons, Bible studies, books, articles, and other teaching resources, 73Twenty Ministries exists to equip believers, strengthen churches, and proclaim the Gospel. Our mission is both simple and profound: to chart the Word, guiding faith, and helping others anchor their lives in Scripture.

At 73Twenty Ministries, we believe that faithful Biblical study should engage the mind, transform the heart, and shape daily life. Whether through exegetical teaching, character studies, theological exploration, or practical application, every resource is crafted to deepen understanding, strengthen conviction, and encourage obedience to God's Word.

As a ministry grounded in a conservative Baptist, dispensationalist approach, we focus on Biblical exposition, doctrinal clarity, and practical discipleship. We uphold the belief that Scripture is the authoritative, inerrant, and sufficient Word of God, and it's our privilege to help others navigate its timeless truths.

I invite you to explore the resources at 73TwentyMinistries.com and join us on this journey of discovery, growth, and unwavering faith. Together, let's stand on the mountain of God's truths and proclaim His name to every generation.

For His glory alone,

Dr. Robert C. Crowder, Th.D.

Founder, 73Twenty Ministries

THE BLESSED HOPE: UNDERSTANDING THE RAPTURE IN 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 stand as one of the most comforting and doctrinally significant passages in the New Testament. Written to believers who were concerned about the fate of their deceased loved ones, this passage reveals the glorious truth of the rapture: that blessed hope which should encourage every believer's heart. As we examine this text through the lens of dispensational theology, we discover not merely a doctrine to be debated, but a divine promise to be embraced with joy and anticipation.

THE THESSALONIAN CONTEXT

The Thessalonian church, established during Paul's second missionary journey, was a young congregation facing persecution and uncertainty. Paul's brief ministry there (Acts 17:1-9) had laid a foundation of faith, but questions remained, particularly regarding the Second Coming of Christ and the fate of believers who had died before His return. The apostle's pastoral heart compelled him to address these concerns with both theological precision and tender compassion.

Paul's opening words, "*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep*" (v. 13), indicate that this instruction was necessary to correct a misunderstanding that was causing unnecessary grief among the believers. The term "asleep" (Greek: *koimao*) is a beautiful euphemism for death that emphasizes the temporary nature of the believer's physical rest, pointing to the certainty of resurrection.

THE RAPTURE REVEALED

The Comfort of the Resurrection Hope (vv. 13-14)

Paul's primary concern is that the Thessalonians not "*that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.*" The pagan world of the first century had little consolation to offer regarding death and the afterlife. However, believers possess a fundamentally different perspective because "if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus" (v. 14).

This verse establishes the theological foundation for the rapture: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just as Christ's physical resurrection is historical fact, so too is the promise of resurrection for those who have died in Christ. The phrase "God will bring with Him" indicates that the souls of

departed believers, currently with the Lord, will return with Christ to be reunited with their glorified bodies.

The Apostolic Authority (v. 15)

Paul introduces the rapture doctrine with the solemn declaration, “*For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord.*” This phrase (Greek: *en logo kyriou*) indicates that what follows is not merely apostolic opinion but direct revelation from Christ Himself. This divine authority undergirds the absolute certainty of the rapture promise.

The assurance that “*that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep*” addresses the specific concern of the Thessalonian believers. They need not fear that living believers would have an advantage over those who had died. In God’s perfect timing, the deceased in Christ will be raised first, followed immediately by the translation of living believers.

The Rapture Sequence (vv. 16-17)

Paul provides a detailed sequence of events that will occur at the rapture:

The Descent of the Lord (v. 16a): “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven.*” This emphasizes the personal nature of Christ’s return. Not an angel or representative, but Jesus Himself will come for His church. The present tense of “descend” suggests the certainty and immediacy of this event from the eternal perspective.

The Threefold Sound (v. 16b): Three distinct sounds will accompany the Lord’s descent:

- “*A shout*” (Greek: *keleuma*) - a military command or summons
- “*The voice of an archangel*” - likely Michael, who is associated with Israel and resurrection events
- “*The trump of God*” - the final trumpet call for the church age

The Resurrection of the Dead (v. 16c): “*and the dead in Christ shall rise first:*” This refers specifically to the church-age believers who have died. Their bodies will be raised and glorified, reunited with their souls that return with Christ.

The Translation of the Living (v. 17): “*Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.*” The phrase “caught up” (Greek: *harpazo*) means to snatch away suddenly or to rapture. This is the same word used in Acts 8:39 of Philip’s translation and in 2 Corinthians 12:2 of Paul’s experience.

The Eternal Fellowship (v. 17b)

The phrase “*and so shall we ever be with the Lord*” reveals the ultimate purpose of the rapture. This eternal fellowship with Christ is the consummation of our salvation and the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise in John 14:3: “*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*”

DISPENSATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

From a dispensational perspective, the rapture represents the conclusion of the church age and the beginning of God’s renewed dealings with Israel during the seventieth week of Daniel. Several key principles emerge:

The Distinction Between Israel and the Church

The rapture demonstrates God’s distinct program for the church versus Israel. While Israel’s promises relate to earthly kingdom blessings, the church’s hope is heavenly and involves being caught up to meet Christ in the air. This distinction is crucial for understanding the timing and nature of end-times events.

The Imminent Return

The rapture is presented as an imminent event: one that could occur at any moment without warning signs or prerequisite events. This imminency is essential to the “blessed hope” and provides motivation for holy living and faithful service.

The Pre-Tribulation Timing

Dispensational theology places the rapture before the seventieth week of Daniel (the tribulation period), based on several factors:

- The church’s absence from Revelation 4-19
- The promise of deliverance from the “hour of trial” (Revelation 3:10)
- The need for Israel to be the focus of end-times events
- The comfort provided by the rapture hope

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Comfort for the Grieving

Paul concludes with the exhortation to “comfort one another with these words” (v. 18). The rapture doctrine provides genuine comfort to believers who have lost loved ones. Death is not the end but merely a temporary separation that will be gloriously resolved at Christ’s return.

Motivation for Holy Living

The imminent possibility of the Rapture should motivate believers to live with an eternal perspective. As John writes, “*And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*” (1 John 3:3).

Urgency in Evangelism

The rapture reminds us that time is limited. Those who haven't trusted Christ will be left behind to face the tribulation when the church age suddenly ends. This creates urgency in our evangelistic efforts.

Unity in the Body

The rapture will unite all believers, both living and dead, in one glorious moment. This future unity should inspire present cooperation and fellowship among believers.

CONCLUSION

First Thessalonians 4:13-18 stands as a beacon of hope in a world darkened by death and despair. The rapture is not merely a doctrinal curiosity but a practical reality that should shape every aspect of Christian living. As we await that glorious moment when the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, we can live with confidence, knowing that our labor is not in vain and that the best is yet to come.

The blessed hope of the Rapture reminds us that the story of redemption is not yet complete. Just as Christ came the first time to die for our sins, He will come again to receive us unto Himself. Until that day, we continue to watch, work, and witness, knowing that our King could return at any moment. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Titus 2:13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

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