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The Second Coming of Christ:

“Ready for the Rapture”

1 Thessalonians 4

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The Bible teaches that, at any moment, God could sound a “trumpet” and physically snatch Christians from the earth just prior to the tribulation. This is known as “the rapture.” The Bible teaches that the first phase of the second coming of Christ is when He comes in the clouds to gather Christians from the earth. There is a generation that will not experience death but will be snatched up to be with Jesus forever. Are you ready for the rapture?

1. Context

a. Outline

i. Chapter 1

1. We are delivered from God's wrath.

ii. Chapter 2

1. We have reasons to rejoice about Christ's second coming.

iii. Chapter 3

1. Love others while waiting for His return.

iv. Chapter 4

1. Be ready for the rapture.

v. Chapter 5

1. Experience spirit, soul, and body transformation in Christ.

b. Theme

i. Each chapter of 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to the second coming.

2. **1 Thessalonians 4:13–18** – “[13] But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. [14] For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep 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 will by no means precede those who are asleep. [16] For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will 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.”

3. Death, and the generation that never sees death

- a. *“Those who have fallen asleep”* (verse 13)
 - i. The early church used the concept of sleep as a euphemism for death.
 - ii. For a Believer, death is temporary—not final.
 - b. The rapture (verse 17)
 - i. A Biblical concept
 1. The word “rapture” is not in our Bibles, but the concept is.
 - ii. The etymology
 1. The word used to describe the concept of the rapture is the Greek **harpazō**, meaning “to be caught up, seized, or snatched.”
 2. These various definitions are why different translations use various terms to describe the same concept.
 3. In 400 A.D., Jerome translated the Bible to Latin.
 4. The Latin Vulgate Bible used the word **rapiemo** to describe the event in **1 Thessalonians 4:17**.
 5. The verb form of the word is **rapio** or **raptus**, from which we get the English word “rapture.”
 - iii. The definition
 1. Sometime prior to the tribulation, Jesus will suddenly return in the clouds to physically snatch Christians from the earth to meet Him in the air so that Believers who are alive at the time of the rapture will not experience death or the devastating tribulation to come upon the earth.
4. Christians enjoy the five r’s of the rapture
- a. Reassured of life after death
 - b. Resurrected bodies
 - c. Reunited with loved ones
 - d. Rescued from wrath
 - e. Rewarded with eternity
5. Reassured of life after death
- a. The misconception
 - i. The Thessalonians were scared that their fellow Believers who died would miss out on Jesus’ second coming.
 - b. The truth
 - i. Paul reassured the Thessalonians that all Christians will be part of Jesus’ return.
 1. Christians do not need to *“sorrow as others who have no hope”* because we will rise as Jesus rose from the dead (verses 13–14).

2. The dead in Christ will join the welcoming committee for Christians who are alive during the rapture, for *“God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus”* (verse 14).
 3. You don’t need to fear the rapture. You need to prepare for it by accepting Christ as Lord and Savior.
 4. **DISCUSS:** Why are some frightened by the second coming of Jesus? How can we be prepared for it instead?
- c. The two phases of the rapture
- i. In the first phase of Jesus’ return, He will come in the clouds for His saints.
 1. The dead in Christ will rise first, before the rapture of the living.
 2. Our spirits separate from our bodies upon death and immediately go to be with the Lord if we are saved.
 3. But during the rapture, the dead saints’ bodies will be raised incorruptible. Their spirits will merge with their glorified bodies.
 4. Believers living during the rapture will get their glorified bodies on the way up.
 - ii. In the second phase of Jesus’ return, He will come to earth with His saints.
 1. Jesus will come to save His people, judge the earth, and establish His kingdom.
 2. Jesus will specifically come to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (**Zechariah 14; Acts 1**).
 3. **Acts 1:10–11** – “[10] While they [the apostles] looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, [11] who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’”
6. Resurrected bodies
- a. While on earth, we are not in the presence of our Heavenly Father.
 - i. **2 Corinthians 5:6–7** – “[6] So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. [7] For we walk by faith, not by sight.”
 - b. Once we die, our spirit goes to be with the Lord in heaven.
 - i. **2 Corinthians 5:8** – “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”
 - c. When the dead in Christ return with the Lord, then they receive their glorified bodies.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 4:16** – *“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”*
 - ii. Whether a body was cremated or buried is irrelevant. God has the power to gather every particle back to life.
- d. Christians alive during the rapture will receive their glorified bodies on the way up.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 15:50–53** – *“[50] Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. [51] Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— [52] in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. [53] For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”*
 - 1. You cannot take corruptible bodies to an incorruptible heaven (verse 50).
 - 2. We will not all “sleep”—there is a generation that will not experience death (verse 51).
- e. In heaven, there will be no more aches, pains, tumors, or diseases.
 - i. **1 John 3:2** – *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”*
 - ii. **DISCUSS:** In what other ways will we be like Jesus when we see Him as He is?

7. Reunited with loved ones

- a. **1 Thessalonians 4:17** – *“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.”*
 - i. We will meet family we did not know on earth.
 - ii. We will be with our departed loved ones.
- b. **DISCUSS:** How has the promise of a future reunion with your Christian loved ones encouraged you? Are you spreading that hope to a lost world?

8. Rescued from wrath

- a. The tribulation is God’s final wake-up call to a lost world, not for people who have already accepted Christ as Savior.
 - i. **DISCUSS:** Does knowing the terror of the Lord motivate you to reach for the lost (**2 Corinthians 5:11**)? How does this affect your words and actions?

- b. The trumpet voice of God will call Believers home before the time of trouble.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 15:52a** – Jesus will come *“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.”*
 - ii. **1 Thessalonians 4:16** – *“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”*
 - iii. **Revelation 4:1** – *“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’ Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.”*
 1. The apostle John, as a picture of the church, was caught up to heaven before he saw the events of the tribulation.
 2. The word “church” is mentioned 19 times in the first three chapters of Revelation.
 3. The word then disappears after John is taken up to heaven and does not come back until **Revelation 22:16**, after phase two of Jesus’ second coming.
 - iv. Although other Believers hold to various beliefs about when the church is raptured, we believe in a pre-tribulation rapture.
 1. As Ed Hindson said, it doesn’t make sense that God would beat up His bride then bring her to their wedding.
 2. Jesus compared His second coming to the days of Noah (**Matthew 24**) and Lot (**Luke 17**).
 3. **Luke 17:26–30** – *“[26] As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: [27] They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. [28] Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; [29] but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. [30] Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.”*
 4. Noah and Lot were righteous men in an unrighteous generation.
 5. **DISCUSS:** How are you being a righteous witness to the unrighteous world around us?
 6. Both Noah and Lot were saved before the Lord judged the ungodly.
 7. **Matthew 24:40, 44** – *“[40] Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. . . . [44] Therefore you also be*

ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

- v. God does not subject His people to His wrath.
 - 1. **1 Thessalonians 5:9** – *“God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*
 - 2. **DISCUSS:** Have you been saved from the wrath to come? How do you know (**John 3:36**)?

9. Rewarded with eternity

- a. Jesus is our reward.
 - i. Spending eternity with the Lord and His people is our ultimate reward.
 - ii. **1 Thessalonians 4:17b–18** – *“[17] We shall always be with the Lord. [18] Therefore comfort one another with these words.”*
- b. Be prepared.
 - i. The Bible is silent on the time between the rapture and the tribulation.
 - ii. The rapture is imminent: it could happen at any time.
 - 1. There are no prophecies left to be fulfilled between now and the rapture.
 - 2. **DISCUSS:** How does the lack of prophecies left before Jesus’ second coming motivate you to live in light of eternity? Will you be part of Jesus’ return?

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)