

Hope and the Coming of Christ

4:13 "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

¹⁷ Then we who are 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."

1 Thessalonians 4:13:18

Secularism

IN 1992, THE KOREAN-BASED **Hyoo-go** ("rapture") **movement** predicted that beginning on Oct 28, 1992, "**50 million**

people would die in earthquakes, 50 million more in collapsed buildings, 1.4 billion from WWII, and 1.4 billion from Armageddon.” In response, “believers” quit their jobs, sold their homes, abandoned their families, and ran up debts in preparation for the end of the world. Many people committed suicide the week before. Several pregnant women had abortions so that they would not be too heavy to be lifted to heaven.¹

The [apocalypse](#), doomsday as it is sometimes called, the [rapture](#), predicting the future, and the strange events that often accompany these teachings—including scores of predictions over the centuries that have led to violent upheavals, slaughters, and deaths or conversely, abandonment of everything in this life to go wait on top of your roof so that you can make it to heaven without bumping your head on the ceiling when Jesus comes to rapture you away only to end up abandoning your faith because of one-to-many failed prophecies. All of these things [can be tied](#) in one way or another [to our passage today](#). Though, wrongly so.

¹ [Walter Martin](#) and Hank Hanegraaff, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, revised (2000 Bible Study Centre, digital library PDF, ch. 15, “The Apocalyptic Cults.”)

In fact, not only do those kinds of things often go astray, they usually **miss the point** that is actually there in the passage. And so, though we do have to talk a little about them today in order to understand what the passage is not saying, we do better to go in another direction, something like what **Mark Dever** does in his sermon on this passage.² Dever presents us with a person to think about. The impact of coming to know this person is very profound, and so I thought I would tell you about him. Let me introduce you to **Secular Sam**.

Secular Sam is successful. He has a good job. A Nice girlfriend. A Beautiful apartment. His car is new. His health is fine. He is humorous. He is good with people. He's intelligent.

Secular Sam is also a Christian and not just any Christian, but an active one. He has an Evangelical background, though he's long ago left some of the more embarrassing and immature bits of his background behind. He's not a liberal theologically. He believes in the authority of Scripture. Yet, he's not really a fundamentalist. He's recovered the cultural mandate from Genesis, indeed he knows that all of life is under the scrutiny of Scripture. Not just as religion, but business and philosophy and ethics and economics and law. Indeed, he's even come to see

² **Mark Dever**, "The Day of the Lord," (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11), *The Gospel Coalition* (4-21-2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gwzTpVzY7Q>.

Scripture as the most satisfying explanation for all kinds of phenomena in our world, from the origin of the world to the meaning of life. Its explanatory power is truly awesome. It has the first principle God, who by definition has no previous cause. He can realistically examine human foibles and also understand human sinfulness. Sam can confound his secular friends by historical evidence for the resurrection. He's a student of Scripture and he seems to have a moral bearing which, if truth be known, is the envy of most of his friends.

But, if the truth were known, Sam is profoundly secular. He expects, in this sense, to wake up in his bed tomorrow morning. Sam's never even heard of what his grandparents call the blessed hope. He's an example of his generation's reaction against speculation and prophecy. No Sam's concerns even about his own spiritual life are all contained in this age. Sam assumes that tomorrow will be just like today. But that has some serious implications for the way he thinks about today.

You may be wondering, how is Sam "secular?" I mean, doesn't secular mean "godless?" Actually, no, it doesn't. Not necessarily.

George Holyoke was the first to coin the term "**Secularism**" in his 1851 journal *The Reasoner*. There he argues that morality should be based solely upon regard to the well-be-

ing of mankind in this present life to the exclusion of all considerations drawn to belief in God or in a future state. So Secularism is Godless. But you may be thinking that the “secular” part of this is the idea of doing this without God. But no. That is actually due to his agnosticism.

Instead, he chose the term secularism rather than something like atheism for this reason: *Saecularis* is a late Latin word meaning “worldly” or “pertaining to a generation or age.” It comes from the word *saeculum* meaning “age” or “span of time” or “lifetime.”³ In other words, to be secular is to have your focus down here rather than up there. In Sam’s case, his focus is not up there, but only down here, at least as far as it concerns his eternal destiny. This is why Sam is presented as being so successful, with a good job, girlfriend, apartment, car, health, and so on. This is why Sam’s religion is touches on all things down here. He just doesn’t care about “up there.” It has no practical impact on the way he lives his life.

I wonder, are you more like Sam than you care to admit? Do you live your life more for this present age than the age to come? If you do, what would it look like to change? Does the age to come have less of an impact upon the way you live

³ “Secular (adj.),” [Online Etymology Dictionary](#).

life in this present age than you would feel comfortable sharing with others? If it does, what would be a practical starting point for it to begin having an impact on you in the here and now. Because the reality is, it is supposed to.

Hope

Our passage is **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**. Its main theme may begin to answer that question. It contains an **idea** and an **example**. The idea is “**hope**.” This is its main theme. This is the first thing that must impact your life down here—hope for up there! The example is **death**. “**But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.**” We have to unpack this a bit.

First, Vs. 13 acts as a kind of **transitional** verse. It continues a thought from **vv. 11-12**, while moving us into a whole new world of ideas in **vs. 14**. Concerning 11-12, Paul had told them that they need to “**aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands ... so that you may walk properly before outsiders...**” We made some of our own applications when we looked at those last time. Now, Paul makes his own. The transition is seen

in the first word “but” (*de*, technically the third word in the Greek). But relates to what was just said. Thus, Beale says, “Behaving quietly and properly also entails not grieving over the death of loved ones *like the rest of men* (i.e., the ‘outsiders’ of 4:12), *who have no hope*.”⁴

This takes us to **the example**. Death. This is the phrase “**those who are asleep**.” In the ancient world, sleep was sometimes used as a synonym for death. It is a fascinating way to depict death, isn’t it? When you think of death, you may think corpse, there’s nothing’s there. When the Apostle thought of death, he pictured the body itself as sleeping, at least metaphorically. What is sleep? **Sleep** is this strange **netherworld** where your mind is perhaps more active than when awake, which takes you to places unimaginable, which in some ways is a kind of gateway to the other side, or at least it can be. Yet, it is rare that you remember much about it when you wake.

Finally, we have **the theme**. It is introduced this way: “**We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers**.” Uninformed? About what? About the fact that when Christians die, we do not grieve “**as others do**.” Notice it doesn’t say

⁴ G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 130.

we do not grieve. It says we do not grieve *as others do*. That is, in our grief, we do something. That something is the theme. **We have hope.**

Who are these “others?” They are unbelievers. There is no hope for non-Christians past this life. Third century Greek poet **Theocritus** said it well. “**Hopes are for the living, but the ones who die are without hope**” (*Idyll* 4.42). Therefore, so are those who are alive whose thoughts are towards the dead. Paul says it this way, that those “**separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise**” have “**no hope**” because they are “**without God in the world**” (**Eph 2:12**). We’ve seen how much this man, who was part of the commonwealth of Israel and grew up with those entrusted with the covenants (**Rom 9:1-5**) was so consumed by this singular thought that he endured every form of torture and persecution just to tell people everywhere about this hope.

Hopelessness is the reason why nearly everyone today **plays games** when someone dies. By playing games, I’m particularly thinking about **eulogies** replacing funeral sermons. A eulogy is a speech or piece of writing that praises someone highly, particularly at death. This past week, we lost the 41st

President of the United States. **George H. W. Bush** was eulogized by many of his friends, including his son, the 43rd president, George W. Bush. If you watched his eulogy, it was funny, warm, moving. It was peppered with personal anecdotes, things H. W. loved to do. It was even sprinkled with a couple dashes of religion, even the Christian religion. He even talked about hope, how to meet “**the good Lord with courage and with the joy of the promise of what lies ahead.**” And actually, I think there “can” be a place for them.

But the focus? What was the heart of those eulogies? The “**down here.**” What he was like *down here*. A couple of words in passing about “up there,” but even those were oblique, cloudy, fuzzy ideas with no definitive way for anyone but the person talking to know what it would even mean. Now, there was a very short sermon in the service. In it were hints of the gospel, and quite a bit of “up there” talk. But at the end of the day we were left with a very mixed message about how a person actually gets there.

The thing is, even in non-political, non-celebrity, non-state sponsored ordinary Tom and Jane Christian funerals these days, there is rarely gospel focused future talk. Lots of eulogies. Lots of earthly goodness. And lots and *lots* of pretending. I think this is done to hide the fact that nominal

Christians—by which I mean nominal Creed-saying Christians who have no personal faith in Jesus Christ by the Gospel, **have no hope**. Even worse, those who really are Christians (like the Thessalonians) are not being taught about the reality or the truth about the Blessed Hope (as it was once called), and so in order to keep from grieving as others do, they ignore the other-side almost altogether, because this hope just doesn't mean much to them and they don't know why it matters.

The Apostle says, “**Brothers, do not grieve as others do who have no hope.**” Hope, you see, becomes **the first great thing** that a person grasps of that other-side that causes everything on this side to change, to have purpose, to have meaning. But why?

For that, you first have to understand **what hope is**, that is this Blessed Hope. What is our Christian hope? Hebrews says, “**Hold fast to the hope set before us**” (**Heb 6:18**). What is that hope? It is a hope for **the future**. Peter says, “**Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ**” (**1Pe 1:13**). But how can that hope be real? Paul says, “**We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God**” (**Rom 5:2**). But how can anyone know this hope?

Peter answers that it is rooted in **the past**. “A living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1Pe 1:3). It is lived out in **the present**. Hebrews calls it a hope “through which we draw near to God” (Heb 7:19). Peter calls it the hope that is “in you” (1Pe 3:15). Thus, our **future hope** is built on the certain past and present realities that make it certain in the future. Paul calls it, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). In a word, it is the resurrection of our bodies and life with Christ for eternity. Let’s look at these a little more from our passage.

Foundation of the Past

Our passage provides its own take on this answer. Like Peter, it roots this hope in **something past and historical**. “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again...” (1Th 4:14). Just like Peter said. Everything stands or falls—here! Either Jesus did die and rise from the dead, or he did not. There is nothing in between. No “he rose spiritually in our hearts.” No, eulogizing, “He was a good man, the end.” Either Jesus rose from the dead, bodily, or he did not. This same Apostle Paul tells you that “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain”

(1Co 15:14). Not merely because that would be making stuff up, but because it means you are “misrepresenting God” because the testimony is that “God raised Christ.”

But how is this a hope *for you*? Paul goes on in that passage to say that if we are lying about God raising Christ from the dead, then he raises no one from the dead. And, conversely, because in biblical theology this goes both ways via the mystical union that Christ shares with believers, if the dead are not raised, then not even Christ has been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins (1Co 15:15-16). Therefore, you are without hope in the world.

Thus, “we believe that Jesus died and rose again...” This central historical claim is what *you* must believe, with your heart, not just your lips. Not that he arose in your heart, but that you believe that he is no longer dead in the tomb, that he came out with a new, glorified body, was seen by many, and is alive forevermore. This proves who he is, that he is King. And because he is alive and has conquered death, you will have life by faith through the Spirit when you confess him as King, bow before his eternal throne, and do what he says.

Future Return

Believing in Christ's [resurrection and ascension](#) necessarily entails that you believe in [his return to this earth](#). This is where Paul turns next. This is necessary because it is his physical resurrection which is the "firstfruits" of our resurrection. In other words, it is the same event separated only by time. It is the same event because those in Christ are one with him. And if they are one, then they are not two. Therefore, if he is raised, we will be raised. It is a first fruit; the same harvest!

But our resurrection only happens [in the future](#), at the Second Coming, or what the Bible (and Paul in our letter) calls [the Parousia](#). Thus, it is his past resurrection that becomes the launching pad for what will become a lot of talk in these next two chapters and on into 2 Thessalonians about the future. Paul has mentioned the Parousia (the "Coming" of Christ) twice already, and it is in fact the reason why he begins to talk about it now.

- "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming (*Parousia*)?" ([1Th 2:19](#))

- "He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming (*Parousia*) of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." (1Th 3:13)

Both of these passages talk about the need for holiness, blamelessness, and therefore justification and sanctification in Christ in order to see that day apart from God's wrath, which has also been discussed in this letter, and which is also tied directly to that day.⁵

How and why does he bring it up here? He does it through this idea of death. He wants to, as he says in vs. 18, "comfort" the Thessalonians, and therefore you today with these words, especially when we are facing the death of a loved one. "Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep" (14). In other words, the dead are not dead, they are asleep. This is their wake-up call. And it is quite loud! But what does all this mean? This is where he launches into one of his longest discussions about the Second Coming in any letter.

⁵ "Wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1Th 1:10). A second verse is related to it in the already/not yet: "But wrath has come upon them at last!" (1Th 2:16).

Vs. 15-17 are the main bulk of it here today, though it continues on beginning in ch. 5. It begins with a very important statement. “For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord...” (15). The Lord here is Jesus. But where did Paul hear this “word from the Lord?” Was it a subjective thought that went through his head, like people mistakenly think happened to the prophets of old? Did Jesus himself come to Paul (as he often did to the prophets of old) in a vision to deliver a unique doctrine found only in Paul? This is a very important question.

The answer is that Paul heard it from the Apostles who heard it from the Lord Jesus at the Sermon on the Mt. of Olives, just before his own death. The way we know this is through the overwhelming number of ideas that correspond directly to that sermon.

24:3, 27, 37, 39	The Parousia	4: 15		x	
24: 13, 22, 31, 40– 41	Surviving Believers Delivered	4: 15, 17; 5: 9		x	
24:30	Christ returns	4:16	x	x	x
24:27-30	Universal Perception	4:16		x	
24:30	From heaven	4:16	x		x
24:30	With a shout	4:16			x
24:31	Accompanied by angels	4:16	x	x	x
24:31	With a trumpet of God	4:16	x	x	x
24:31, 40–41	Believers gathered to Christ	4:17	x	x	x
24:30	In clouds	4:17	x	x	x
25:6	Meeting (<i>apantesis</i>)	4:17		x	
24:32-33	Knowing the season	5:1		x	
24:36	Time unknown	5:1–2	x		x
24:43	Coming like a thief	5:2, 4	x	x	x

24:29-30, 37-39	Initiation of the Day of the Lord	5:1-3		x	
24:37-39	Unbelievers unaware of impending judgment	5:3	x	x	x
24:8	Judgment comes as pain upon an expectant mother	5:3	x		x
24:37-41	“Peace and safety”	5:3		x	
25:10-13	Inescapable for the unprepared	5:3		x	
24:43	Believers not deceived	5:4-5	x		
24:45-46	The faithful at his coming	5:4-5, 8		x	
24:37-39	Believers to be watchful	5:6	x	x	x
24:49	Warning against drunkenness	5:7	x		x
Beale, <i>1-2 Thessalonians</i> , The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 137.					
Alan Kurschner, <i>Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord: What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Return of Christ</i> (Eschatos Publishing. Kindle Edition), 179.					
Adam Maarschalk, “Comparing Matthew 24 and I Thessalonians 4-5,” <i>Pursuing Truth</i> (Mar 4, 2015), https://adammaarschalk.com/2015/03/04/comparing-matthew-24-and-i-thessalonians-4-5/					

The Second Coming

Structure

In order to get at this fascinating few verses, I want to alert you to its structure and then as we go through it, we will need to look at Jesus’ Discourse (looking especially at Matthew 24). The structure is a chiasm.⁶ The chiasm is verses 14-17 with 13 and 18 acting as introduction and conclusion:

⁶ I have some thoughts on why this is a chiasm. Chiasms are devices that make something much easier to memorize. I think that Paul did this as much for himself as he did for these Christians. What do I mean? As we will see, this entire passage has numerous parallels with Jesus’ Olivet Discourse. The thing is, the Gospels were not yet written down when Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, and they certainly were not copying off of him! Instead, it seems that Paul is aware of the story of the Discourse, probably through Peter himself, and that as they were passing down this teaching, it was originally done chiastically to help them remember it.

- P'. Do not **grieve** ... as those without hope (13)
- A'. "Through Jesus, God will bring **with him** those who have fallen asleep" (14)
- B. "**We who are alive and remain** (*perileipomenoi*)" (15)
- C. "**For the Lord himself will descend from heaven**" (16)
- B'. "**We who are alive and remain** (*perileipomenoi*)" (17a)
- C'. "**Caught up together ... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**" (17b)
- A'. "And so we will always be **with the Lord**" (17c)
- P'. "**Console** one another with these words" (18)

The chiasm has **opposite pairs**: grieve/console; descend/up-in the air. It also has **identical pairs**: with him/with the Lord and more importantly, "**we who are alive and remain.**" This last one is important because the wording here is identical in both verses, and even contains a word "remain" (*perileipomenoi*) that is only found here anywhere in the NT (or the LXX, minus the Apocrypha). Clearly, he is giving a structure, not only to help remember, but probably to point out the most important thing, which is always the center of the chiasm.

We will make our way to the center by starting in **vs. 15**. What does the Lord Jesus say? "**That we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.**" He **assumes** (probably for sake of argument **since as we will see next week** no one knows

when this is going to happen) that that **Jesus will come back within their lifetimes**: “**we who are alive.**” It also applies to mourning. The Thessalonians are (for reasons we are not entirely clear on) mourning their dead loved ones in Christ, acting like pagans do, not realizing that, as the Living Bible translates it much more clearly, “**We who are still living when the Lord returns *will not meet him ahead of those who have died***” (1Th 4:15). The comfort here? Jesus said that those very people you are mourning will actually return to this earth with him *before you have a chance to see Jesus yourself!* How in the world, then, can you grieve as others do?

Importantly, there are two ideas here that are found in Jesus’ famous sermon. That sermon is the most concentrated of all Jesus’ words that focus on the Second Coming. In it, he describes in several places surviving believers being delivered. And that is what is going on here for those who are still alive:

Matt 24:3, 27, 37, 39

The Parousia

Matt 24:13, 22, 31, 40– 41

Surviving Believers Delivered

Loud Coming!

Let's continue. "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (16). This is the first of the two-part center of this passage—"the Lord himself with descend." He is in heaven, having ascended to the right hand of the Father. Now, he will descend.

How he descends is described in three ways. First, he descends "with a cry of command." Second, "with the voice of an archangel." Third, "with the sound of the trumpet of God." Let me point out the obvious here. Notice the noise. This is loud. It is enough to wake the dead! Indeed, that's exactly what it will do.

Olivet Discourse and 1 Thessaloinans

Like **vs. 15**, this one has parallels in the Olivet Discourse.

24:30	Christ returns
24:27-30	Universal Perception
24:30	From heaven
24:30	With a shout
24:31	Accompanied by angels
24:31	With a trumpet of God

But here I need to make something clear. At this point in *his* discourse, Jesus is talking about a different coming. It is the coming upon Jerusalem in judgment in 70 A.D. Paul is not talking about that. This is something a lot of people do not understand about the Discourse. Nevertheless, it is vital to see it. The Disciples actually asked Jesus **two questions**, not one. “**Tell us, when will these things be**” (**Matt 24:3**), this is the first question. He has been talking about the destruction of the temple and the disciples wanted to know when that would be. Jesus tells them by giving them all kinds of signs. When they see those signs, run to the hills, flee the city. Jesus’ answer to this question lasts essentially from **24:3-35** (with **vs. 27** as an exception).⁷

It is only after he answers this question that he addresses **the second question** they asked which is, “... **and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?**” (**Matt 24:3**). He has been telling them all about the temple being destroyed, which has clear signs. “**But concerning that day and hour,**” that is the Parousia, the Second Coming, “**no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the**

⁷ For an excellent treatment of this see **R. T. France**, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007) and his discussion on this entire two chapters.

Father only” (Matt 24:36). He talks about the Second Coming all the way until the end of Ch. 25.

What’s so interesting is that Paul is quoting the Jerusalem-coming language, but he is using it for the Parousia—the Second Coming. How can he do this? Because those two comings are related to one another **eschatologically**. It is very much like the firstfruits we have just talked about. Jesus’ resurrection necessitates our resurrection, for it is the same event separated by time. The same here. The destruction of Jerusalem necessitates the Second Coming of Christ in judgment upon this earth. More, the Jerusalem coming was proof to the Jews that he really is King. He predicted it in great detail. He brought it to pass as he judged them for their unbelief. This coming brings terrible judgment upon the nation of Israel for their rejection of Messiah. It also opens the door for him to call his elect from the four-corners of the earth. It was judgment, but not *final* judgment. It brought salvation, but *final* salvation is still coming. **I’ll show you one more way this is relevant here shortly.**

Michael and the Son of God

For now, I want you to think about the archangel. In the Bible, there is only one person called an archangel. This is Michael (Jude 9). Michael is Israel's prince, seemingly the son of God in charge of Israel (Dan 12:1). But the Angel of the LORD is also the Son in charge of Israel back in Deuteronomy (Dt 32:8-9), where he is called Yahweh. Therefore, Michael is the proper name of the Angel of the LORD.⁸ It means, "Who Is Like God," the very idea that is so often associated with the Angel (Ex 15:3, 11; Dt 33:26, cf. Dan 7:13; Ps 113:5; Mic 7:18, etc. and compare Ex 15:3's "wonders" with Jdg 13:18, Gen 32:29, and Isa 9:6).

In my opinion, I do not think that Jesus comes *with* an archangel (though that is possible from the grammar), but that he comes *as* the archangel (which is also possible), because I believe that Jesus is Michael. Consider John 5:25,

⁸ Meredith Kline explains, "A pronouncing of this rebuke-curse on the devil is cited in Jude v. 9, whether in allusion to Zech 3:2 or its appearance in the Assumption (or Testament) of Moses. If the latter, we would have to assume that this work preserved a true tradition not recorded in the canonical literature about an historical encounter between Michael and Satan on the occasion of Moses' burial. In the former case, the "body of Moses" concept must be understood after the analogy of the body of Christ as a designation of the community under the covenant mediated by Moses (cf. 1 Cor 10:2), the people of Jerusalem represented by Joshua the high priest. If Jude v. 9 refers to Zech 3:2, it clearly identifies the Angel of the Lord by the name Michael. On the other alternative, this identification would still not be contradicted." Meredith G. Kline, *Glory in Our Midst: A Biblical-Theological Reading of Zechariah's Night Visions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001).

“The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.” That’s exactly what is going on here, except it is the voice of the archangel. Also, in Revelation (1:10), Jesus’ voice is the voice of the trumpet.

The Rapture or A Royal Entourage?

While this is an interesting side-note, it can be important in this respect: Jesus is coming loudly, powerfully, not in humility, but in glory, like the very Angel of the LORD. This loud coming, as we have said, raises the very dead. Thus, the verse finishes, “and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1Th 4:16). This is critical because of the way vs. 17 is often interpreted. It says, “Then we who are 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” (17). Here’s the thing about this verse. Return to our very first point today, about **the rapture** and what it has done to many people. Dispensationalists take this verse to be describing the Rapture.

What is the Rapture? It is the idea that at some point in the near future Jesus will come, quietly, in secret, and in the blink of an eye, all Christians will vanish from the face of the

earth, leaving everyone else to live through the Great Tribulation which will then immediately commence with the coming of the Antichrist. One dispensationalist says, “This is undoubtedly the primary passage on the Rapture of the Church.”⁹ Another says, “Without a doubt this is the central passage on the rapture of the church.”¹⁰ The famous Dispensationalist John Walvoord said, “a careful study of this passage in 1 Thessalonians will do much to set the matter in its proper biblical revelation,” demonstrating “the difference between the Rapture of the church and Christ’s second coming to judge and rule over the earth.”¹¹

They get this from the language of being “caught up.” The word (*harpazo*) means “to seize, catch up, or snatch away.” But think about this. For something so secret, Jesus sure is making a lot of noise! In fact, seems to necessitate that everyone on earth will hear and see it. Furthermore, it says that we will always be with the Lord. As Gentry points out, “It says nothing of Christians going with him to heaven for

⁹ **Gerald B. Stanton**, “Biblical Evidence for the Pretribulational Rapture.” *Biblical Perspectives* 4:4 (July/Aug. 1991): 2.

¹⁰ **Paul Benware**, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 159. See also: *Popular Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, 309. *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 338.

¹¹ **John F. Walvoord**, *Every Prophecy of the Bible: Clear Explanations for Uncertain Times* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1990), 468.

seven years, then returning to the earth to rule in a thousand-year millennium, then returning back to heaven.”¹² That doesn’t even come close to working for a “secret rapture.”

It also fails to understand the ancient idea being discussed, even as Jesus discusses in his parable of the virgins in his discourse.

24:31, 40–41

Believers gathered to Christ

24:30

In clouds

25:6

Meeting (*apantesis*)

And this is important, because this is **the second half of the center** of the chiasm: We will meet the Lord in the air. You see, what is being described here is **the entourage of the king**. The king arrives home with a procession of people. Then, as he is coming, people in the city go out to meet him. In other words, in what is being depicted here, we are **not staying in the air**, but we are going up to meet him to then descend with he and the angels and the saints in glory to reign upon in the new heavens and new earth for eternity. Remember, Jesus is descending. Those left alive ascend, but

¹² **Kenneth Gentry**, “Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4?” *Postmillennial Worldview* (Oct 10, 2017), <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2017/10/10/rapture-in-1-thess-4/>.

only briefly, to escort their King home even as they receive their new bodies fit for eternal service in the newly constituted heavens and earth. Well, we could go on, but will have much more to say next time.

Hope

The purpose of all this is to **comfort one another with these words** (18). And this returns to the idea of hope as the chiasm returns to the beginning. Hope brings comfort. Hope does not grieve like the rest of mankind. This hope is certain, not pie in the sky, because Jesus has already risen from the dead. And it is so much better to talk about this hope than it is just giving platitudes, even if true, about our beloved dead. When I die, I want people to tell those at my funeral about Christ, not about me!

So let's now try to take our thoughts back to the things we began with today. Returning to those **people who sold all they had** to go live on the roof because of the Rapture, I decided to look up the phrase, "**So heavenly minded that your no earthly use,**" because that's what they became and because this doctrine of the Second Coming is not supposed to make you that way (which may be why, as we will see

next time, no one can know when it is going to happen. If we did, humanity has proven over and over again what we do with that knowledge). It is supposed to impact your life here and now. But not like Secular Sam who is only impacted by here and now such that he is only pursuing temporal things that rust and rot and are destroyed, *even though he is a Christian!* But differently. In my search, I found an interesting little quote from John Piper.

Yes, I know. It is possible to be so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly use. My problem is: I've never met one of those people. And I suspect, if I met one, the problem would not be that his mind is full of the glories of heaven, but that his mind is empty and his mouth is full of platitudes. I suspect that for every professing believer who is useless in this world because of other-worldliness, there are a hundred who are useless because of this-worldliness.¹³

With that, I want to leave you with these thoughts from C. S. Lewis in his chapter on Hope in *Mere Christianity*.

¹³ John Piper, quoted in Justin Taylor, "So Heavenly Minded You're No Earthly Good?" TGC (7-16-2014), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/so-heavenly-minded-youre-no-earthly-good/>.

Hope is one of the Theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that the Christians who **did most for the present world** were just those who **thought most of the next**. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither. It seems a strange rule, but something like it can be seen at work in other matters. Health is a great blessing, but the moment you make health one of your main, direct objects you start becoming a crank and imagining there is something wrong with you. You are only likely to get health provided you want other things more—food, games, work, fun, open air. In the same way, we shall never save civilization as long as civilization is our main object. We must learn to want something else even more.

Most of us find it very difficult to want ‘Heaven’ at all—except in so far as ‘Heaven’ means meeting again our friends who have died. One reason for this difficulty is that we have not been trained: our whole education tends to fix our minds on

this world. Another reason is that when the real want for Heaven is present in us, we do not recognize it. Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy. I am not now speaking of what would be ordinarily called unsuccessful marriages, or holidays, or learned careers. I am speaking of the best possible ones. There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in the reality. I think everyone knows what I mean. The wife may be a good wife, and the hotels and scenery may have been excellent, and chemistry may be a very interesting job: but something has evaded us.¹⁴

That “something” is hope. And you, beloved, are not without hope in this world for Christ has been raised from the dead. Your beloved dead in the Lord are really only sleeping, and when that day comes, they shall return with him before you even get a chance to meet him. You, if you are so lucky to live to see it, will be caught up together with him

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 134–135.

and them, to receive your new body, so that you and they can serve the Lord together in eternity. Surely, there are comforting words that should make a huge difference in the way you live your life today. For if we are going to be given bodies fit to serve him for eternity, don't you think that's exactly what we are supposed to be doing with them today? So do not grieve as others do. But have hope in that Day, and may that Day cause you to live more and more for him this day and all the others henceforth until that Day arrives.

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