

Are You Ready for Jesus?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Dr. Steve Hereford

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INTRODUCTION

1. I would like to ask you a question this morning, “Are you ready for Jesus?”
2. If God were to take you right now are you ready to see Jesus?
3. If the rapture occurred at this moment would you be taken or left behind?
4. What about your loved ones?
5. Do they know Jesus?
6. If God takes any of them today, are they ready to see Jesus?
7. The Gospel always gives the urgency of now!
8. When we hear it we are to respond NOW!
9. Repent NOW!
10. Believe NOW!
11. Follow NOW!
12. Surrender NOW!
13. We are not promised later.
14. 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 says when Jesus is revealed “from heaven...,” He will deal out “retribution to those who do not

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know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”

15. That’s at His coming.
16. What about before He comes?
17. For the follower of Jesus, 2 Corinthians 5:8 says, “...to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”
18. But for the unbeliever, Jesus said in a parable in Luke 16:22-23 that he when he “died and was buried,” he was “in Hades...in torment.”
19. That’s why the invitation is so urgent!!!
20. The greatest fear is everyone talking about heaven is not going to heaven.
21. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 7:21-23 (NASB) “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”
22. So I ask the question again, “Are you ready for Jesus?”

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23. Please take God's Word and turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 4.
24. Paul tells us that the church of the Thessalonians were ready for Jesus.
25. In fact, so much so, that they were mourning over their loved ones who had already died and thought since they were still living they had some advantage over their loved ones.
26. That doesn't make sense at first but when you realize they were a second coming church that always looked for the return of Jesus, being alive when He returned sounded better.
27. So Paul writes to correct this misunderstanding and in doing do he instructs them about meeting Jesus, whether it's in death or at the rapture.
28. Notice what He says beginning at verse 13:

Paul says beginning at verse 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, will 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

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will rise first. 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. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

29. When I read that passage I'm reminded of two things: (1) you can be ready for Jesus and (2) Jesus is coming!
30. 1 John 5:13 (NASB) These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.
31. You can know or be assured of eternal life with Jesus.
32. And you can rest on the promise of His coming.
33. The Bible gives 333 prophecies about Christ in the Old and New Testament.
34. 109 were fulfilled at His first coming. 224 will be fulfilled at His second.
35. 4 times in this letter alone Paul mentions Jesus' second coming (1:10; 2:19; 3:13;4:16).

I. Do Not Be Ignorant (v.13)

A. Concerning Those Who Have Died in Christ (v.13a)

1. The term “ignorant” (agnoeo) means “to be uninformed due to a lack of information or knowledge, to lack understanding” (Hiebert)

“The term does not carry an implied rebuke like ‘Know ye not?’ nor does it make an appeal to previous knowledge and instruction. It seems always to refer back to something that has happened and to which attention is called to correct a misunderstanding or to relieve anxiety” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, pp.187-188).

2. The phrase “those who have fallen asleep”

“Asleep” Gr.koimaomai, used of “sleep” (Mat.28:13), of the death of the body (Jn.11:11 - Lazarus)

“It was often used as a euphemism for death in Greek, Jewish, and Christian writings as well as in Paul's epistles. There is nothing in the context to indicate that Paul used the word here in any way other than the conventional fashion” (D. Michael Martin, *The New American Commentary*).

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B. Lest You Have Continual Sorrow (v.13b)

1. They were already grieving

“Sorrow” Gr.lupeo (Pres.pass.subj.), means, “their ignorance was the cause for their sorrow.” The verb means to “grieve, to be said, to be distressed.”

“There is a normal sorrow that accompanies the death of a loved one, caused by the pain of separation and loneliness.

Jesus grieved over the death of Lazarus (John 11:33, 35), and Paul exhorted the Romans to "weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15).

However, the apostle did not have that kind of grief in mind here, but grief like the rest who have no hope.

In Ephesians 2:12 Paul described unbelievers as "having no hope and without God in the world."

There is an awful, terrifying, hopeless finality for unbelievers when a loved one dies, a sorrow unmitigated by any hope of reunion.

Commenting on the hopeless despair of unbelievers in the ancient world.

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William Barclay writes, "In the face of death the pagan world stood in despair. They met it with grim resignation and bleak hopelessness. Aeschylus wrote, "Once a man dies there is no resurrection." Theocritus wrote, "There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope." Catullus wrote, "When once our brief light sets, there is one perpetual night through which we must sleep." On their tombstones grim epitaphs were carved. "I was not; I became; I am not; I care not.""(The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, rev. ed. [Louisville: Westminster, 1975], 203; Cited by John MacArthur, 1 & 2 Thessalonians).

2. They were grieving like those who have no hope

This phrase identifies unbelievers. They are seen as those who have no hope.

Isa.57:20-21 - "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

II. God Will Resurrect the Dead in Christ (vv.14-15)

A. Because of Christ's Resurrection (v.14)

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again"

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“For” introduces the reason why the readers are not to sorrow for their dead.

The historical facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus are the guarantee concerning the future of the believing dead.

Christian faith and hope are anchored in history” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonians Epistles*, p.191).

1. Paul states this as a recognized truth (v.14a)

If does not imply doubt and uncertainty. It is a condition of reality and might well be translated “since.”

2. The Bible teaches Christ’s death and resurrection as the great major premise of the Christian faith – They are the sure foundation of Christian hope.

“The two facts must be kept together. Paul bases his gospel not on the cross taken in isolation, but on the cross as followed by and interpreted by the Resurrection.”

- a) “Jesus died” asserts the past historical event
- b) Jesus “rose again” is also a past historical event

Both verbs – *died* and *arose* are in the active

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voice. “To have used the passives would have meant that He was acted upon by others. The active voice depicts Him as voluntarily laying down His life and taking it up again (Jn.10:17-18).

Christian faith embraces as its Savior this Jesus, who voluntarily died and rose again” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, p.192).

- (1) In 1 Corinthians 15:20 Paul says, “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

“‘Firstfruits’ speaks of the first installment of harvest to eternal life, in which Christ’s resurrection will precipitate and guarantee that all of the saints who have died will be resurrected also” (The MacArthur Study Bible).

- (2) John 11:25-26 - “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”

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(3) 1 Peter 1:3-5 - “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

3. Because Jesus arose so will His followers (v.14b)

“Even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (v.14b)

If Jesus did not actually arise from the grave our Christian hope has no justification.

But He did rise just as He said He would and He gave the promise that those who believe will be raised at the last day “to the resurrection of life.”

Jesus said in John 5:28-29 - “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth— those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

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B. Because of God's Word (v.15a)

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord”

“For” introduces the authority for the statement just made. It was based upon a revelation from the Lord.

1. This verse indicates the character of the revelation of verse 14

- a) What Paul just stated was “by the word of the Lord” – indicates the source of the revelation

It was revelation made in connection with a communication from the mouth of the Lord.

It should read, “For this we say to you *in* the Word of the Lord.”

- b) “You” is in the emphatic position and stresses that the revealed truth now being spoken is given in the special interest of the readers

2. The second part of verse 15 provides the corrective for their sorrowing (v.15b)

“The revelation that the living will not have any advantage over the dead at the return of Christ makes any further feeling of sorrow for the dead wholly unjustified.

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The two classes of believers at the Lord's return, those that are still alive and those that have died, will unitedly share the same destiny" (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, p.196).

a) Paul says that we have no advantage over those who have died in the Lord

- (1) They are immediately in His presence
- (2) We are still here in these earthly bodies
- (3) You see the play of words – “we who are alive and remain” versus “those who are asleep”

b) And then he says we will “by no means precede those who are asleep”

“Precede” Gr.phthano, “to go before”
(Rienecker)

In verses 16-17, continuing with the corrective for their sorrowing, he specifically details the events of the rapture.

He says:

III. Jesus Will Return (vv.16-17)

He begins with another “For” but this one (a different Greek word) could be better translated ‘because’ (hoti).

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This “justifies the preceding statement by a fuller description of the Lord’s return” (Hiebert).

A. He Will Personally Return for His Own (v.16)

1. He will “descend from heaven”

“He will not merely send His angelic deputies to call the saints; He will return physically for them in His glorified body” (Hiebert).

John 14:3 - “And 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.”

2. He will summons those in the graves

“The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout”

“The noun rendered *shout* means ‘a shout of command’ and implies authority and urgency” (Hiebert).

a) John 5:25-29 - “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him

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authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

- b) John 11:43-44 - Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.”

3. The archangel will sound

- a) “voice” Gr.phone, means, “a sound”
- b) “archangel” Gr.archangelos, used only here and in Jude 9 where it is used of Michael

“The voice of the archangel” “may denote a vocal utterance by the archangel or a sound or tone produced by him, namely, with the trumpet” (Hiebert).

- c) Mat.24:31 - “And He will send His angels with the great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds,

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from one end of heaven to the other.”

4. The trumpet will sound

“Trumpet” Gr.salpinx, “a trumpet”

“In ancient Israel, as in many ancient lands, the trumpet was used to announce important convocations” (John MacArthur, Matthew 24-28, p.58).

- a) A trumpet was blown to gather Israel at Mt. Sinai to receive the law (Ex.19:13,16,19)
- b) A trumpet was blown at the beginning of war times (Jos.6:5,20)
- c) A trumpet was blown as a sign of victory over Israel’s enemies (Judg.3:27)
- d) Rev.1:10-11 - “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,” and, “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”

5. The dead in Christ will rise

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“And the dead in Christ will rise first”

1 Cor.15:51-52 - “Behold, I tell you a 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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

B. He Will Rapture His Church (v.17)

The Latin word “rapturo” is where we get the word “rapture” from. The word itself does not occur in the Bible but the concept does.

1. It is defined as the catching away

“Caught up” Gr.harpazo, “to snatch or catch away”

- a) This word is used of Philip being snatched away by the Spirit - Acts 8:39

“Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.”

- b) It is also used of Paul being caught up to the third heaven (2 Cor.12:2, 4)

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c) It “denotes a sudden forcible seizure, an irresistible act of catching away, due to divine activity” (Hiebert).

2. It is described as being caught up in the clouds

“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.”

IV. Find Comfort in These Words (v.18)

A. Their Comfort is Based on the Content of vv.14-17

1. They have no advantage over those who already died because they are now with Jesus
2. Jesus is coming personally for His own
3. When He comes He will raise the dead first and then we how are a alive and remain will be caught up together to meet them in the clouds

B. The Rapture Replaces the Sorrow

CONCLUSION

1. Are you ready for Jesus?

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2. You can be ready now by repenting of your sin and following Jesus.
3. Let's pray.