

Reality and Readiness

Jesus is coming again! This is the confession of faithful Christians for the past 2,000 years. It is proclaimed in the Gospels by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is spoken of in Acts as the Gospel message was carried throughout the Roman Empire in the first century. The Apostles—Paul, Peter, John—spoke of it in their letters. And of course, the book of Revelation caps off the Bible with the vision of the end times crowned by the physical return of Christ in Revelation 19.

In 1 Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul teaches the return of Christ in a pastoral manner. The question had been raised by the Thessalonian Christians—is Jesus yet to come? They had received false teaching that Jesus had already returned by the early A.D. 50s. They were concerned that 1) they weren't included, and 2) that their dead believing loved ones had missed out on this great event. Paul wanted to assure them that wasn't the case.

First Thessalonians 4:13-18 is one of the clearest teachings on the Second Coming that speaks of the Rapture of the Church. The Rapture is that first stage of the Second Coming events of the end times. Here we understand that this is **real** – Jesus is coming again!

Paul begins: *“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. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 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.”*

God gives us this **revelation** or preview of what is yet ahead. He speaks of those who are “asleep”—those who have died in Jesus. Between physical death and the resurrection, our bodies (not our souls—which *never* lose consciousness. See 2 Corinthians 5:8.) appear to be asleep. Physical death is a temporary condition of rest from which our bodies will awaken and be reunited with our souls. This passage indicates that

Paul and other early Christians believed in an imminent return of Christ, that *it could happen any time*.

Then we see the **return** of Jesus:

“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.”

Paul says that those who have died will experience the **resurrection**. They will be raised from death in the Rapture before we who are alive. There will be a shout of command by the archangel, and then *“the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed,”* (1 Corinthians 15:52). The believing dead will rise first, then the believing living will be transformed in an instant into their glorified bodies.

“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.”

This is the **Rapture** of the Church. While we use the Latin word “Rapture” for this event, this simply means that we will be “caught up” with those dead who are raised first. We will be immediately “translated” into that which cannot die (1 Corinthians 15:50-53).

We will be caught up together—we will experience a great **reunion** of believers from the past with believers of the present. Our Christian loved ones—we will see them again! And this will be the moment when we all see Christ with our own eyes in our own bodies. And this will be a permanent reunion. There will be no parting, as our state from then on will be everlasting and glorious.

Paul closes out this passage with a **reassurance**: *“Therefore comfort one another with these words.”* For the Christian, the return of Christ does not bring sorrow or fear, but *comfort*! Our sins already have been judged at the Cross, and we face no condemnation (Romans 8:1). We will stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive our rewards for faithful service (2 Corinthians 5:10).

There is a big silence in this passage; there is not a word about *unbelievers* being raised at this time. The Revelation says that there are two resurrections: the resurrection to *life* (this passage in 1 Thessalonians), and the resurrection to *condemnation* (Revelation 20:11-13).

You may be a part of this first resurrection. You can experience the Rapture of the Church if you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to save you from sin and for His service. "*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved,*" (Acts 16:31).