

Posted 10–29–2020 The End Times Bible Study #2

Remember: Begin with prayer asking the Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible authors to record the words you read to help you understand the Scriptures.

Before you read our Scripture for today, I suggest reading this short Introduction to our reading: An unusual question came up amongst the new Christians in Thessalonica (present day Thessaloniki). Some of them had already died. If they had been practiced the common Greek religious life at that time, they believed the dead went into a dark underworld from which there was no return. Not yet fully grounded in the Christian faith and teaching about life after death and the resurrection, they were concerned that those who had already died were going to miss out on the return of Jesus. While the Greeks did not believe in resurrection (Acts 17:32), the Christians did. They were confused by their old religious ideas and the resurrection faith of the Christians. This false impression or false teaching needed to be corrected. False teachers arose very quickly in the Early Church. But instead of destroying the truth, they only succeeded in causing it to be brought out more clearly and more powerfully by the apostles. Possibly the false teachers here suggested those who died would not share in the benefits of Jesus' coming. If so, this would bring sorrow to the believers who remained alive. In this kind of sorrow they were coming very close to the black despair and empty hopelessness reflected on the tombstones of the heathen of the time. Paul wanted them to know the truth that would keep them from that kind of grief. Christians are not like the heathen who have no hope.

This section reminds us that there are several topics we will have to examine in greater detail. One is “The Rapture” and another is “The Millennium” which will require a study of “Dispensational Theology.” We will cover these before the end of our study.

Read 1st Thessalonians 4:13–18. Then study the notes which follow.

v. 13: It is not just Christians who use the word sleep to describe death. A number of the pagan religions of that time did also. There have always been some who believed that you live and you die and that's it. There is no afterlife. There are an increasing number of people who believe that today. The end of this verse is still a valuable message for us today: we do not sorrow as those who have no hope.”

v. 14: The key to a Christian's hope is his belief in the fact that Jesus died and rose again. It simply indicates that as surely as they believed, so surely will the dead believers be with Jesus when He returns. Their belief in Christ's death and resurrection was not a mere mental acceptance of the facts, however. It involved a personal identification with Jesus in His death and resurrection, as pictured in our baptism. Baptism is the drowning of our sinful nature and a picture of God's saving work. God used water and the ark to save Noah and his three sons and their wives. Because of the ark there is a lot of boat language in describing the church building. The word used to describe the large interior space of the building is “Nave.” (You can see the word Naval in this word.)

v. 15: Paul now outlines some specifics for the congregation to address their concern. He reminds them they have had a “word from the Lord” about this. Of course, all he wrote in his epistles was by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Now Paul makes it clear that those who are alive and remain till the coming of the Lord will not go ahead of or have any advantage over those who died before Jesus' return. The fact Paul used "we" in this verse does not mean he believed he would be alive at the second coming. He simply meant whoever is alive at the time of Christ's return.

v. 16: Those who die before the return of Christ will not miss a thing. The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout or command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. Then the dead in Christ will immediately rise in response to His command.

v. 17: The moment after the dead arise, those who are alive and remain will join with them to form one great body. Together we will all be caught up (snatched up in a powerful manner, carried up suddenly in great power) to meet the Lord (for a meeting with the Lord) in the air. This sudden snatching away to meet the Lord is often referred to as the "rapture." You do not hear this term used in Lutheran discussions because of the specific meaning it has among a number of our fellow Christian.

The rapture is an eschatological concept held by some Christians, particularly within branches of American evangelicalism, consisting of an end-time event when all Christian believers who are alive, along with resurrected believers, will rise "in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." In Paul the Apostle's First Epistle to the Thessalonians in the Bible, he uses the Greek word 'harpazo,' meaning "to snatch away" or "to seize," and explains that believers in Jesus Christ will be snatched away from earth into the air. (from Wikipedia.)

Where does the word rapture come from? The Greek was translated into Latin by 'raptus.' From this comes our English words rapt and rapture. Today these words usually speak of being carried away emotionally or spiritually. But one meaning of rapt in current dictionaries is "lifted up and carried away." Thus some believe it is perfectly good English to translate this verse, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be rapt (or raptured) together with them in the clouds." (I do not agree this is a good way to translate v. 17. They choose it so they can say that "The Rapture" is in the Bible. However, not one of the major translations and nor any of the lesser known or used translations that I know translate it that way either. Plus, I find it interesting that John Nelson Darby who was an Anglo-Irish Bible teacher, one of the influential figures among the original Plymouth Brethren and the founder of the Exclusive Brethren, and considered to be the father of modern Futurism and Dispensationalism did NOT translate it that way in his own translation which he published.

Another reason for avoiding the Rapture because it would make the coming of Jesus a second time actually the third. Paul was just answering the question of the congregation concerned that because some had already died, they would miss out on the Second Coming of Jesus. They consider it a pre Judgment Day Event. And offered hope to those Dispensational Christians that they would avoid the tribulation of the end of times.

The teaching on this became popularized in the first publication of the "Left Behind" series in 1995. Left Behind is a series of Christian novels written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. The novels take readers to a world where all the Christians have left earth and the remnants must contend with seven years of trials and tribulations. I can remember seeing my bumper stickers on cars which read: "In Case of The Rapture This Car will be without a Driver." This was a time when there was a fascination and a fear of what would happen when the 21st Century would arrive. There are 16 books in the series and three movies. The first movie (released 2000) was even shown in some movie theaters but was also released on video. The next two movies were only released on video to the best of my knowledge.

Paul said nothing about what would happen when the resurrected believers and the living believers met the Lord in the air (which include the judgment seat of Christ and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in teaching about Judgment Day in the Bible). Paul concluded simply by saying that believers will always, forever, be with the Lord.

v. 18: There is no greater comfort, encouragement, or exhortation that can be given to another than the fact that whether Christians live or die they will be caught up to be with Christ when He comes.

SIGNIFICANT POINTS:

1. Always check the context to get the meaning of a passage. As you read 1st Thessalonians you see the context of Paul's words in today's reading. Paul was addressing a concern of the congregation, not starting to teach a new significant doctrine to the people.
2. Always seek first to know what certainties we can confess, before we address the uncertain issues. If the teaching weakens or attacks the clear statements of God, stick with clear statements.
3. When Christ returns, the Bible says ALL will be able to see him coming.

4. Remember our great assurance: We will always be with the Lord.
5. Don't forget to encourage one another, especially those who have lost loved ones.

Don't forget to close with prayer. I believe a correct understanding of the End Times produces comfort and assurance in us, not fear. Beware of those whose teaching engenders fear rather than joy in the Lord. Amen!

Pastor Milan

StrongInChrist@CFL.rr.com