

The Catching Away of the Church

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1323

Tonight we come to the marvelous theme which is the thrill of all believers and that is the theme the catching away of the church. We're going to be looking at several texts. In 1 Corinthians Chapter 13 and verse 13 we learn that there are three great Christian graces, faith, hope, and love.

And for the most part, we know a lot about faith, a lot about love, but we're often a very little vague about hope, and yet it's included with those others. You ask the average churchgoer, for example, what is your hope? You read about hope, it's all over the place in the Bible. But what is your hope? And perhaps the average churchgoer would say well my hope is salvation. I hope to be saved and to make it to heaven when I die.

Or maybe he states in terms of eternal life. He hopes to get eternal life when he dies. That's his hope. Or somebody else might say well my hope is death. I'm tired of this world and all the suffering and I want to die and my hope is that I'll die and be released from pain and suffering. And this was what was basically, seemingly the hope of those in the south who for so many years sang the spirituals that just talked about being carried away from the troubles of life into the arms of Jesus.

And you might ask somebody else, what's your hope and maybe getting a little closer to the truth, they might say well, my hope is heaven. I'm looking forward to heaven. Heaven is my hope. Well, I want you to know that the Scripture does not present salvation as our hope. It does not present eternal life as our hope. It does not present death as our hope. And it does not present heaven as our hope.

In fact, salvation to begin with is a present possession. You're not waiting for salvation, it's yours. In John 5:24, "Jesus said, verily, verily I say unto you he that hears my words and believes on Him that sent me has eternal life and is passed from death unto life." That's present tense. We don't hope for salvation, we have it. We only await the fullness of what that salvation means.

In 1 John 3:2, the Bible says "beloved now are we the sons of God." Not tomorrow, not in the future, but now. And so salvation and eternal life is ours now. Salvation is not something way off the gates of heaven. Salvation is something way back at the cross. That's all taken care of in history. That's not in the future. That's in the past.

But then what about those who say our hope is in death and the release from the world and from suffering. I don't think that's our hope either. Death is simply the wages of sin. And death can't be our hope for the simple reason that not all of us are going to die, right? "We shall not all sleep," Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:51. Not everybody who's a Christian is going to die. So death can't be our hope.

But what about heaven, is heaven our hope? Not really. Let me show you why? 1 Peter Chapter 1, Verse 3. Now listen, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope." Now there's a statement we have a living hope.

Now go to verse 4, "To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that fadeth not away," watch, "reserved," where "in heaven." So whatever our hope is, it isn't heaven, but it's in heaven. You see the difference. It's not heaven, but whatever it is it's there.

Colossians 1:5, "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." Then in the simplest sense, heaven is not our hope, but our hope is there. Now what is our hope? Well, it's important for us to know what our hope is. It's a shame that many Christians don't. Paul prayed that we might. Ephesians 1:18, he says, "I'm praying that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened that you may know what is the hope of His calling."

Paul says you ought to know it and I'm praying you'll understand what you're hope is. Now you say well, tell us what it is. I will in a minute. But let me give you a little bit about it. Whatever our hope is, it makes us rejoice. Romans Chapter 5, verse 1, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand," watch, "and rejoice in hope." Whatever our hope is it makes us rejoice.

Now let me add a thought to that. Whatever our hope is, it is only one hope, only one. Ephesians 4:4, "There's one body, there's one spirit, even as you are called in," what, "one hope of your calling." It's cause for rejoicing and it's only one hope. Not only that whatever it is, it's given to us by grace, which means you can't earn it. In 2 Thessalonians 2:16 we read "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God even our Father who hath loved us and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." God has given us this hope by grace. It can't be earned. You can't deserve it. You can't earn it, it's a gift of grace.

Now whatever this hope is, Peter said as we just read in 1 Peter 1:3, it's alive, it's a living hope. So it makes us rejoice. It's only one. It comes by grace and it's alive. The Peter said "it's reserved in heaven." So whatever it is, it's in heaven right now waiting for us. You say well that means it's future doesn't it? Exactly. It's definitely in the future. The point being that our hope is future. It is reserved for us. It is laid away for us in heaven and we wait for it by faith.

Now let me show you what it is. Turn to Hebrews Chapter 6, verse 18 and you're going to get close to what our hope is. It makes us rejoice. There's only one of them. It's given us by grace. It's alive. It's reserved in heaven. It's not visible incidentally. Remember Romans 8:24-25, "The hope that is seen is," what, "is not hope." It's invisible. It's future. We wait for it by faith. Now let's see something else about it. Hebrews 6:18, "That by two immutable things," and this was the promise of God and His oath as He swore by Himself, "by two immutable things, in which it's impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who hath fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hopes set before us."

All that verse is saying is that by two things God has guaranteed our hope. His promise and His oath. Our hope is a guaranteed thing. Now what is it? Verse 19, "Which hope we have as anchor of the soul." Now our hope is a guaranteed thing. "It's an anchor," watch "both sure and steadfast which entereth into that within the veil."

Ah ha, now we find out a little more about our hope. Whatever it is, it anchors us and it's inside the veil in the holy of holies, the heavenly place where God dwells. Verse 20, "Where the forerunner is for us entered," want to know who our hope is, "even," what's the next word, "Jesus." Beloved that's as simply as it could be said. Our hope is not salvation. It's not eternal life. It's not death. It's not heaven. It's whom? It's Jesus.

He is our hope. He is alive. He causes us to rejoice. He comes to us by grace. There's only one of Him. He is reserved in heaven for us. It is in the future that we're going to see Him. He is presently now invisible. He is our hope. In Titus 2:11, let me take you a step further. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly. Righteously and godly in this present age." Now watch the next verse. "Looking for that blessed," what, "hope, even" and the word ciaas well translated even, as and, and here better translated even, "that blessed hope even the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ." He again is our hope.

Now if you want something more specific than that, listen to this one. 1 Timothy 1:1, are you ready? I love this. "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior," listen, "and the Lord Jesus Christ who is our hope." There it is. And slowly, but surely we zeroed in on our hope. The blessed hope of a believer, my friends, is Jesus Christ Himself in His glorious appearing."

But let me take a step further. Are you ready for this? 1 John Chapter 3, and this adds a dimension that just ought to thrill you to the very depth of your being." Verse 2, 1 John 3, "Beloved now are we the children of God." That's present tense. "But it doth not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure."

There's the second feature of our hope. Our hope is our Christ. Our hope secondly is being like Christ, you see? Now let me say it as simply as I can. The hope of every Christian is the appearing of Jesus Christ and at that moment when we become like Him. That is our hope. The return of Jesus as He personally returns and when we see Him, we are like Him. That is our hope.

And that's the hope reserved for us in heaven. The appearance of Christ and in the moment that He appears, we are transformed into His likeness. That is our hope. To see Him is to be like Him. Now the Thessalonian church knew what their hope was, and this is a wonderful text. In 1 Thessalonians 1:10, it says "that this church was waiting for His Son from heaven." And that's what every church and every believer is really waiting for. "For the Son to appear from heaven, for in the moment when we see Him we will be like Him." That is our hope, being like Christ.

When the Lord Jesus Christ is ready to terminate the church age, the age in which we now live, He will appear in the air and He will gather all Christians to Himself. And they will all in an instant be like Him forever. That is our hope.

Now there are three major passages in the New Testament which clearly discuss this and I want to show you those three. The first is John Chapter 14, and I want us to look together at what has to be the most thrilling thing that a believer can yet desire and wait for, the appearing of Jesus Christ when we shall be like Him.

John 14 is the first introduction of the coming of Jesus Christ for His church. This is the first revelation of the rapture. And incidentally, we use the rapture frequently. It comes from the Latin word, and the Latin word means to catch away or snatch away. And the church is to be snatched from the earth, caught away. That is the rapture. Now in John Chapter 13, so we can kind of get a running start on 14, Jesus had met with His disciples the last night before His betrayal and arrest. And He really loved them. And everything He was about to do was based on His love for them.

Look at verse 1 of Chapter 13. "Now before the feast of the Passover when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the uttermost." Or He loved them completely. He loved them fully or He loved them right up to the end, both and all of those are equally true.

And so Jesus is in love with His disciples, and out of that burning love that He has for them comes all of the features of the next three chapters. And including the fourth chapter, the 17th. He just flows out with love. To begin with, He washes their feet, in verses 2 through 17, expressing their...His love to them in the most humble menial fashion imaginable.

Having done that, He speaks to them of His death. Look at verse 21. "When Jesus had thus said He was troubled in spirit, testified and said, verily, verily I say unto you one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one upon another doubting of whom He spoke." You see it had just been a time of love. It had just been a sweetest kind of fellowship as Jesus had washed their feet and tears of penitence's had come down their faces and they recognized how they had been proud and how they should have been washing His feet. And even Peter said, "Lord, you'll never touch my feet." And the Lord said, "If I don't wash, you have no part with me." And Peter said, "All right, Lord I'll have my feet washed, and my head and the whole works."

And they were full of remorse and sorrow because they had not shown the same love that Christ had shown them. And here all of a sudden in the midst of all of this love, "He says, one of you is going to betray me and they can't believe it." He was speaking of His death. And then He turned to Judas and said what you do, go and do it quickly. And He sent Judas out."

And verse 31 says "then when He was gone out, Jesus said now is the Son of man glorified and God is glorified in Him." Knowing that Judas had gone about to do his heinous deed of betrayal, Jesus knew the hour of His death was eminent. That for which He had waited 33 years on earth. That for which He had waited throughout all eternity. That moment of excruciation on the cross was about to happen.

But Jesus saw it as His own glorification. He said, "Now is the Son of man glorified," for it was on the cross that He was most glorious, winning the victory over sin and Satan. And He went on to say, "And God has glorified in Him," for on the cross He exhibited all of the attributes of God. The cross was the beginning of His glorification. But I don't think it ended there. Verse 32, "If God be glorified in Him on the cross, God shall also glorify Him in himself and shall straight way glorify Him." And there Jesus saw not only the glory of the cross, but the glory of the resurrection and the glory of the ascension and the glory of His place at the right hand of the Father.

Jesus is saying finally the struggle is over. All of the waiting is done. Now I am going to be glorified. Now all of this glorification meant that He had to leave the disciples. And so in loving tender compassion, He speaks to them in verse 33. Technia, "Little children yet a little while I am with you." I'm not going to be around long, He says. "You shall seek me, and as I said unto the Jews, where I go ye cannot come so now I say to you."

When He said that to the Jews, He added the statement "ye shall die in your sins." He never said that here. The Jews could never come where He was. The disciples just had to wait a little longer. But Jesus makes the announcement. But they can't come where He's going. Well, this is awfully hard for them to handle. They had a spiritual heart attack. They had put all their eggs in the basket of Jesus Christ. They had believed with all their hearts He was the Messiah. And now He was going to leave them. And now just when everything was hot and it was rough and persecution had broken out

against them or begun to break out and it was very difficult and now they realize He's going to be gone.

In verse 36 Simon who was often the spokesman reveals the attitude of everybody. He says, "Lord where goesth thou?" Where are you going? Jesus answer him, "where I go you can't follow me now, but you'll follow me hereafter." He says, I'm going to leave and you can't come.

Peter says, "Look I'll follow you anywhere you go, I'll even die if need be." Well that was the expression of the emotion of the moment. Jesus was leaving and they couldn't handle it. In fact, they go so turn up that in verse 1 of Chapter 14, we begin to see what Jesus says, "Let not your heart be troubled." The literal is stop having troubled hearts. Stop letting your hearts be troubled. It means they already were troubled. They were already bent to the very depths of their souls. They were in anguish because Jesus was leaving.

They were bewildered. The gloomy prospect of the absence of Christ was something they couldn't handle. You see they were they sure He was the Messiah. They were absolutely convinced that He was the Messiah. And the only idea of a Messiah that they ever had was a Messiah who was an illustrious conqueror. Who was a reigning king on the earth. They had no concept of a Messiah who stuck around a while and went back to heaven or went off somewhere. The only Messiah they knew was one who conquered and who stayed and remained on the earth. This dying and leaving thing just wasn't in their messianic script.

Didn't fit. And they had forsaken everything to follow Jesus. They had given up home and family and trades and jobs and positions and they had given it all up for Him. And now what is this about your leaving and they were shook. Jesus was in some sorrow Himself. Jesus knew that the cross was just around the corner and there was no way they could relieve Him of His sorrow.

But it was sure possible for Him to relieve them of theirs and Jesus was always lost in the consciousness of somebody else's problems. Even when He was dying on the cross, He was more concerned about the thief next to Him than He was about Himself. And so He realizes that they're grieving and He feels their grief. He felt their hurts. And so in loving comfort he speaks to them. And His words are so beautiful. Verse 1, "Stop letting your hearts be troubled." And I know there's sorrow in pathos in His voice because He loved them.

He says, "you believe in God, believe also in me." In other words, He calls on faith. He says, hang in there guys. Have I ever failed you? You believe in God, God comes through, you know who I am, believe in me. I'm not going to fail you. So He calls for faith. He says, you've lived all your life believing in God, now believe in me.

And then He takes it a step further and gives them a promise. I love this. "In my Father's house are many mansions." That's the old King James. That translation has perpetrated more error than perhaps any other verse. We have the ideas of all kinds of big monstrous mansions all over heaven. And we're all concerned and I've heard people preach about the kind of life you live as sending up certain material. And some of us are going to live in hubbles by the tracks. And others are going to live in great white mansions with a hundred rooms down there where God's house.

Don't you believe it. Nobody's going to live four blocks or eight blocks or a quarter mile from God's house. "In my Father's house," "In my Father's house," where? "In my Father's house are many dwelling places." The literal Greek. You know His house is big?

Do you know it's the only house in heaven? Revelation 21:16 says "it's 1,500 miles cubed." You say it doesn't sound so big. Fifteen hundred miles cubed is 2,250,000 square miles. London is a 140 square miles. I think 2,250,000 out to handle us fine. It could easily hold, according to the calculations of an architect, 100 billion people. I'm quite confident there aren't going to be that many there because narrow is the way and few there be that find it.

Plenty of room. "In my Father's house are many dwelling places." You know how they used to build a house in those days. They always had a courtyard in the middle and they build a house around it. A square around the place. The father and the mother would live in one place and as they had they had their children and they married, they'd move into the next apartment and they'd just keep building and filling until they closed in the Father's house. Families lived within the Father's house and the courtyard was there. There was a double way entry. You came in the outside door into the inside door.

Every believer who goes to heaven will be living in the Father's house. Now look what Jesus says further. "If it were not so I would have told you." Now watch, "I go to prepare a place for you." And again the word prepare in the Greek doesn't mean to manufacture. It doesn't mean to make. It means to get ready or to ready up as one Lexicon says. Or to furnish and equip. It means to make it a suitable place for those who will dwell there.

And so the Lord Jesus is not up there working with a construction crew of angels. He is not up there building mansions and new dwellings and new housing projects as new people are being redeemed all over heaven. He is simply getting the Father's house straightened up for when we arrive. Now here's the key, verse 3, now watch this. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will send for you."

Is that what it says? No, it says, "I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there ye may be also." And from that time we'll never be anywhere where He isn't forever. And that's the promise. He'll not send angels for us. He'll come in person to get us and take us to be there. Just as literally as Jesus went to heaven so literally He'll come again to receive His disciples to himself and

He will take them to the Father's house.

Now, I love this, the term "I will come again," is in the present tense in Greek. It isn't even a future statement. "I come again." It's present tense. You say why is it in the present? Whenever the Greeks wanted to say something that could never be refuted something that was so positive they said it as if it was happening or had already happened and they used the present or the past tense to verify future absolutes.

And He says, I am as good as here. That's how secure the promise is. Something so secure that it must happen is very often in the Greek language placed in the present tense. Now watch, Jesus then says, "I am coming." Now we said our hope is Him. He is our hope. Seeing Him and being like Him is our hope. And here He promises that He's coming.

Now let me add a footnote. This is in complete contrast of the coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation. Seven years after the rapture, Christ returns to the earth. Now watch, at that point when Christ returns to the earth seven years later, nobody goes to heaven. You got it? Everybody in heaven does what? Comes to earth.

Here everybody goes, there everybody comes to earth. And the saints in the kingdom reign with Christ where? On the earth. So at the second coming of Christ, nobody goes to heaven. But here it is very clear that everybody's going to go who's a disciple of Christ. Therefore the rapture and the return must be two different things.

And incidentally next Lord's day, Sunday night, we're going to speak on the subject, why the church will not go through the tribulation. And that's one of the reasons. So this has to refer to the translation of the church. This is taking us out of here and taking us to the Father's house. This has nothing to do with coming for the kingdom. From earth to heaven, the kingdom is from heaven to earth. We come back and reign with Him.

Well, the idea of going to the Father's house was totally foreign to the disciples. They had no such concept of a rapture, did they? The only concept they had was Messiah comes and sets up His kingdom on earth, we reign with Him on the earth. The thought of going to heaven first absolutely was over their heads. They had no concept and it's even illustrated by Thomas who says, "Lord we don't know what you're talking about. Where are you going and how do you get there?"

And Jesus says, "Don't worry about it Thomas. Trust me, I'm the way." Just leave it to me. Because they didn't even understand this. In fact over in Acts Chapter 1, verse 6, they were still hung out on this very thought. They said, "Lord wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" They didn't understand. They were still waiting for the messianic earthly kingdom. They didn't understand this concept of being taken away.

Now watch, Christ then in John 14 announces an entirely different hope than that which was promised to Israel. The promise to Israel was the kingdom on earth. The promise to the church is a taking out of the world into the Father's house. That's never been promised anywhere in the Old Testament to Israel. They are going to have their millennial kingdom on the earth. And so the hope of Israel, a kingdom on earth. The hope of the church, rapture to the Father's house. Two different things.

Now let me add this, what happens to a Christian when he dies? Do we...does he just go into limbo until Jesus comes? No. No, not at all. Philippians 1:23 says this, "Paul says, I'm in a strait between two. I'm caught between two good things," he says, "having a desire to part and be with Christ which is far better." The other one was to be with them. He says, you're wonderful and like being here, but my real desire is to go and be with Jesus.

Now what did he say? "Having a desire to depart and to be with Christ." He knew that the minute his spirit left this earth, it would be with whom? Christ, and Paul also said in 2 Corinthians 5:8, "To be absent from the body is to be," what, "present with the Lord." The minute, the instant, the split-second that a believer dies, his spirit enters the presence of God, the presence of Jesus Christ. His body does not. His body goes into the grave. And so what you have then is for all of the church age until the rapture spirits of believers in heaven without their glorified bodies.

And we're awaiting the rapture because that's when the spirit gets joined with the glorified bodies that are going to come out of the graves. And we'll see that in a moment. But now notice in John 14 something very important. Notice that there are no signs that tell them when it's going to happen. There are no intervening events. This is what we call the eminent rapture. That means it can happen at any moment. It's the next thing. Nothing has to happen. People say what are the signs before Jesus can come?

Only the shout, the voice of the archangel and the trump of God and then we go. There are no signs. Now on this basis, the disciples are exhorted, don't be troubled. I'll be back. And I'm going to take you to the Father's house.

Now surely that means they weren't going through the tribulation. If they were going to go through the tribulation, He would say now you're going to have to let your heart be troubled. They had every reason to be troubled. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 we read earlier, let me read the rest of the verse. It says, "there are those who will wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead even Jesus who delivered us from the wrath to come."

What wrath? All of it. All of it. Well, this was so hard for them, because they never heard this doctrine. And they didn't understand, but Jesus presented it. I'm going to come and get you and take

you to be with me. That's the eminent return of Jesus Christ. Now let's look at some of the detail about this by turning to the second passage we want to consider.

1 Thessalonians Chapter 4, and if that was the promise, then this is the plan. 1 Thessalonians 4, and oh how we love this one. You know the Thessalonian church was a young church. Paul had only preached there three Sabbaths, which meant that he probably was there about 21 days at the most likely. And he had preached simply and clearly the gospel and in the meantime while he was there from Sabbath to Sabbath, he was probably teaching. And apparently he had taught them about the rapture. He had given them enough eschatology, which is the long word for talking about end times. He had given them enough information about the rapture that they were a super rapturised group.

I mean, they were so ready that they were just hanging around waiting to leave. It says in 1:10, we've read it twice now, the third time, "they were waiting for the appearing of the Son." I mean, that's who they lived for. They got up every morning and said maybe today, maybe today. And there's nothing wrong with that. That's what the Spirit of God would like.

They were a rapture conscious outfit. They had another thing that was characteristic of them. They were a love-bound group. Chapter 4, verse 9, "As touching brotherly love, you need not that I write unto you for yourselves are taught of God to love one another." He says, you don't even need a lecture on love. You are really together. So here was a group that loved each other with a super kind of love and at the same time were looking for Jesus to come and get them.

And then you know what happened? Some of them starting dying off. Jesus didn't come and some of them were dying. And they became very concerned because they were wondering well what about those people who are dying? Are they going to miss it when Jesus comes? This was their problem. All through the chapter the whole...I should say all through the book in every chapter he talks about the second-coming. Talks about the rapture.

They had no concept that it was going to be at least 2,000 years away. They were looking for Jesus every day when they got up. But some people died and they were really worried about it. The Christians who died, is Jesus going to take them? Are they going to miss it? Are they going to have an inferior place in glory? Are they going to have an upper level, upper division for the ones in the rapture and a lower division for the ones who missed out?

Are they going to have to wait and have their resurrection later? Maybe at the close of the tribulation. So they had questions. So Paul says, I'll answer them. Verse 13, "I would not have you to be ignorant." I know you've got a problem, I want to solve it. "Brethren, concerning them who are asleep," and that's exactly who they were worrying about, it's a present tense in concerning them who are falling asleep. Christians were dying. And he's saying I don't want you to be ignorant about the

people who are dying. Incidentally falling asleep is a figure for death. And so he says, "I don't want you to be ignorant about those who've fallen asleep." There is an answer.

You say well, you know that figure it's apparently bothered a lot of people. That figure bother me a little bit because it says, "them who are asleep." Is this teaching soul sleep? Does this mean that when you die, you just kind of go into Never-Never Land and you lose consciousness until the rapture? Not at all. The figure here could never be pressed to established the teaching of soul sleep or unconscious repose.

Paul is not talking, now watch it friends, Paul is not talking about the state of the soul. He is talking about the state of the body. Are you with me? When a believer dies, his soul goes into the presence of God. His body goes into the dust to rest until resurrection. So the asleep that he's talking about is the body.

To be asleep is to be out of communication with your environment. That's exactly what happens to the body when it dies. The spirit is communication with the environment of God still. Goes right into the presence of God. The body goes out of communication. The body has no capacity to relate to its environment until such a time as the rapture occurs and that body is glorified and reconstructed.

And incidentally, the soul sleep is totally inconsistent with Chapter 5, verse 10, talking about "Christ who died for us that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him." You got it? So whether you're awake or asleep in biblical terms, you're with Jesus. So it's not unconsciousness either way you look at it.

And so he's only talking about the body. In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul says, "That when you die the earthly house of this tabernacle is," what, "is dissolved. But the spiritual man departs absent from the body, present with the Lord." So it's the body that is at rest. It's the body that He's talking about. Them who are asleep, those bodies who are sleeping. Now he says, "brethren you don't need to be ignorant concerning those whose bodies are asleep." They're not going to be second-class citizens. They're not going to get in the lower echelons of heaven. They're not even going to have to wait extra time for their resurrection.

You don't need to be sorrowing. "Don't sorrow not as others do have no hope." Apparently this had gotten to them to the point where they were really moping around about it. And he says you don't need to be like the hopeless pagans. And incidentally somebody without Jesus Christ really has no hope. He says, "Don't sorrow like those who have no hope." Why? Verse 14, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." If Jesus' body went into repose in the grave, incidentally His spirit never died, did it? But if His body went into repose and He arose you can believe that all of those who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.

You see it is the resurrection of Christ that guarantees our resurrection. Jesus said in John 14:19, "Because I live ye shall live also." It is Christ who has abolished death, said Paul to Timothy, and brought life and immortality to light to the gospel. So he says if we believe that Jesus died and rose again and it's not a question of doubt, it's a question of affirmation, obviously we do, if we're the ones that believed that He died and rose again, surely then we know He'll bring those who are asleep with Him when He comes.

Now I want to show you something fabulous. Verse 14, easy escape. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." Beautiful. When Jesus comes back to meet us in the air, He's going to bring some folks with Him. That's what it says. Who? The spirits of those believers who have already died and who have not yet receive their glorified bodies. So when the Lord returns in the rapture, with Him are going to be all the spirits of the dead saints of the church age. Their bodies all dust and decay and probably most of them nothing left of them. But their spirits are coming back.

Why? Because they're going to get reunited with bodies. And so those who are asleep, they're coming back. They're going to re-enter transformed bodies, which are going to come out of the graves. Boy that's a terrific thought. All those spirits that have been longing for bodies are going to get them, glorified bodies.

Now look at verse 15. "For this," and here's this specific answer, "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord," this is straight stuff, right, Revelation, not my ideas, this is what God says. "This we say by the word of the Lord, we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them who are asleep."

They were saying oh those poor ones that have died. They're going to miss the rapture. We're all going to go and they won't get in on it. And Paul says, wrong. You're not even going to go before they do. They'll be first. Oh, this is a tremendous promise. The living don't have any advantage over the dead. In fact, it's better to be dead, did you know that?

It's better to be dead, because your spirit's with Jesus and you get to go first in the rapture. I mean, you come back with Him and you're body's coming out first. It says at the end of verse 16, "The dead in Christ shall rise," what, "first." And then simultaneously...and then somebody said because they have six feet further to go, but I doubt that. Then they meet simultaneously...they meet simultaneously in the air. Both meet Jesus together.

Now in verse 15, "For we say unto you by the word of the Lord, we who are alive and remain under the coming of the Lord shall not," the term shall not is a double negative in the Greek, by no means, no way, can't happen, impossible. Strong negative.

We who are alive aren't going to get a head start on the dead in the translation. Their spirits are coming down and their bodies come out of graves first. Now you want to see the detail? Watch this, verse 16. Here's how it's going to happen. "For the Lord Himself," don't you like that? Jesus Himself is coming for us. "Shall descend from heaven with a shout," oh I like that. You say what's He going to say?

Well, I don't really know, but I have a good idea, and the idea that I have is from Revelation 11. Remember the story of the two witnesses? I'm sure you do. They were tassing the beast, preaching the gospel and creating havoc because they had all the power to make plagues happen all over the world. So finally the beast kills them and their bodies lying in the street three and a half days dead, and all the world's looking at them on television. It doesn't use the word television, but it says every eye on the world's going to see them. And the only way it couldn't happen would be on satellite communication television. And so they'll be the topic of the news for a few days.

And after they've been lying dead in the tribulation for three and a half days and the world's having a party, giving gifts it says in verse, they're so happy they're dead. All of sudden, verse 11, "and after three days and a half the spirit of life from God entered them and they stood on their feet." Oh what a day that'll be. Oh and everybody will see it on television, instant replay and the whole things.

And watch, verse 12, "And they heard a great voice from heaving saying unto them come up here." Don't you like that? Now I don't know what He's going to say, but that's good enough for me. 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4, there's going to be a shout. It might be come up here and away we go.

But beloved look we're not waiting for an event, we're waiting for a person aren't we? We're not waiting for a signal, we're waiting for a voice. And I'll tell you I don't know how anybody can say He believes the Bible and deny the physical, literal return of Jesus for His church. It's too clear. "I will receive you unto myself." "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout." He's going to do the calling. The word shout is kaluzmain the Greek. It's the term that's used for a military command with snap.

It's going to be a command with authority and urgency. Remember at the grave when Jesus stood there and looked where Lazarus was and he said, "Lazarus, come out." And he did. And that was only dead one. Somebody said if He didn't qualify it by saying Lazarus everybody would have come out in every grave in the universe.

That may be what He's going to say, come up, come out, something, maybe come up after He said come out. And Jesus Himself will give the shout. You say, well, how do you know it's Jesus? Well, I know it from John 5, verse 28, "Marvel not this for the hour is coming in which all that are the grave shall hear His voice and shall come forth." It's going to be His voice.

What did Jesus say in John 10? "My sheep hear my voice." You'll know it when you hear it. Not only the voice, I love this, incidentally not all the dead are going to be raised. The Old Testament saints don't get their bodies until the end of the tribulation. So it's just the church, just the church. The evil have to wait until the end of the kingdom. Then there's a resurrection of all the unjust. That's the second resurrection. This is just the church, just the catching of the church.

The second thing that happens is this verse 16, "The Lord descends from heaven with a shout and the voice of the archangel," do you know who the archangel is? Michael. And Michael five times incidentally in Scripture he is designated the archangel in Jude verse 9 names him as such. He's the leader of the angels. He's the warrior angel. He's the commander in chief. He's God's general. And he's been fighting the demons for a long time. And he's tired of it all.

And I don't exactly know what he says, but I imagine it's something like an angelic yahoo. Because he is going to see the victory begun at that moment. As the believers come out of the graves and off the earth to meet the Lord in the air and Michael lets out a shout.

The shout of victory for the holy angels. And it's the beginning of the war that's going to be the final war and it's in those seven years to follow that Michael and his angels completely wipe out the demons. Well, there's something else. The voice of the archangel and the trump of the God. Trumpets are used many times in the Old Testament to summon people. Sometimes to summon them to battle. Sometimes to summon them to worship. This surely is to summon them to worship. When the trumpet blows.

Well, there you have it, the shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet blasts. Three separate things, picture one of it, the coming of Jesus personally to gather His church. And those who are already dead and with the Lord, I think of those that I know and those that you know who love Jesus Christ, their spirits are there. They're going to come back with Him and they're going to meet their glorified bodies first and then we're going to be gathered together with them in the air. And so Paul says, people don't feel sorry for those folks. They're going first.

Verse 17, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet," whom, "the Lord." Again, it's personal. In the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord. From then on, you'll never be out of His presence. Isn't that exciting? You'll never be out of His presence. When He comes back for the kingdom, you're coming too.

When He goes into the eternal state, you're going too. Heaven is in His presence. That's what it is. Wherever it is it isn't a wherever, it's just a whatever and that whatever is in His presence. Notice a footnote at the end of verse 16. I mean to give you. It says, "The dead in Christ," that's again an indication that it's only the church saints, because Old Testament saints are not said to be in Christ.

That's exclusively for the church. "And so then we who are alive and remain are caught up together with them in the clouds." And again this express caught up is the one from which we get the word rapture, the Latin term.

You say well, can God do this? Oh that's no problem for God. He already gave us a preview. One day Enoch took a walk with God and just kept on walking, walked right up into God's presence, never died. Elijah got in a chariot one day, it was different than normal chariot and just took off. He finally got done, he climbed out of the chariot, he was in heaven.

God gives us a couple of previews of what rapture is going to be like only instead of one or another, it's going to be the multitude of believers all over the globe exiting the presence of God. And I don't think anybody's going to see it. It says it's going to be in the clouds and I think it's going to disappear long before anybody sees it. And so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Now he says do you feel a little better, verse 18. "Wherefore," do what, "comfort one another." The word is parakalew, exhort, encourage each other with these words. You have nothing to be afraid of and I can just see the joy. And then he adds in verse 1 of 5, "But of the times and the seasons brethren, you have no need that I write unto you for you know perfectly that the day of Lord comes like a thief in the night." You don't know when it's coming. Just when everything looks good, peace and safety, then wham, sudden destruction.

What are you going to do about it, verse 6? "Don't sleep, watch, be sober minded." Verse 8, "Put on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet, the hope of salvation." Get ready. Get it together spiritually, it's coming and you don't know when. Comfort one another and get ready.

The last passage, just to look at it briefly. The second phase of the plan 1 Corinthians Chapter 15. We're just going to briefly look at this, absolutely exciting, thrilling thing. 1 Corinthians 15, verse 51, are you ready for this? Paul says this, they're talking about resurrection the whole chapter. And of course the resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of our resurrection. "Behold I show you a mystery." Now that's a term used 27 times in the New Testament. It always refers to something hidden in the Old Testament, now revealed in the New Testament. So whatever it is it's something the Old Testament folks didn't know.

And believe me the Old Testament folks did know about the kingdom. This is something different. "I show you a mystery." You say yeah, a resurrection is that mystery? No, they knew about resurrection. Job said "I know that my Redeemer lives that He shall stand upon the latter...He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Job knew about resurrection.

Isaiah said, Isaiah 26:19, "The dead shall live together with my dead body shall they arise. The earth shall cast out the dead," said Isaiah. So they knew about resurrection. It isn't resurrection. Daniel 12:2 also indicates they knew about it. What is this mystery that's been hidden if it isn't resurrection. I'll tell you what it is, it's rapture.

It's rapture. It's the fact that some believers are going to be translated up to heaven without dying, that's what he says. Look, "we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed." Some of you have seen that that's the motto we have in our nursery, which is a little out of context.

But anyway, meanwhile back at the rapture, "we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," means that all believers are not going to die. Some are going to be changed, no, all are going to be changed. Even those who've already died are going to get a changed, transformed and glorified body. That's the glorious promise. Rapture is the mystery. Taken out of the world.

You say we get these glorified bodies changed, what kind of bodies are they going to be? Changed into what? Well, Philippians 3:20-21, just quickly read this. "Our citizenship is in heaven from which we look for the Savior," see we're not looking for an event, we're looking for a person, this is everywhere in Scripture, "who shall change our lowly body." What's it going to be like? That it may be fashioned like His glorious body. "When we shall see Him, we shall," what, "be like Him."

What kind of body did He have? Spiritual, powerful, glorified, incorruptible, the kind of a body that could stand on a mountain and say good-bye and just take off. No rocket fuel, nothing. Just blast through space. The kind of a body that when the door was shut, went through the walls. The kind of a body that ate, a physical body in a sense, and yet a supernatural and eternal, spiritual body as well.

I can't describe it anymore than to say if you study the resurrection body of Jesus Christ that's the description of what yours will be like. It cannot die, it is visible, yet it is...moves as fast as a supernatural thought. It is physical in the sense that it can partake of food. Yet it is spiritual in the sense that there are no processes. It's the kind of a body that can be seen and it can move through a wall or blast through space. That's the kind of body we're going to have.

You say oh boy. I ain't waiting for that. One final thought, how's it going to happen? Verse 52, you want to know how fast you're going to be changed. Now I've heard of the six month plan. No, in a moment. "In the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible," remember they go first, "and we shall be changed." When you get ready for that trump, that's it. You say how fast? In the twinkling of an eye. Somebody figured out what a twinkling of an eye is. If I could just show you real quick. Give you a little idea. Now watch, the twinkling of an eye, according to someone is the time that it takes the eye...the light to get from the service of the eye to register on the retina.

Not a blinking of an eye, a twinkling. That's light entering the eye. From the time that it takes the light to hit the surface of the eye, to the retina. That tiny distance is a twinkling of an eye. A beam of light travels at 186,000 thousand miles a second, which means light takes 1.5 seconds from the earth to the moon. In the twinkling of an eye it would get one foot from the surface of the earth.

Want to know how fast you're going to be changed? That fast. That's why I don't believe anybody is going to see it. When we go we will be gone before they know we went. And with all the mass of us in heaven changed, we're going to be veiled in the clouds and ushered in to the presence of the Father in His house. Beloved, I believe this with my whole heart. Do you believe it? This is our hope to see Jesus and to be like Him.

Let's pray. Our Lord Jesus Christ we, with eager hearts, await Your coming and say with John even so come Lord Jesus. Oh Lord we are so thankful that you went away with a promise and said I'll be back. And myself I'm not sending a messenger, it'll be myself to gather you into my Father's house.

Oh Lord we would just pray that there is no one in our presence tonight who is not ready when You come. Lord Jesus we know that there are no signs that need to take place. Nothing needs to happen. You can come any second. We know You'll come and...as a thief in the night when people are saying peace and safety, then comes the destruction. And You said You'd come in an hour when we think not.

Lord Jesus we're looking up, we're loving Your appearing. We want to be changed. We want to be like You are. We wait for that flash when we're in the Father's house and we are actually in the likeness of Jesus Christ. Oh what an unbelievable thought. And when we're with Him forever and ever never to be separated.

And Father in our joy we also are like John to find that these words are honey in mouths and bitterness in our stomachs, because while they are sweet for us, they are tragic for the world that is left. Lord if there's someone here tonight who has not really come into the knowledge of Jesus Christ and isn't ready for the time when He comes for His own, oh God may this be the night when they commit their lives to Him. That if He comes tonight, if He comes tomorrow, He'll come for them. God we thank you for those of our beloved saints who have died and whose spirits are with thee and who await the great resurrection morning when glorified bodies shall come out of graves long ago forgotten and joined to those spirits that they too shall be like thee.

And Lord, those of us who are Christians may we in gratitude for this promise live every day sober minded, watchfully making every moment count for glory. Speak to our hearts even as we draw ourselves to a conclusion. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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