

I Thessalonians 4:13-18 The Coming of the Lord

Alright today we are in I Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 13 through 18. We are in the second half of this book, chapters 4 and 5, which is entitled The Instruction to the Believers in Thessalonica. We have studied the first three chapters, which is The Inspiration of the Believers in Thessalonica. But now as we start chapter 4, we are studying the Instruction, specifically given as The Testimony of the Lord.

There are two instances in this chapter where Paul designates it as being from the Lord. The first one is in verse 2, **For you know what instructions we have given to you through the Lord Jesus.** So these are instructions from Christ. These are His testimonies.

Verse 3, **For this is the will of God your sanctification.** So the first testimony of the Lord is God's will for every believer is their sanctification. To *sanctify* means to *be set apart*. That comes from a trail of Greek words starting with ἅγιος (hagios), which means *holy*. ἅγιος (hagios) is also the word for *saint* in the Scripture. And so once a person receives the Holy Spirit - same word *holy* for Spirit, set apart Spirit - once a person receives the Holy Spirit that person is set apart and is called a *saint*, a set apart person. Both the word *holy* and *saint* come from the same word.

But then ἁγιασμός (hagiasmos) is this word *sanctification*. And a person is said to be *sanctified* or *set apart* once they have received Christ. Once they have received the Holy Spirit that person is set apart and belongs to Jesus Christ. That person is sanctified.

And so he is telling the believers in Thessalonica, **This is the will of God for your life, your sanctification.** Once He comes into your life, He not only has forgiven you for your sins, but He has also purchased you with a price of His death on the cross.

The second testimony of the Lord is found in verse 15 in our text for today, **For we are saying this to you in the Word of the Lord.** He is talking about the coming of the Lord. That is the second testimony of Christ in this chapter. The Lord's testimony about His coming, not man's opinion, but the Lord's testimony of His coming.

On page 3 in your study guide we start out with verses 13 and 14 as we begin the instruction on the confusion that existed there in Thessalonica among the believers. They were concerned about the believers who had died. They knew what the Lord's testimony promise was, that He was going to come back for His people. They are well aware of the resurrection and the coming back of Christ for His people. But they were concerned about the people who died. "We will be resurrected, but what about these people?"

We see this knowledge of their understanding of the resurrection of Christ in John chapter 11 verses 20 through 27. **Then Martha as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming went to meet Him, but Mary was sitting in the house.** This is when Lazarus was sick and died, and Jesus waited for him to die and then came into town, and Martha came to meet Him and Mary was in the house. **Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord if you had been here my brother would**

not have died. But even now I know, that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." So they had this doctrine and this belief among all the Jews that one day the Lord was going to come and raise up His people.

Jesus said to her, verse 25 of John chapter 11, "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?" Then she said to Him, "Yes Lord: I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is come into the world." There was a belief that there would be a resurrection. There would be a calling up of the Lord's people.

But according to the second letter to Thessalonica, II Thessalonians, apparently someone had come into Thessalonica and corrupted the doctrine and teaching about the raising up of the dead. In fact, telling the Christians in Thessalonica that they had missed the coming of the Lord. That they died and that they will not rise. In fact, they went so far as to say that Christ came, and they missed it, they are left behind for the tribulation period, which are going to get into next week in chapter 5. So they had a belief about it, but there were different beliefs, different teachings floating around and Paul wants to instruct them as to what the Lord actually says in His testimony.

Verse 13 says, **But I do not desire you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning the ones having fallen asleep.** Now the Biblical phrase *falling asleep* is used for those who have died in Christ, those who are saved and have died. That is presented to us in Scripture because this was the believer's way of saying that death was only temporary. It is just sleep. But some believed that when Paul uses the term *sleep* - and by the way that is the Greek word for *sleeping* - they have developed a doctrine called *soul sleep*. There is a doctrine called soul sleep where in the doctrine they believe that a person's spirit and soul inside their body also is sleeping, and so they believe in soul sleep. They believe that when a person dies, they are just sleeping inside the body, they have not gone anywhere. That is what some of the people did with Paul's words. But it is only in the Bible that you have to notice this in the New Testament. It only applies to the physical body. The soul is never mentioned when making reference to death or sleeping. It is always the physical body that is sleeping, said to be. So the word *sleep* in Scriptures, in the New Testament as ministry and application for believers is only applied to the physical body, never the soul. It has never mentioned the soul.

In fact, Paul mentions the fact in II Corinthians chapter 5 verse 8, **And we are confident, yes well pleased rather, to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.** So death, the word *death* **θάνατος** (thanatos) means *separation*. Your spirit leaves your body at the point of what we call death. But the body is just temporarily sleeping. But the spirit goes to be with Christ. **To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.**

There is another good example in Luke chapter 8 verses 51 and 56. This is Jairus. Jairus sent for Jesus and asked Him to come to his house that his daughter was dying. So while Jesus was on His way some of the man's slaves or servants - the man's name was Jairus - Jairus' servants came and said, "Do not bother the Master, she has died. She cannot be helped." But Jesus kept coming. In Luke chapter 8 beginning with verse 51. **And when He came into the**

house, He permitted no one to go in, except Peter, James, and John, and the father and the mother of the girl. Now all wept and mourned for her: but He said, "Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping." Interesting, He used the term *sleeping*. This is where the terminology came from. And they ridiculed Him, knowing that she was dead. But He put them outside, took her by the hand, and called, saying, "Little girl, arise." And her spirit returned, notice this, her spirit returned and she arose immediately: and He gave command that she should be given something to eat. And her parents were astonished: but He charged them to tell no one what had happened.

So, her spirit returned. Her spirit left her body. There is no soul sleep here. Her spirit is not sleeping. When Jesus called her to arise, verse 55 of Luke 8 says, her spirit returned and she arose immediately. So her spirit did not go anywhere, supposedly, if there is soul sleep. But her spirit left her body. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. And so those who have fallen asleep are believers whose physical bodies are in the graves, but their spirits are with Christ. That is what happens when a believer dies is that you go to be with Christ, but your physical body is dead. Or as the believer's way of saying, death was only temporary, using the word sleep, the body is only sleeping, it will go through a change.

So he says in verse 13, But I do not desire you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning the ones having fallen asleep, in order that you should not grieve, according as also the remaining (or the rest) the ones not having hope. I do not want you to become like the ones not having hope, the ones that do not know Christ. The ones that don't have the hope of going to be with the Lord, once you die and leave the body. But I am giving you this instruction now to help with the confusion that is made about the ones who have fallen asleep. They have been told various things about it. He is now setting them straight.

Verse 14, For if we believe that Jesus died and rose up, in this way also God will bring with him the ones having fallen asleep through Jesus. Now the word *if* in verse 14 in the Greek text - it is called a first-class condition assumed to be true and is literally translated *since*. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose up that is the Christian doctrine, that is the Christian creed, in this way also God will bring with Him the ones having fallen asleep through Jesus. The Lord is going to bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. Their spirit is going to come.

He is now going to explain it, beginning with verse 15. For we are saying this to you in the Word of the Lord. So, this is the Lord's testimony. Because we ourselves, the ones living, the ones remaining for the coming of the Lord, will never precede the ones having fallen asleep. The old King James translation uses the word *prevent* instead of *precede*, it means the same thing. Back when they used the old English the word *prevent* means *to go first*. But the New King James has changed it to *precede*. So he says for your benefit, the ones who are living and remaining on the earth for the coming of the Lord, we will never precede the ones having fallen asleep. We will never go before the ones who have died in Christ. Christ is going to come back. He is going to have His people with Him who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

He is going to explain it now in verse 16. Because the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven in a command, in a voice of an archangel, and in a trumpet of God. And the dead

in Christ will be raised up first. So the Lord is going to come back at His coming from heaven. Instead of in a shout the word in Greek is literally the word *command*. He is going to command and call the bodies of the people out of the grave. **In the voice of an archangel, and trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will be raised up first.** So we will not be raised up to meet the Lord if we are remaining on the earth, if we are living on the earth, we will not be raised up first. It will be those who have been buried, their physical bodies have been buried. Those physical bodies will be raised up and changed as we will see in a moment.

This is going to happen according to I Corinthians 15, **In the twinkling of an eye.** It is going to happen that quick. Quicker than the eye can blink. Paul mentions this further in I Corinthians chapter 15 verses 50 through 58:

50) Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

51) Behold, I tell you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52) In the 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.

53) For this corruptible (meaning the physical body) must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54) So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

55) O death, where is your sting? O hades, where is your victory?

56) The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

57) But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58) Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

The Lord's work is not in vain because of this great hope that we have.

Verse 17, **Then afterwards** - that is, **The dead in Christ will be raised up first: then afterward.** It is very important that you realize in the Greek text there is a word that means *afterward*. **Then afterward**, the second thing that happens, **we ourselves, the ones living, the ones remaining, will be caught up** (or snatched away) **together with them in the clouds for a meeting of the Lord into the air. In this way we will always be with the Lord.** So the dead in Christ their physical bodies will be raised up first, then we who are remaining on the earth alive on the earth are going to be raised up with them simultaneously meeting the Lord in the air, for a meeting of the Lord. But the raising of the dead comes first, then we who are alive.

The terms *snatched away* or *caught up together* is where the Latin translation gets the word *raptous* for *rapture*. There are people today that say, "Well, the Christians are wrong because the Bible never uses the word *rapture*." Well, it is Latin that is why. It is from the Latin translation. The Greek word is the word **ἁρπάδζω** (harpazō). **ἁρπάδζω** (harpazō) means *to seize something by force*. We are going to be snatched away together with them, so it is going to be at the same time. The dead will be raised first. Those who are living on the earth will be caught up with them together in the clouds for a meeting of the Lord into the air.

Interesting *in the clouds* is mentioned. This was announced to the disciples at the Lord's ascension. After His resurrection He ascended up into heaven. In Acts chapter 1 verses 9 through 11 it says, **When He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."** He is going to come in the clouds just as you saw Him go up.

In this way we will always be with the Lord, verse 17 says. We are always going to be with the Lord with a changed body, a spiritual body according to I Corinthians chapter 15 verses 50 to 58. The physical body will be changed, and we will forever be with the Lord this way.

Verse 18, the last verse, **So then you encourage one another in these words**. So Paul taught this for two reasons. Number one he saw the encouragement and the comfort for the Thessalonians that those who had died and knew the Lord had not missed the rapture, the coming of the Lord. And they themselves still alive on the earth, they had not missed the coming of the Lord.

The second reason given (not only for their comfort and encouragement, but for their motivation) continue to abound in the work of the Lord. It does not say, "Abound in church or religious activities." It says, "Continually be abounding in the work of the Lord." Without this raising up, this rapture taking place for believers, there is no hope. There is no comfort. There is no motivation to continue in the things of the Lord. But we are encouraged, we are comforted, and we are told to continue to abound in the work of the Lord. It is not for nothing. It is for something.

So the confusion of the Christians in Thessalonica was straightened out. The content of the Lord's testimony was explained in detail. So that is the teaching on what is called down through history The Rapture of the Church, the taking up of God's people. When it is going to happen the Lord will come down with a command, with the voice of an archangel, and a trumpet of God will sound. And those who are in the graves will come up, their physical bodies will meet their spirit who is with Christ, who came back with Christ, and their physical bodies will be changed into spiritual bodies.

Now there comes a time when problems arise as to when this rapture is going to take place - either before the tribulation period, in the middle of the tribulation period, or at the end of

the tribulation period. And Paul is going to tackle that for us when we get into I Thessalonians chapter 5 beginning next week, as to its place in history.

Let's close with prayer.