The Rapture of the Church

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

Introduction:

Paul had taught the Thessalonians about the rapture of the church. One of their basic concerns was that they thought that the believers who had died (or might die soon) had missed the resurrection or might have to wait a while.

I. The Theological Setting:

A. The Two Testaments -

1. The Old Testament –

The time: 1500 BCE (Exodus- Malachi) Genesis is a general history of mankind before Israel.

It also gives the early history of Israel:

* Gen.12 - the call of Abraham.
* Gen.15 - the 400 year Egyptian bondage foretold.
* Gen.21 - the birth of Isaac.
* Gen 25 - the birth of twins – Jacob and Esau.
* The people are Israel.
* Their covenant is the Old Covenant (Law).
* Their promises are physical.

2. The New Testament –

* The Time: Pentecost to the Rapture
* The people are the Church
* Their covenant is the New Covenant (Heb. 7-10)
* Their promises are spiritual

B. Their Relationship –

* + Israel is not – in any way - the Church
  + The Church is not - in any way – Israel
  + The church is not in the Old Testament in statement or institution or figure.
  + The Church is a mystery i.e. something unrevealed up to that point.

Col. 1:26

“To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Eph. 3:4-9

“… when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery… To be specific, that Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.”

Where was the mystery hidden?

v. 9 … {the mystery} which for ages has been hidden in God Who created all things.

The Rapture is a mystery -

I Cor. 15.51

“Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep (die), but we will 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 imperishable and we shall be changed.”

There was no church on the earth before Acts 2 (Pentecost) and there will be no church on the earth after the Rapture. I say all of that to emphasize the fact that the Church is a unique entity in the plan of God.

II. The Scriptural Statement – 4:13-18

A. A Preview – 4:13-14

1. Our Feelings – 4:13

a. Don’t be Ignorant (like the pagans) – 4:13a

“I would not have you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who are asleep,”

The word ignorant, means uninformed.

The word sleep is used here to mean physical death. Jesus used it that way in John 11:11and 13 -- Jesus: “Our friend Lazarus is sleeping.” Disciples: “Then he is doing well.” Jesus (told them plainly) “Lazarus is dead.”

So Paul’s subject is believers who have died.

b. Don’t Grieve – 4:13b

“that you sorrow not even as others who have no hope.”

Paul’s concern is that they not sorrow like the pagans sorrow. Reason: they have no hope. Believers do sorrow, but unlike the pagans, they do have hope, as Paul will now show them.

Question: Where are those dead believers right now?

Answer: Their bodies are here on the earth – grave, urn, ocean-- wherever they left it.

The body sleeps; the soul lives on!

2 Cor. 5:8

“We are confident, yes, ﻿﻿well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”

Phil.1:23

“…having a ﻿﻿desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* ﻿﻿far better.”

Right in this section – Dead saints are coming down. God will bring with Him (Jesus)﻿﻿ those who ﻿﻿sleep in Jesus. (v. 14)

Dead saints are going up. And the dead in Christ will rise first (v. 16)

2. Our Faith – 4:14

1. The Condition - 4:14a

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again,”

The word “if” does not that there is any doubt. There are 4 classes of condition in the New Testament. This one is the first class condition. It assumes that the “if” is true and in this case should be translated since. “Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, etc”

1. The Conclusion - 4:14b

“even so, (based on that fact) those who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are among the best-attested facts of history.

You can be equally certain that, when Jesus comes for His living saints, he will bring the souls of believers who have died with Him.

B. A Promise – 4:15

“For this we say by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede those who are asleep.”

This revelation of the resurrection came from the Lord Jesus, Himself. Probably it was a direct revelation to Paul.

Not only will they be a part of the resurrection, they will be the first part. We who are alive and remain shall not precede them. ﻿The dead in Christ will rise first. (v. 16)

C. A Picture – 4:16-18

1. Resurrection – 4:16

“For the Lord, Himself, shall descend from heaven with a shout and the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first,”

a. The Shout – κέλευσμα – only here in the N.T.

Outside of N.T. – it is used of:

* Hunter to his hounds
* Shipmaster to his rowers
* Horseman to his horses.
* It is a shouted order.

It is addressed not:

* The Father to the Son
* Nor the Son to the angels
* But the Son to the dead in Christ, “Come forth!”

There was one in the gospels who heard this command; only it had a name before it, Lazarus.

b. The Voice – of the archangel

Scripture names only one archangel, Michael. (Jude 9; Rev 12.7)

c. The Trumpet of God –

All three apparently sound at the same time.

2. Rapture – 4:17

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord and so shall ever be with the Lord.”

Notice the “we” indicating that Paul expected to be alive at the rapture. We should also.

There are no signs for the Rapture. Nothing has to occur before the rapture. Every generation should have this “Blessed Hope” always before them.

3. Reassurance – 4:18

“Wherefore, encourage one another with these words.”

Wherefore = Because of all that has been said, use this doctrine for its intended purpose; Not scare one another with this doctrine. Encourage one another.

When you ask someone, “How are things going?” He answers, “Not so well.” One of the encouraging things we can do is point him to the Blessed Hope and Glorious Appearing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

* Positive truth – “shall”
* Personal truth – “we”, “us”, “I”, “you.”
* Pivotal truth - “but” 4 times
* Progressive – “for”
* Practical truth – “wherefore” “therefore” John Phillips