The love of Christ keep you.

Jesus said, “*I have come as Light into the world, so that no one who believes in Me will remain in darkness*.”

That word “remain” is important. It is a good reminder to us of where we were before we turned to Jesus as our Saviour. We were in darkness; spiritual darkness. Our understanding was darkness, even though we didn’t realize it.

Once we turned to Jesus, we came out of the darkness; we did not remain there. How much better it is to be in the Light that is Jesus Christ. We are now able to see, although not perfectly yet. But we can see is that the rest of the world remains in darkness and that is why it has such trouble.

Stay with Christ; stay in the Light. One day, we will be able to see perfectly. And we will see the glory of our Saviour.

In Christ’s love

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3-21-21

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (3)

We continue now with our consideration of these verses that Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica. The church had some questions and the first had to do with those Christians who had died before Jesus came back. The people knew that Jesus would be back and they knew that it could be at any time. But they were concerned about their brothers and sisters who had already passed away; they wanted to know what would happen to them.

Paul reassured them that there would be no problem for them. In fact, they would be resurrected and be with Christ before those who were living. There would be great shouting and trumpet blasts that the dead would hear and they would arise to be with Jesus forever.

This brings us to verse 17 which deals with those living when Jesus returns. *Then we who are alive and remain, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord*. What takes place here is what we refer to as the Rapture. The word “rapture” does not appear in the Bible. It is simply the word Christians use for what is described here in verse 17; and the key part of that is “*caught up*”.

Often when we think of the word “rapture” in this context, we think of how it will be when we are face to face with Jesus. We imagine being awe-struck; filled with joy; looking adoringly at Jesus; enraptured. In fact, there are many hymns that describe the encounter this way. While these things might take place, that is not the meaning behind the word used here. There is an indirect path of translation for this word. The Greek word is *harpazo*, which was translated into the Latin word *rapere*. From the Latin *rapere*, comes the Christian context word *Rapture*.

Now, what the word actually means is “to seize”. It is sudden and it connotates some violence. My Bible translation uses the phrase “caught up”. Others might be “swept up” or “snatched up”. And this is what will happen to the Christians who are alive when Jesus comes back for His people. We will find ourselves no longer standing on the ground but whisked up into the sky to meet Jesus and those who have been resurrected. While this may sound far-fetched, remember that this is the God who spoke all creation into existence.

This verse is the most unambiguous description of the Rapture in the Bible. There are other verses that point to the Rapture, but only if we know to relate them to this one. For example, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.

*Behold, I am telling you a mystery; we will not all sleep, 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 will be changed.*

This verse tells us that the dead in Christ will be resurrected in their resurrection bodies and that we who are alive will be changed. It doesn’t tell us how we will be changed or that we will see Jesus or that we will go to Him in the air. But from our verses in 1 Thessalonians, we understand that this verse is talking about the Rapture. Notice again that it is sudden, “*in the twinkling of an eye*”.

Looking back at our verse 17, it starts with the word “then” or something like it. So, this follows the rising of the deceased Christians. How long after the dead go to meet Christ do the living get caught up? It doesn’t say. Presumably, it will be very soon after. But perhaps we will get to stand on the ground for a while and watch them up there. Wouldn’t that be a sight. Millions of resurrected Christians gathered around the glorious Jesus Christ and praising Him while the trumpet plays.

When our turn comes, we will be raptured; we will be caught up; and we will go to be with them in the sky. How do we get there; how do we get caught up? Again, we don’t know. Certainly, all it would take would be a command from Jesus and we would come to Him. Another possibility might be angels taking us up. Mark 13:27 tells us, “*And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of heaven*.” We don’t know how we get there and we don’t have to know. Jesus will take care of it.

The resurrected dead and those who are raptured will meet the Lord Jesus in the air. And that’s a very interesting place to meet. Recall that Paul, in Ephesians 2:2, referred to satan as “*the prince of the power of the air*”. Later, in Ephesians 6: 12 he tells us, “*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*” These are strong indications that our atmosphere is the realm of the spiritual forces of satan. So, Jesus will be calling His people together right in satan’s territory; right in his front yard.

I feel that I should discuss some of the possibilities of the timing of the Rapture with respect to the Tribulation. The Bible is very clear that no-one knows when this will happen and that no-one is going to figure out when it will happen. But there are a lot of Scriptures that associate the Rapture with the Tribulation.

First off, what is the Tribulation and where does it come from? The idea of the Tribulation starts in the book of Daniel, chapter 9 and verses 24-27. Daniel receives a prophecy concerning 70 weeks that applies specifically to Israel. It seems fairly straight forward that it is referring to 70 weeks made of years instead of days; in other words, 490 years. This time period is divided into about three sections. Sixty-nine weeks, or 483 years, have already taken place. This leaves one week or seven years and it is the time when the anti-Christ will rule.

This seven-year period is what we call the Tribulation and it is described in the book of Revelation. When we read all the judgement that falls on the earth during this time, it is obvious why it is called the Tribulation; it will be a miserable time to live here. At the end of this seven-year period, whenever it takes place, is when Jesus comes back to earth to establish His Kingdom.

There are many ideas out there as to when the Rapture takes place in relation to the Tribulation; and even some ideas that neither of these takes place at all. But I want to look at three possibilities that are the most common and make the most sense. The thing to remember is that there are Bible believing Christians who hold to each of these views. It is not a salvation issue and there is room for each view in any church body.

The three basic views are that the Rapture will occur before the Tribulation, in the middle of the Tribulation, or at the end of it. Each of these views has Scripture and reason to back them up. Each of them also has Scripture they can’t fit into their view. Additionally, nowhere does Scripture tell us exactly when the Rapture will take place with respect to the Tribulation.

The pre-tribulation view has the most support from Scripture. Briefly, 1 Thessalonians 5:9 tells us that Christians are not destined for wrath and there is plenty of wrath during the Tribulation. There are also many stories in the Bible of God sparing the righteous from calamity, such as Noah from the flood, Lot from Sodom, and Rahab from Jericho. Additionally, the church is never mentioned in the book of Revelation once the Tribulation starts.

This view requires that Jesus comes back twice: once to gather His people in the Rapture and then a second time to stop the Tribulation and establish His Kingdom here on the earth. The Bible speaks of the second coming of Jesus but it doesn’t actually say He will do so twice.

The mid-tribulation view says that Christians will experience the first half of the tribulation period, but then be raptured before things get really bad. One of the primary Scriptures given for mid-tribulation rapture is 2 Thessalonians 2:3. This verse describes an order of events: There will be apostasy, next the man of lawlessness or the anti-Christ will be revealed, and then the day of the Lord, or the Rapture, will take place. This view also requires that Jesus comes back twice.

The last view that I’ll mention is the post-tribulation rapture. This says that the Rapture takes place at the end or very near the end of the Tribulation when Jesus comes back to set up His Kingdom on earth. One of the main points is that in the prophecies of the second coming of the Lord, it is only ever mentioned that Jesus comes back once. In Revelation 19, that time is shown to be the end. There are some verses in Revelation such as 13:7 that show there will be saints in the Tribulation. It also points out that God’s people have suffered greatly throughout history.

You may be interested in knowing which view I think is correct. Let me put it this way: I hope the pre-tribulation view is correct. Also, I believe that the pre-tribulation view has the most Scriptural backing. However, if the time comes when I find myself and other Christians still here once the Tribulation has begun, it will not affect my belief in Jesus Christ as Saviour in the least. He will still be Lord and He will be the Rock I cling to no matter what.

I have only given very brief descriptions of these views so you’ll have an idea of what they are. Christians can have good discussions about these different possibilities as long as we don’t let them interfere with our Christian fellowship. The important things to keep in mind are: Jesus is coming back, there will be a Rapture, and we must be ready.

How are we to be ready? First and foremost, make sure you are saved. Make sure you have accepted Jesus Christ and no other as your way to heaven and eternal life. Without this step you are lost.

Once saved, the Bible calls us to perseverance and work. Over and over, we are called to stand faithful to Jesus, no matter the cost. We need to stand with the millions before us who have lost possessions, property, jobs, and lives rather than deny Christ. We steadfastly trust Jesus regardless of what trials we go through in life. This is a strong witness to God and brings Him glory.

Jesus had many parables about being busy when the Master returns and being ready. We want to be one of the five wise virgins, not one of the five foolish ones. Have your supply of oil full. We are not to silently wait for our Master to come back. He has given each of us work to do and in all the parables, the end is not good for those who slack off while the Master isn’t present.

What a wonderful promise lies at the end of verse 17: “*and so we shall always be with the Lord*”. And what more could we want? We live our lives as Christians in the constant company of the Lord, although we still have to deal with sin and suffering. When we die, our souls are with Him in heaven which will be paradise, yet we will not have our bodies. Once Jesus returns, we will be with Him body and soul, perfect forever.

It is interesting how Paul finishes this section: *Therefore comfort one another with these words*. Notice that this is active; it is something that they should be doing. When facing the loss of a loved one or when facing persecution for their faith, Paul tells them to remind each other of these things: Jesus is coming back, He will bring His people to Himself, there will be a glorious reunion.

Certainly we ought to comfort each other with these same words. There are lots of difficult things in this life. We all need comfort from time to time. What better way to comfort each other than these words of hope; these words of promise that one day our Lord and Saviour will bring us to Him and make all things new and perfect, and we will live with Him forever.

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for the promise of Your coming, when You will set all things right and take us to Yourself forever. This is a promise that not even death can break, for You have defeated death. Your coming will be glorious and we Your people will worship You without the stain of sin.

Keep in our minds that it is part of Your will that we comfort each other. That is part of the work You have for us to do. Your word provides us with all we need; Your many promises and Your goodness are more than enough for us to cling to. The very fact of salvation through Jesus Christ will bring us through any trial we face in this life.

We know we need to be prepared for Your return. Help us, Holy Spirit, to be ready. Call to our minds the Scriptures when we need guidance or when we need to extend kindness and love to another. We pray for this church body; that we would stay in the Father’s will and that You would provide for us all that we need.

We praise You in Jesus’ name

Amen