

The Word of the Lord

An Exposition of I & II Thessalonians

I Thessalonians 4:17-5:5

Scriptures

I Thessalonians 4:17

Genesis 5:24

Hebrews 11:5

Philippians 3:14

John 17:2

I Corinthians 15:51-52

II Peter 3:7

Romans 1:18

I Thessalonians 4:18

Acts 4:12

Colossians 1:27

I Thessalonians 5:1

Acts 1:6-8

I Thessalonians 5:2

Revelations 1:7

I Thessalonians 5:3

Isaiah 5:21

I Thessalonians 5:4

II Corinthians 4:6

I Thessalonians 5:5

I Thessalonians 4:17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

After the dead have been raised, those who remain alive at Christ's return, shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Because they have maintained faith in the Son of God, their reward will be that they meet Him upon His arrival to the earth.

The manner in which saints will be caught up to meet Christ in the air is first seen in Enoch, whom the scriptures state, *walked with God before God took him*

Genesis 5:24 And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.

Enoch's fellowship with the Lord implies that where the Lord led him, he, by faith, followed. This will always be the primary manifestation of true faith.

The reward for Enoch's obedience to the Lord was that he was lifted from the earth while still alive.

Hebrews 11:5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

There is no greater reward for faith than this, and even the great Apostle Paul pursued such an end.

Philippians 3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

In recorded history, rapture is rare, only purposed for the godliest of men. The rapture of present-day saints shows us the monumental work the Son of God has accomplished for His people, whereby, through His life and death, He makes men worthy of heavenly transformation.

The basis for the Christian being lifted into heaven is found in Christ's perfect work to redeem him.

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Christ pleased God, and because of this, God has given Christ the power to receive into heaven all that God wills should join Him there.

John 17:2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

We, the church, have been given to Christ by God. Ultimately, no man can enter heaven without their election by God to share with His Son in heaven.

Saints will be lifted from the earth by being *caught up*. This means that it will be through no ability of their own that they will be raised to meet the Lord in the air, but rather solely by heavenly might and power being exerted upon them.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 4:17

Shall be caught up - The word here used implies that there will be the application of external force or power by which this will be done. It will not be by any power of ascending which they will themselves have; or by any tendency of their raised or changed bodies to ascend of their own accord, or even by any effort of their own will, but by a power applied to them which will cause them to rise.

Ultimately, the unity established on earth between Christ and His people will reach its purposed end when both the living and the dead are eternally joined to the Savior.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 4:17

The world would not be spacious enough to contain all the assembled living and dead, and hence the throne of judgment will be fixed in the ample space above it.

This world was never meant to be the believer's home, and Christ will prove this when He ushers him into His own promised heavenly inheritance. Like their Master, Who died and after resurrection ascended into heaven, Christ's chosen have been born from above and will be equipped with new bodies to maintain spiritual existence beyond the earth.

All this, as Corinthians reveals, will be in the twinkling of an eye.

I Corinthians 15:51&52 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

The trumpet, as seen in Corinthians and Thessalonians, as well as many other records in scripture, is attached to the Lord's return, and it will call all God's people for their final gathering.

As mentioned, the trumpet signaled the Lord's chosen to assemble themselves before God. Here its heavenly sound will call those chosen by God to now inherit their spiritual destiny.

The Son of God will appear in heaven and, by supernatural power, raise His people to meet Him there. This transition from God descending to the earth to meet Israel, to now the church being powerfully raised to meet Christ in the air marks a change of administrations, signifying that the earthly, all that is fleshly, is to be replaced by the spiritual, and all that is heavenly.

Here it is the changing of His people's bodies, but many other things will also be transformed by Christ. The entire world order will change, from human governmental au-

thority to divine spiritual authority contained in the person of God's Son. No longer will the descendants of the first Adam function according to their own human will, which has always resisted God's sovereignty over it, but now all will be done according to God's will.

These people, because of their new hearts, created in them by God, shall forever remain loyal to God, faithfully keeping God's laws and commandments.

Many other Old Testament prophecies will also be fulfilled, but the Christian's transformation provides great insight into what new glories are to come. Another vitally important reason that the rapture will take place in heaven, is so that the saved will be removed from the earthly judgements to come.

The last trumpet marks the beginning of the day of the Lord, and once it is blown, God's wrath will be poured out from heaven.

Hence, once the saved are raised, the day of this world's judgment has arrived.

II Peter 3:7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Because of its wickedness, the first world, as seen in the time of Noah, was destroyed by water; (Genesis 6:7) the one which we live in now, because of men's unbelief and rejection of God's Son, will be destroyed by fire.

Benson Commentary, II Pet. 3:7

are kept in store — *Τεθησαυρισμενοι εισι πυρι τηρουμενοι*, *are treasured up and preserved for fire*; that is, preserved from a deluge for the purpose of being burned. Therefore the earth is not always to remain, but is to suffer a destruction even more terrible than the former; *at the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men* — The day when God will judge the world, and punish the ungodly with everlasting destruction.

HELPS Word-studies

The Greek word for *ungodly* is #765 "*asebēs* (an adjective which is the negation of 4576 */sébomai*, 'to respect') – properly, lack of reverence ('without due respect'), i.e. failing to honor what is sacred – especially in the outward (ceremonial) sense."

This definition teaches us that God demands reverence and respect for what is sacred. When men do not respect or have a high regard for that which is holy, they prove themselves ripe for judgment.

The two greatest sins in man, aside from blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, are unbelief and ungodliness. These sins are committed directly against a holy God and, as such, are worthy of divine judgment. The day of the Lord will prove how distasteful God finds the pride and the insolence of man to be.

The scriptures also teach us that now, that is today, even before this great day of judgment, a portion of God's anger towards sin is being revealed in the earth.

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, Rom. 1:18

This Wrath of God, Revealed against All Iniquity, Overhangs the Whole Heathen World.

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Whereas today God's wrath and anger is measured, at Christ's return, marking the day of the Lord, neither will be. It is this judgment and divine wrath of God upon the world that Jesus came to save sinners from. Just as Lot was rescued from Sodom and Gomorrah and led out by angels from whence judgment was promised, (Genesis 19:21-26) the Lord will rescue the righteous and catch them up into heaven before His vengeance is fully let loose upon an ungodly world.

And so shall we ever be with the Lord. Once raptured by the Son of God, the saved shall never again be separate from Him.

Nothing disturbs and causes inner consternation more than when spiritual fellowship with our heavenly Father and Savior is damaged. This is why, once the believer is joined to the Lord Jesus, all such fear will be eternally removed.

Our spiritual hearts will be at peace, simply because of our proximity to the Lord of peace.

In God's presence is fullness of joy, and this joy will be exceedingly felt in the saved once they join Jesus in heaven.

I Thessalonians 4:18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

This verse teaches that there can be no real comfort, nor any sustainable hope regarding good expectations for the dead, without their having had good relationship with the Son of God.

There is but one name given under heaven through which men can be saved, and only One that can bring comfort when a man is either facing death or his body has entered the grave.

Acts 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

All salvation, both of the soul and body, is tied to the Son of God. This is why, if a man does not have true relationship with Christ, he possesses no real hope beyond the grave.

Colossians 1:27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

Before Jesus Christ's entrance into the world and His resurrection from the dead, men knew little to nothing of the concept of spiritual immortality. Today, because of the revelation given to Paul, by the Lord Jesus, we know much more.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, II Tim. 1:10

Before the Gospel revelation from God, man, by the light of nature, under the most favorable circumstances, had but a glimmering idea of the possibility of a future being of the soul, but not the faintest idea of the resurrection of the body...

I Thessalonians 5:1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

Regarding the time of the advent of Christ and the rapture of His saints, the apostle now states that it makes no difference as to when these things will take place, but only that they will. This teaches us that men can get easily distracted about when something will be, when in fact, they should only be concerned that it shall be.

Curiosity, though common in man is not a heavenly virtue. The secret things belong unto the Lord, (Deuteronomy 29:29) and that which He says should remain hidden cannot be discovered by human effort.

Jesus' words to the disciples before His ascension reveal the proper behavior saints should exhibit while patiently waiting for Christ's return to the earth.

Acts 1:6–8 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

⁷ And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. ⁸ But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

If men wonder if Jesus will return to the earth and transform the bodies of both the living and the dead, they really only need to look at the power of God already present on the earth in the form the His Holy Spirit.

Hence, instead of speculating as to the timing of future events, like Israel's restoration, true believers should pursue walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, which itself testifies to the reality of the Son of God.

This witness, the witness of the Holy Spirit, assures men of the truth of God's word and the sureness of His Son's return to the earth.

I Thessalonians 5:2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, I Thess. 5:2

The day of the Lord.—Here “the Lord” (as usual in the New Testament) means Jesus Christ; and this day can mean nothing else than the great day of His return to judgment. The expression is taken from the Old Testament, where, of course, it does not primarily mean what we call “the Day of Judgment,” but the set time which God has fixed for any great visitation. Thus in Joel 2:1, et seq., it means the time appointed for the plague of locusts; in Ezekiel 13:5, generally, any day when God visits His people; in Joel 3:14, the fixed time for vengeance to be taken upon the heathen for persecuting the Church; which, in Isaiah 2:12 (a passage largely influenced by recollections of Joel), seems to widen into a general day of judgment for mankind.

The *day of the Lord* is that day when Jesus Christ will be openly manifested to the world. It is that future time referred to in the book of Revelation as the *Revelation of Jesus Christ*. (Revelation 1:1)

Like in Thessalonians, the book of Revelation reveals that God's Son will come with clouds.

Revelation 1:7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

It is stated that Jesus' return and His appearance to the world will cause many to wail. This wailing will be by all who have rejected God's sovereignty and have now become aware that divine judgment is ready to be revealed upon them.

All the previous rejoicing of sinners will cease once they realize that God's authority has returned to rule the world, through the person of His Son.

Benson Commentary, Rev. 1:7

Shall wail because of him — For terror and pain, if they did not wail before by true repentance; even all who have rejected his government and opposed his interest, shall lament the fatal opposition, by which, instead of prevailing in the least against him, they have only effected their own destruction. In this verse is prefixed the great moral, which the whole book is designed to illustrate; namely, that though there should be great opposition made against the cause and kingdom of Christ, yet it should be utterly in vain, and his kingdom should triumph in the most illustrious manner, so that all who opposed it should have the greatest reason to mourn.

It is worth noting that sinners shall mourn *because of him* (Christ). The sight of the Son of God coming in glory will awaken in even the dullest of men the authority of God.

The world's inhabitants, knowing they are unworthy of Christ's company, will wail at His coming.

The great majority of this world both have, and even do now seek to evade God's rule, but with the Son of God's appearance, because of the power given to the Son, divine sovereignty cannot be avoided.

The time of sin will have passed, and the time of righteousness being executed on the earth has begun.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

Before judgment comes, the world will think itself in *peace and safety*.

Divine deliverance, as well as divine justice, therefore, will be swift. As the Lord will not hesitate in transforming the saved, nor will He delay in executing His wrath upon those who are not. All fates have been settled, all choices made, and no time is needed before justice is served.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, 1 Thess. 5:3

And they shall not escape - That is, the destruction, or punishment. They calculated on impunity, but now the time will have come when none of these refuges will avail them, and no rocks will cover them from the "wrath to come."

It is often a predominant characteristic of the ungodly that they wrongly estimate the danger of sin, as well as God's final judgment for it.

Because they are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight, sinners cannot perceive their final end.

Isaiah 5:21 Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Isa. 5:21

Wo unto them that are wise ... - This is the fifth crime specified. It refers to those who are inflated with a false opinion of their own knowledge, and who are, therefore, self-confident and vain. This is expressly forbidden; Proverbs 3:7: 'Be not wise in thine own eyes;'

compare Proverbs 26:12.

In their own eyes - In their own opinion, or estimation.

And prudent - Knowing; self-conceited. This was, doubtless, one characteristic of the times of Isaiah. It is known to have been strikingly the characteristic of the Jews - particularly the Pharisees - in the time of our Saviour. The evil of this was,

(1) That it evinced and fostered "pride."

(2) That it rendered them unwilling to be instructed, and especially by the prophets.

As they supposed that they were already wise enough, they refused to listen to others.

Ultimately, the world will see itself as vastly mistaken for not recognizing and revering the Son of God. It will realize that He Who was rejected by man has been made ruler of all men and the final judge of all those born of the flesh.

The wiser a man believes himself to be the less he will rely on heavenly prophesy. This is why: those who trust in their own thoughts and reasonings have little to no use for God's word.

Foolishly believing that truth comes from themselves and the small intellect they possess.

Unbelievers will be wildly surprised at Christ's coming. Ultimately, proving that the carnal mind has absolutely no perception of God nor can it perceive God's final judgment towards sin.

Pulpit Commentary, Isa.5:21

Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes. The fifth woe. Self-conceit is the antithesis of humility; and as humility is, in a certain sense, the crowning virtue, so self-conceit is a sort of finishing touch put to vice. While a man thinks humbly of himself, there is a chance that he may repent and amend. When he is "wise in his own eyes," he does not see why he should change.

They shall not escape.

Just as Adam and Eve hid to avoid giving account for their sin, yet God found them, so will those who have resisted God's rule attempt to flee yet find no escape from God's wrath. The earth, though vast in human estimation, is small to God, so that when divine judgment is brought upon her, there will be found no place for sinners to escape.

They shall not escape, simply because there will be no place to hide. And though sinners will wish that the hills could cover them, (Luke 23:30) this hope, like the lives they lived, will be in vain. God's righteousness and His judgment will sweep the entire ungodly world, allowing no one who has rejected His Son's rule to escape divine punishment.

I Thessalonians 5:4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

Because God has illuminated the saved, through the Spirit of God given to them, they will find themselves prepared for Jesus' return.

II Corinthians 4:6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, II Cor. 4:6

Hath shined in our hearts - Margin, "It is he who hath." This is more in accordance with the Greek, and the sense is, "The God who at the creation bade the light to shine out of darkness, is he who has shined into our hearts; or it is the same God who has illuminated us, who commanded the light to shine at the creation." "Light" is every where in the Bible the emblem of knowledge, purity, and truth; as darkness is the emblem of ignorance, error, sin, and wretchedness. See note, John 1:4-5. And the sense here is, that God had removed this ignorance, and poured a flood of light and truth on their minds. This passage teaches, therefore, the following important truths in regard to Christians - since it is as applicable to all Christians, as it was to the apostles:

(1) That the mind is by nature ignorant and benighted - to an extent which may be properly compared with the darkness which prevailed before God commanded the light to shine. Indeed, the darkness which prevailed before the light was formed, was a most striking emblem of the darkness which exists in the mind of man before it is enlightened by revelation, and by the Holy Spirit. For:

(a) In all minds by nature there is deep ignorance of God, of His Law, and His requirements; and,

(b) This is often greatly deepened by the course of life which people lead; by their education; or by their indulgence in sin, and by their plans of life; and especially by the indulgence of evil passions.

The tendency of man if left to himself is to plunge into deeper darkness, and to involve his mind more entirely in the obscurity of moral midnight. "Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil," John 3:19.

(2) this verse teaches the fact, that the minds of Christians are illuminated. They are enabled to see things as they are. This fact is often taught in the Scriptures; see 1 John 2:20; 1 Corinthians 2:12-15. They have different views of things from their fellow-men, and different from what they once had. They perceive a beauty in religion which others do not see, and a glory in truth, and in the Saviour, and in the promises of the gospel, which they did not see before they were converted. This does not mean:

(a) That they are superior in their powers of understanding to other people - for the reverse is often the fact; nor,

(b) That the effect of religion is at once to enlarge their own intellectual powers, and make them different from what they were before in this respect.

I Thessalonians 5:5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thessalonians 5:5

Ye are all the children of light - All who are Christians. The phrase "children of light" is a Hebraism, meaning that they were the enlightened children of God.

By instructing and reminding the Thessalonians who they were, the apostle sought to remove any fear they might have of the day of the Lord. Since, it is those who prefer darkness who should fear, not those who have made Jesus their Lord. It is important

then for saints to think of themselves as they properly are; least they forget the great distinction and separation that God has put between them and those still dead in sins.

Because of being born of God, the saved are now aptly designated as the *children of light*, children of the *Father of lights* (James 1:17) *with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*.