

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Read 1 Cor. 15:50-57 // B. Deus ex Machina

1. An ancient & oft-used literary device is called **deus ex machine**, Latin for “**god out of a machine**.”
 - a. It comes from ancient Greek playwrights whose heroes were trapped in an impossible situation.
 - b. To rescue him they’d wheel a box out onto the stage from which one of the Greek gods would emerge & remove the hero from danger.
2. **Critics** consider the use of deus ex machine to be a mark of inferior writing.
 - a. The author has written himself into a corner & needs a miracle to get out.
 - b. He lacks creativity & **has to resort to divine intervention**.
3. As contrived as deus ex machine is **as a literary device**, the fact is – The world will soon see a huge example of it in the epic story that is history.
4. In our passage today, Paul describes an event of divine intervention unlike anything ever seen before.
5. It’s **so** miraculous & dramatic, many find it difficult to accept. It’s called the **Rapture**.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 13-14

¹³ But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

1. Remember that Timothy had just returned from Thessalonica & told Paul how the church was doing.
 - a. Along with the good news of their faithfulness & love were some questions.
 - b. One of them was about the fate of believers who die **before** Jesus comes back.
2. When Paul was in Thessalonica, he’d taught them about the end times.
 - a. But he’d only been able to spend about a month there before being forced to leave.
 - b. Anyone who’s studied prophecy knows it’s a complex topic.
 - c. So there were some holes in the Thessalonians understanding that needed to be filled in.
3. A question had risen dealing with Christians who die before Christ returns.
 - a. By reading between the lines of what we find here,
 - b. It seems some thought they had to be **alive** when Christ came or they’d miss the Rapture.
4. Paul wrote to correct this.
5. The Rapture is the **Blessed Hope** of believers & he wanted to **renew** that hope.
6. So he says . . .

I do not want you to be ignorant [uninformed], brethren, concerning [about] those who have fallen asleep [early Christian euphemism for dead], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

- a. Paul puts people into 2 groups:
 - 1) those who sorrow **w/o hope**,
 - 2) & those w/hope because of faith in Christ.
- b. Which group are **you** in?
 - 1) The Christian has hope because Jesus conquered death & gives eternal life to all who put their trust in Him.
 - 2) Christians never **really** die, we just, as it says here, sleep.
 - 3) Death is a momentary repose in the bed of the grave.
 - 4) At Jesus’ call, we will rise!
- c. But what hope does the unbeliever have?
- c. But what hope does the unbeliever have?
 - 1) The **best** he/she has to hope for is that when this life is over, it’s **annihilation**.
 - 2) The **other option** is that there **IS** an afterlife
 - 3) An eternity of living with the consequence of rejecting Christ.
 - 4) There’s no hope in **either** of **those** options.
7. Paul reminds the Thessalonians they have good reason to hope, not sorrow.
8. So, **what about** those who’ve died before Christ comes? Paul tells them . . . v. 14

¹⁴ For if (since) we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in

Jesus.

9. Paul goes on to elaborate on this in the next verses, but don't miss what he says here.
 - a. When Jesus returns, He brings something **WITH** Him.
 - b. We know the **body** of a believer goes into the ground when he/she dies.
 - c. What comes **with** Jesus are the **spirits** of all those who've died in faith.
 - d. As Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:8, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.
10. To **be human** means to **have a body**.
 - a. The problem is, our physical bodies, these meat suits we wear now, are great for Earth but wholly inadequate for Heaven.
 - b. In Scripture often when a mortal human being encounters even a tiny slice of the glory of Heaven they're overwhelmed & fall on their face.
 - c. The experience leaves them weak & overcome for some time.
 - d. Believers are destined to **live** in that glory forever.
 - e. It's obvious we'll need **new** bodies that are capable, not just of **enduring** it, but **enjoying** it!
 - f. That's why in 1 Cor. 15, it says mortal is transformed into immortal, perishable to imperishable.
11. When the Christian dies, the body is laid in the grave, but the spirit goes to be with the Lord.
12. They await the event described here when Christ comes.
 - a. They will come **with** Him to be united with their **new bodies**.
 - b. Look –

B. Vs. 15-17

¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord,

1. This wasn't something Paul or the apostles dreamed up on their own.
2. The Spirit had made it clear as the Word & will of God.
3. As **wild** as what we're about to read may seem, **it's going to happen!**
 - a. This isn't science fiction or fantasy.
 - b. It's what's in store for those who've put their faith in Christ.

that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming [parousia = presence] of the Lord will by no means precede [take cuts before] those who are asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself [not an angel or some surrogate] will descend from heaven with a shout, with [accompanied by] the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then [next] we who are alive *and* remain [living at the time this takes place] shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

4. This **isn't** the Second Coming, when Jesus returns **visibly** to Earth to restore the Kingdom of God.
5. Take note that it **doesn't say** Jesus descends TO THE EARTH.

5. Take note that it **doesn't say** Jesus descends TO THE EARTH.
 - a. V. 17 He comes in the **clouds** & it's in the **air** we meet Him.
 - b. The bodies of those who died in faith will rise first.
 - d. This rising is a **resurrection**.
 - 1) Their mortal bodies laid in graves, buried at sea, cremated & scattered on the wind,
 - 2) Will be reassembled & raised up. How? We have no idea.
 - 3) But it won't be a problem for the God who created & sustains all matter.

As a side note: Since this takes place immediately before the Last Days, it's possible the removal & transformation of all those molecules that used to be believers' bodies is what contributes to the plagues & catastrophes we find described in Revelation. The very fabric of creation will be weakened by all the holes punched in it due to the Rapture of the saints.

6. Hard on the heels of the resurrection of the dead, believers **living** at that time will experience an instantaneous transformation, as described in 1 Cor. 15.
 - a. We'll go from flabby to fabulous in the blink of an eye. From thin to thrilling! From short to shazaam!
 - b. Then together we'll rise to meet Jesus in the clouds, & **in** those new resurrection bodies we will remain always with Christ in glory.

7. In v. 15 it says the living will not ***precede*** those who sleep.
 - a. The word means ***to have an advantage***.
 - b. That's what the Thessalonians thought, that living believers had an advantage over the dead.
 - c. Not so. Alive or asleep, at the Rapture, we ***all*** go!
8. Let me explain where that word '***Rapture***' comes from.
9. In v. 17 we read -
 Then we who are alive and remain shall be ***caught up*** together with them in the clouds
 - a. The Greek word "caught up" is ***harpazo***.
 - b. It speaks of a sudden, irresistible lifting up.
 - c. As when a father sees his little girl confronted by a raving dog. He reaches down & yanks her up & away from harm.
10. When the Bible was being translated into Latin, the translators settled on the word "***rapto***" to translate the Greek ***harpazo***
 - a. Rapto means ***to seize, to carry off***.
 - b. We get our word ***Rapture*** from it.
11. But there are some ***nuances*** to the ***Greek*** missed by the Latin.
 - a. Harpazo has the idea of something being taken ***speedily, instantaneously***.
 - 1) It's used this way in Acts 8:39, when the Spirit "caught away Philip" after he led the Ethiopian to Christ.
 - 2) It wasn't a slow fade; it happened in a millisecond.
 - b. Harpazo means to ***seize something with irresistible force***.
 - 1) No matter how fiercely the devil may try to hinder the Rapture, he won't be able to stop it.
 - c. Harpazo also has the idea that the ***reason*** someone takes something with such decisive force is because ***he has a right to it – it belongs to Him***.
 - 1) The Rapture is Jesus' claim to take His betrothed bride, the Church, to the wedding.
 - d. The word also means ***to move to a new place***.
 - 1) Paul used it to describe his visit to heaven in 2 Cor. 12:1-4.
 - 2) In John 14, Jesus said He was going to prepare a new home for us, & when He comes, He will take us to there.
 - e. Finally, harpazo means ***to rescue from danger***.
 - 1) It's used in Acts 23:10 when the Romans rescued Paul from the mob that was beating him to death.
 - 2) This suggests the Church will be taken home ***before*** the Tribulation.
12. V. 16 says 3 things will accompany the Rapture; a ***shout***, a ***trumpet***, & a ***voice***.
 - a. The ***shout*** is a loud command – something similar as to when Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth."
 - b. ***Trumpets*** were used to summons people to gather.
 - c. The ***voice of the archangel*** signals the attendance of the angelic host at Christ's side when He comes.
 - d. The point is At the Rapture, there's a lot of ***joyous noise***, as there ***should*** be.
 - e. Jesus comes to ***apply*** His victory. He takes possession of that which belongs to Him.
 - f. Have you ever been to a Surprise Party? (Lots of plans ahead of time, those being surprised don't know. But when they walk in – Lots of noise!)
13. That's the idea here. The hosts of heaven have waited for this for a long time, & now they let loose with rejoicing as Jesus shouts the command for His own to come home.
- C. V. 18
 - ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.
 1. The hope of the Rapture had special appeal to the Thessalonians because persecution was an on-going challenge.
 2. I wonder Is the Rapture a comfort ***to us***.

3. I was **provoked** by this, this week.
4. After describing the specifics of the Rapture, Paul **turns to exhortation** & says, “Take comfort in this & use it to comfort others.”
5. Is the prospect of being caught up to meet the Lord a comfort to you?
 - a. Or is the doctrine of the Rapture **embarrassing**?
 - b. Do you fear someone finding out you’re a Christian and asking, “So, when are you beaming up?”
6. Does the Rapture seem so “out-there,” so sci-fi, that you mostly ignore it?
7. I first learned about the Rapture when I came back to the Lord a year after HS.
 - a. Bible prophecy had become a fad with the release of Hal Lindsey’s *The Late, Great Planet Earth*.
 - b. I had just started attending CCCM & Pastor Chuck was one of the best prophecy teachers around.
 - c. As he talked about the Rapture, I remember thinking, “Cool. But there’s some stuff I’d like to do before Jesus comes.”
 - 1) I wanted to have my own place, get married, have kids.
 - 2) I had plans, dreams, **things** I wanted to do, **experiences** I wanted to have.
 - 3) They weren’t bad things; they were **good** things, **right** things.
8. It’s been 35 years, & the Rapture hasn’t happened. All the things I was hoping I’d get to do, I’ve done.
9. But I’ve got a **new** list now.
 - a. I’d love to see my kids married. I want to walk my daughter down the aisle.
 - b. I want grandbabies!
10. This verse moves me take an **honest look** at where my heart is.
10. This verse moves me take an **honest look** at where my heart is.
 - a. What ought I hope more for? Seeing my kids married or rising with them to meet Jesus?
 - b. Which is better, holding a grandchild or being held by Jesus?
 - c. What experience anywhere on the Earth can compare to the glory & pleasures of Heaven?
11. To the degree I wish for a **delay** in the Rapture so I can enjoy something of Earth, is the measure of my not understanding how much better heaven will be.
 - a. No single believer is going to get raptured & on the way up say, “Darn, I was hoping to get married first.”
 - b. When that trumpet sounds, & the glorious face of Jesus is seen, all such thoughts will become a distant hazy memory.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Next Week

1. Paul goes on in Ch. 5 with more insight into the Last Days.
2. We’ll leave it for next week & talk about why we believe in a pre-tribulation Rapture.
3. Because next week is the first Sunday of the New Year, there’s something important I want to share with you all & our text next week is the perfect setting in which to do so.