

In The Light • 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

I. INTRODUCTION – Read 4:13-18

A. Comfort One Another

1. We ended last week with v. 18 –

Therefore comfort one another with these words.

- a. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to find comfort in the prospect of the Rapture.
- b. The Rapture wasn't something to **ignore** or be **embarrassed** by.
- c. Nor should they hope it would be **delayed**.
- d. In Titus 2:13, the Rapture is called the **Blessed Hope** because it brings us into a glory the things of this world cannot come close to.
- e. In Colossians 3:4 Paul says –

When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

2. So, we're to comfort & encourage one another with the prospect of the Rapture.

3. Sad then that it's become something to **argue over** rather than **rejoice** in.

4. The debate over WHEN the Rapture happens has become so heated many pastors avoid teaching on it lest they stir up controversy & polarize their congregation.

B. The Debate

1. For those here not aware of what I'm talking about, let me give a quick summary of the issue.

2. History is moving to a climax when Jesus will return—as He promised.

- a. When He comes again, He comes as a **Conquering King**.
  - 1) Every eye will see Him & there will be no doubt Who He is & what He's come to do.
  - 2) He will rule over Earth for a thousand years.
  - 3) Humanity will finally see how God always intended things to be.
- b. But **before** Jesus returns, the world will have a short, final hurrah of rebellion against God.
  - 1) It lasts 7 years & is called the **Tribulation**.
  - 2) It's a time when God in effect says to humanity's rejection of Him, "**Okay, have it your way.**" He withdraws the gracious restraint of evil He's had in place up to that point.
  - 3) That's when the **antichrist** steps forward & begins his rule.
  - 4) For the **first half** of the Tribulation, things seem to be going well as deception spreads.
  - 5) But at the **halfway point** of the Tribulation, the antichrist's mask comes off & he unveils his satanic agenda for Planet Earth.
- c. By the **end** of the Tribulation, humanity is on the verge of annihilation.
- d. Jesus returns, dispatches the antichrist, & sets up the Kingdom of God.

3. The question is, WHEN does the Rapture described in ch. 4 take place in all this?

a. When does Jesus come for the Church and we rise to meet Him in the clouds?

4. While there is a **small number** who doesn't believe in any kind of Rapture, the vast majority of Christians settle into **3 positions** as to when the Rapture takes place; all related to the Tribulation.

- a. **Pre**-tribulationists believe the Rapture occurs **before** the Tribulation.
- b. **Post**-tribulationists believe it takes **place** after.
- c. And **Mid**-tribulationists see it as taking place at the **mid-point** of the Tribulation

5. I'm an unabashed & enthusiastic Pre-Tribber. Let me explain why . . .

- a. I've come to this position after a lot of study.
- b. I've reviewed the arguments of the most eloquent & influential of each position.
  - 1) There are men & women of far greater learning & brains than I who advocate different views in this area.
  - 3) It would be foolish to disregard their work just because I don't agree with it.
  - 4) Wisdom demands we take a look at **why** they hold the views they do on the timing of the Rapture.
  - 5) I've done that, & can honestly say that after considering **all** the evidence, I've come to a firm belief the Rapture occurs **before the Tribulation**.

6. We don't have time this morning to do a proper study of all this.

7. But because it **IS** important, we've put together a resource that lays out some of the reasons to believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. [online & printed]

- a. As you use that resource, remember this . . .

- b. There's no verse in the Bible that says, "The Rapture comes before, after or in the middle of the Tribulation." If there was, there'd be no debate.
- c. This resource gives **over a dozen** reasons to believe the Rapture happens **before** the Tribulation..
  - 1) A critic might read it and say, "It's all just **circumstantial evidence**."
  - 2) That's not quite true. Several of 14 reasons listed there are pretty clear pointers to a Pre-Tribulation event.
  - 3) But even if they **were** all **circumstantial**, that **there's so many of them**, makes the case.
  - 4) It turns out that **many** court cases **are decided** on circumstantial evidence.
  - 5) When there's no eyewitness or hard evidence available, judges & juries are still convinced if there's an **abundance** of circumstantial evidence.
  - 6) 1 or 2 pieces aren't enough.
  - 7) But if a lawyer is able to assemble a dozen pieces of good circumstantial evidence, the verdict is going to go his/her way.
- d. So, take a look at the evidence. It's a convincing case for a **Pre**-Tribulation Rapture.
- 8. There's a **subtle support** for it here in 1 Thess 4:13-14.
  - a. Remember what we looked at last week.
  - b. The Thessalonians thought believers **had to be alive** at the time of the Rapture or they'd miss it.
    - 1) Some had died & the rest were bummed out.
    - 2) Paul wrote to correct their mistake. // The dead will rise along with the living at the Rapture.
  - c. But don't miss the point; There was an **expectation** among the Thessalonians that the Rapture **could take place at any moment**.
  - d. They got this idea from Paul when he'd first been there.
  - e. Now, if he taught the Rapture comes **in the middle of or after** the Tribulation,
  - f. And the Thessalonians thought the Rapture **could come at any moment**, then they were already IN the TRIBULATION!
  - g. But in **2 Thess**, Paul tells them they **AREN'T** in the Tribulation.
- 9. The only way to square this is to conclude **Paul taught** a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.
- 10. It's made even clearer in ch. 5 . . .

## II. TEXT

### A. Vs. 1-5

1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

- 1. The Thessalonians had no need to be instructed on the timing of the Rapture because Paul had already taught them.
- 2. This is amazing! Though he only spent a month in Thessalonica, he'd taught them about the End Times.
  - a. While many pastors consider this to be a secondary topic & one to avoid if possible, Paul saw it as central, a **core** doctrine.
  - b. It was something they needed to know.
  - c. Paul knew the prospect of Rapture would both fill them with hope & encourage them to live holy lives.
- 3. Take careful note of v. 2 –

You yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

- 4. The key here is knowing what "**The Day of the Lord**" is.
  - a. The Thessalonians did, but many of us don't.
  - b. If you write me a letter w/a line in that says, "Reffing in the NBA has been atrocious lately." We both know what that means.
  - c. Bury that letter in the ground & leave it for a thousand years to be dug up & analyzed by scholars & chances are they'll be mystified by the words 'reffing' & 'NBA' until they find other documents that explain them.
- 5. The phrase, "Day of the Lord" meant something specific to Jews & early Christians.

- a. It comes to us from the OT Prophets who spoke about the End times.
  - b. “The Day of the Lord” is more than a single day. It’s a **period of time** in which God intervenes directly in History & takes possession of Earth.
  - c. It’s not uncommon for us to refer to Alexander the Great’s reign as **Alexander’s Day**, or the **time** of Julius Caesar as **Caesar’s day**.
    - 1) For instance we say, “In Caesar’s day, the Roman Republic ended & the Empire began.”
  - d. The Day of the Lord is **Jesus’ Day** in the sense that it’s **His time**, when He reigns.
6. The Day of the Lord **begins** with a time of judgment.
- a. According to the prophets, God will pour out His wrath in **increasing intensity** on a Christ-rejecting world.
  - b. The Day of the Lord rises to a crescendo of trouble that ends in the visible return of Christ, the binding of the devil, & Jesus reigning over the Earth for a thousand years.
7. The **first judgment** God sends is the **removal** of His people in the Rapture.
- a. I wonder if we realize just how devastating the Rapture will be to those who are left behind.
  - b. Jesus said His followers are the **salt & light** of the world.
  - c. As **salt** we resist the corruption of sin. As **light** we reveal truth.
  - d. But when the Rapture takes place, the spiritual salt & light of believers are removed.
  - e. Evil will flourish & deception will spread unchecked.
8. But the absence of Christians is something the world’s been itching for, for years.
9. V. 2 says the Day of the Lord begins **like a thief in the night** . It’s quick, unexpected. He explains . . .

3 For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

10. The Day of the Lord breaks onto the scene when the forecast is smooth sailing. The experts will be touting a new era of peace & prosperity.
11. Their slogan of “Peace & Safety” proves hollow as a nightmare of destruction & ruin comes.
- a. Just as labor pains get more frequent and intense, the trials go from bad to worse.
  - b. And note From this time of judgment, **THERE IS NO ESCAPE!**
  - c. There’s no Rapture out of this because the Rapture has already happened.
12. In contrast to those who can’t escape, Paul describes the followers of Christ . . .

4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day [of the Lord] should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

14. The lost live in & are destined for eternal darkness. Believers belong to the Light.
- a. We aren’t destined for the judgments of God poured out on Earth in the Day of the Lord.
  - b. The whole point of the Cross was to save us from God’s wrath.
  - c. So we won’t be here to see the Day of the Lord. We’ll be taken out before it begins.

B. Vs. 6-10

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

- 1. Paul calls us to **be** what we are – **People of light**.
- 2. Right now, as we wait for the Rapture, Light & Dark exist **side by side**.
  - a. Though we share the same neighborhood, shop the same stores, eat at the same restaurants & attend the same schools –
  - b. Christians & non-Christians are **very** different; at least—**we’re supposed to be**.
- 3. The followers of Jesus are to be **sober**; that is, thinking clearly,
  - a. With minds not distorted by **pride or lust**,
  - b. **As well as** chemicals like alcohol or drugs.
- 4. Because this world is a spiritual battlefield between the Kingdom of God & the devil, we need to put on the armor of God.

9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

5. V. 10 ties all this back to what we looked at last week in 4:13-14.

6. Take careful note of v. 9 – In Christ, we’re appointed to salvation, not wrath.

a. This is crucial because it’s another important pointer to a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

b. You see, the **entire** Tribulation, all 7 years of it, is God’s wrath.

c. Yet this says we’ve been saved **from** that wrath!

C. Mid-Trib?

1. For many years the debate about the timing of the Rapture revolved between only 2 positions, Pre & Post Trib.

2. In recent years a new position was carved out in the Mid-Trib view.

3. Those who hold it prefer to call it the **Pre-Wrath Rapture**, but locate it at the mid-point, or 3½ years into the Tribulation.

4. V. 9 is one of their main verses. They recognize it means the Rapture has to occur **before** the wrath of God is poured out on Earth, but claim it isn’t until the **last half** of the Tribulation He does that.

a. They correctly point to the first 3½ years of the Tribulation being a time of false peace & prosperity as the antichrist takes control & launches his plan for world domination.

b. Mid-Tribbers claim it isn’t till the antichrist enters the newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem & declares himself God, demanding that the world worship him, that God finally says, “Enough!” and begins to pour out His wrath in the plagues & disasters described in the Book of Revelation.

5. What they miss is that God letting rebel humanity go in its love-affair with the antichrist is **ALSO** a manifestation of His wrath.

a. God’s wrath **isn’t only** demonstrated by His **overt & active judgments** in fire from heaven.

b. Romans 1&2 say God’s wrath is also seen **passively** when He withdraws His restraining grace & allows evil to grow unchecked.

c. How terrifying to think of God withdrawing His hand of protection & allowing sin to run amuck!

d. In the first half of the Tribulation, God honors rebel man’s desire to be left alone.

e. Humanity has said “No!” to God for thousands of years, & though God has graciously worked behind the scenes to hold evil at bay, the time comes for man to see just what a world without God’s grace really looks like.

f. It’s that removal of grace that allows satan to thrust forward his surrogate, the antichrist.

g. But his agenda isn’t salvation; it’s damnation.

h. Because the Church is gone, there’s no one left to raise the warning & the antichrist is able to install his plan, which finally comes to fruition at the mid-point of the Tribulation.

6. But know this – **God’s wrath is as present in the 1<sup>st</sup> half** of the Tribulation as in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half.

But believers aren’t appointed to wrath as v. 9 makes clear.

7. The way Paul words this makes it clear we won’t just be protected **in** the wrath; it’s not like we’ll be in some protective cocoon while it’s falling all around us, which is what Post-Tribbers say.

8. When Paul says we **aren’t appointed to wrath**, it means we’re **exempt altogether from it**; its **time**, as well as its **touch**.

9. Jesus experienced the wrath of God in our place so that we won’t experience it in any way, shape or form.

10. To do so would be to **lessen the effect of the cross**.

D. V. 11

1. Paul repeats what he wrote in 4:18 –

11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

2. **Question:** How could the Rapture be a comfort **if we had to endure** the Tribulation to get there?

3. The comfort it brings is that it could happen **at any moment**.

4. But here’s the thing, the Rapture **closes out** the Church Age, the Age of Grace, & begins the DotL.

5. After the Rapture is the Tribulation, a time of God’s judgment.

6. And it’s about that I want to end today.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. Strangers

1. In **Gen 18**, Abraham encounters 3 strangers. He urges them to stop for refreshment.
  - a. The strangers turn out to be God and 2 angels.
  - b. The angels are on a **reconnaissance** mission.
  - c. Their meal finished, they prepare to resume their journey.
  - d. God tells Abraham of the angels' agenda. They're on their way to **Sodom**.

2. In v. 20 we read . . .

The Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know."

3. Abraham pleads with God to spare Sodom if as few as 10 righteous people can be found.
4. The angels travel on & visit the city where they're mistreated by the residents.
  - a. Only Lot is found to be righteous.
  - b. Even his family members were corrupted by Sodom's evil.
5. Now, here's the thing; God is omniscient. He knew **precisely** what was happening in Sodom.
6. Yet the angels went there **to experience firsthand** what God knew.
  - a. **Verifying** the report was part of the process necessary for the just administration of God's judgment.
  - b. And before the fire could fall, the **believer, Lot, had to be removed**.
7. Let me be clear: Though God knew precisely what was going on in Sodom, He sent angels to investigate **personally**:
  - a. To experience **themselves** the evil that was being done.
  - b. If the angels were the agents of God's judgment, as they were in Egypt, it makes sense they'd investigate the wickedness they were judging.
  - d. The abuse of angels **justified** a requirement of wrath.
  - e. No one can accuse God of being too harsh when **angels** are ill-treated.
8. In the NT, in Hebrew 13:2 we read this –  
Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.

- a. Being kind to **all** is a mark of love & the fruit of the Spirit.
  - b. So why would it matter these strangers were angels **unless** their treatment counts for something more.
  - c. There's no more merit or moral imperative in serving an angel than a human.
  - d. But! There is far more **consequence** if angels are **mistreated**.
  - e. How they're treated is used to **evaluate the moral condition of a city or society**.
9. Thru-out the OT Law, God called His people to be **careful** about how they treated strangers.
    - a. They were to be shown dignity & respect.
    - b. They were to be treated fairly & shown kindness.
    - c. Strangers were included with widows & orphans as those God protected & defended.
    - d. Abuses suffered by them were treated as though they were delivered to God Himself.
    - e. in Deut. 10:18-19 we read this -

[God] administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

#### B. Careful

1. I say all this because recently, both my wife and I had encounters we suspect were angelic.
2. I'm not going to give details because they're not important.
3. Let me just say that at the time they occurred there was a sense more was going on than what appearances would suggest.
4. Both encounters were **challenges**, a test of how we'd treat them, either kindly or rudely.
5. Both individuals presented themselves in forms many would despise or purposely overlook.
6. Since these are certainly the End Times, & **God's wrath is about to be poured out**,

- a. It makes sense that just as the angels visited Sodom to evaluate its spiritual condition,
  - b. We can expect angels to visit the world to see firsthand what the conditions are.
  - c. The angels went to Sodom, & specifically to Lot's home.
  - d. While the Sodomites intended to do the angels harm, Lot showed hospitality.
  - e. He and his *alone* were delivered from the wrath of God.
7. Be careful how you treat others, especially strangers;
- a. Specifically those who come in a form you'd tend to overlook or avoid;
  - b. The homeless, immigrants, the physically or mentally challenged.
  - c. Be hospitable and kind, exercising care in treating others respectfully.
  - d. It may be an angel. How you treat it could determine much, both for yourself & others.