

Comfort in the Hope of Resurrection

1 Thessalonians 4

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Paul indicated to the Thessalonian believers his main reason for addressing the resurrection and rapture. It was so they would not sorrow as those who had no hope. It is apparent the Thessalonians had a question about the resurrection that Paul was trying to answer. Their sorrowing had to do with those who had died. In his answer, Paul clarified the exact events surrounding the resurrection and rapture. While the question is not stated, we can reconstruct it from Paul's answer. Notice his answer linked the **timing of the resurrection** to the catching up of the living saints. Therefore, their question most likely concerned the fact and timing of the resurrection of the dead in Christ. In answering their question, Paul assumed his readers were familiar with the Lord's coming itself. He attached the timing of the resurrection of dead saints to an event they were already familiar with, the catching up of the living saints.

1 Thess 4:13-18

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.

*15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, **that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.***

Before Paul began to speak of the timing of the resurrection, he mentioned "*the coming of the Lord*" as though they were already familiar with this event. He took it for granted that they knew what the "*coming of the Lord*" was. Then he proceeded to link the timing of the resurrection of the dead saints to this already established event.

*16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: **and the dead in Christ shall rise first:***

*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.*

I have placed in blue type the NEW information Paul was giving them. I have placed in red type the well known event to which he linked the new information. They were already familiar with the Lord's descending from heaven, and the living believers being caught up in the clouds when the trumpet sounds. In this passage, **Paul simply placed the resurrection of the dead saints in its proper place in the sequence of events.** In essence, Paul did this by saying that the dead saints will rise just before we are "caught up." So, it is apparent that the Thessalonians were already familiar with Christ's coming, and the "catching up" of the living believers. But, they were not sure where the resurrection of the dead saints fit in. And this led to some sorrow among them. How is it that they knew about the coming of Christ, and the catching up of the living saints, but did not understand where the resurrection fit in? It is because of their familiarity with the Olivet Discourse. In that passage, Jesus described His coming, and the gathering of the elect, but He did not specifically mention the resurrection of the dead, or how it would fit into the end time drama.

Matthew 24:29-31

29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

*31 **And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.***

Paul's words would, no doubt, bring to memory the words of Christ in the Olivet Discourse. Notice the similar language. Both mention the coming of the Lord. Both mention the sounding of the trumpet to gather His own. Both mention angelic participation. But when we look at Jesus' words, we see that He did not mention the resurrection of the saints specifically in the Olivet Discourse. Based on these things, the Thessalonians' question for Paul becomes apparent. They wanted to know what will happen to those who have previously died. Will they be raised to witness the revelation of Christ to the world in all His glory, and to participate in the establishment of Christ's Kingdom? Or will they be raised at some other time? Or perhaps not at all? The fact that Jesus only spoke of the living, and did not place the resurrection in His sequence of events described in the Olivet Discourse, caused these Christians to worry about their departed brethren not participating in the spectacular events surrounding Christ's revelation to the world in power and glory, and the setting up of His Kingdom. Paul's answer indicates that this was indeed the problem. By linking the timing of the resurrection to the gathering of the living that Jesus spoke of, Paul

completely resolved the problem for them and gave them reason for hope regarding their loved ones who had died.

Again, so far we find nothing in Paul's writings that conflicts with the scenario described by Jesus. But more importantly, we see Paul's reliance on Jesus' Olivet Discourse. In the articles that follow, we will demonstrate conclusively that Paul actually used the Olivet Discourse as a backdrop for His teaching about the rapture. Jesus' teaching was the authority, and Paul simply supplemented it with additional details, and dealt with questions arising from Jesus' discourse. This fact forces us to draw two major conclusions that absolutely devastate the pretribulation position.

- Jesus' Olivet Discourse concerns His Church
- Paul did not teach a distinct "rapture."