

1Thessalonians 12-05-04b

We resume our study now in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, we pick up at verse 15, God is going to bring through the Lord Jesus those who sleep in Him. And once again we have an affirmation that this is a church age doctrine. This does not pertain, for example, to the Old Testament saints.

There is occasionally kind of a fuzziness on who is going to be involved at the rapture. It will not be Adam, Enoch, Noah, Seth, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Judah, Moses, Joshua, all the way down through the list of Old Testament saints. They are not resurrected at the return spoken of here.

Why? This is kind of a shocking thing to say. Old Testament saints are not in Jesus. They're not.

There is no biblical passage that places Old Testament saints in positional truth as body of Christ the way we are. It's unique. We are the body.

We are the bride. We are in Christ. If any man be in Christ, he's a new creation.

He's not an old creation as the Old Testament saints. We have new covenant founded on new and better promises. We have a unique destiny.

We have a unique standing. We have a unique assignment. We have a unique calling.

We have a unique opportunity. We have a unique ministry of God the Holy Spirit. Everything is distinct for us.

We are a special gift that God the Father gives to His Son, the Lord Jesus. And Old Testament saints, not to say that it is in any way inferior. It is different.

Would you say that the plan of God for humanity is better or worse than the plan of God for the unfallen angels? I can't make a qualitative judgment. It's different. Those angels are called to things that we're not called to.

We have been given challenges and opportunities that they are not party to. They long to look into these things. Angels watch closely what goes on here on earth.

They are learning. But they are not part of it. They have their own destiny.

They have their own part in God's overall overarching program. And the same is true with Old Testament saints. By the way, trying to make this point, trying to point out this distinction has been labeled anti-Semitic in some quarters.

To say that, for example, Israel are the earthly people of God and the church is the heavenly people of God, trying to draw out the distinction that the fulfillment of covenant promises for Old Testament saints, Israel in particular, is on earth. It's an earthly kingdom. It's an earthly land.

It's got earthly promises, earthly fulfillments, where we as body and bride of Christ join Him in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord in the heavenly realms. We're not owners and dwellers in the earth during the millennial kingdom. Our residence is in a place that Jesus has gone to prepare.

He never says that to the Old Testament saints. I go to prepare a place for you, Joseph and Daniel and Ezekiel and Zephaniah and all the rest of you guys. He doesn't say that.

But to point out that God has an earthly program for Israel and a somewhat different program for the church and it comes right out and says it's founded on new and better promises, that's labeled anti-Semitic for this reason. You have things like progressive dispensationalism and other human attempts to make the truth of God politically correct. But I don't want to digress into that too far.

Suffice it to say that we have abundant evidence here. Brethren, these are church age believers. Those who sleep in Jesus are church age believers who have died.

They are not Old Testament saints. Old Testament saints are never said to be asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you, verse 15, by the word of the Lord.

This is a wonderful preposition in Greek. It is the preposition en. En is the preposition that serves the same function or communicates the same meaning as the dative, locative and instrumental cases do.

Depending on whether you do the 5 case or the 8 case noun system in Greek. I personally like the 8 case, but in some cases it's sort of a contrivance. But en here, or the dative, locative or instrumental case, either one or both, means three things almost universally.

In, by or with. And by is by means of. In, by means of or with.

And with not in the sense of soon or meta meaning co-located. But with meaning I am chopping wood with an axe. It doesn't mean I and the axe are real close friends and we're just right next to each other.

I am using it in an instrumental sense. I do this with this. By means of this.

In the use of this. That's what you have here. So this we say to you in, by or with the word of the Lord.

Now, this is kind of a challenge. What does this mean? Why doesn't he say, we say to you that, and go on and give the content? But he says, by the word of the Lord. The other thing that is curious is, did you notice a change of number? I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren.

This we say to you, by the word of the Lord. Well, there's a choice here. Are these perhaps sayings of the Lord Jesus that he issued while he was on the earth ministering? And there's this

theory going around that there's the cue source, the quell, the sayings source.

And that the gospel writers for the Synoptics, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, drew on this when they composed their gospels. That there was an oral tradition of Jesus' teaching. And this would be the word of the Lord.

Anybody think of a reason why that might not fly here? I know you're thinking of it. I won't ask you to say it out loud. But since I know you're thinking of it, I'll say it out loud.

Jesus lived and taught in the age of Israel. And his teaching was to Israel, for Israel, by Israel, about Israel, dealing with their gospel of the kingdom, right? Who is the steward of the mysteries? Who is it that reveals what had heretofore not been known or revealed? It is Paul. This is a church age truth that Jesus would not have spoken, at least not until, say, John 14.

So, we can safely say that this is not derived from a teachings source that was distributed in oral form, harking back to the days of Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus didn't talk about, address, or speak to the church or reveal church age truth until the last part of his teaching in the upper room to the 11 remaining disciples at that point. And he also communicated that and more to the Apostle Paul.

Paul says, it has been given to me to reveal these mysteries. Behold, I show you a mystery, a previously unrevealed truth. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

Well, this we say to you, we, meaning Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Silvanus, Paul and Silas. And we know that there was revelation given to these early teachers, these early apostles and their companions by more or less direct revelation, either through the Holy Spirit, or I think the Lord Jesus taught Paul just like he taught the first 11 disciples. Paul has 14 months of time unaccounted for.

He apparently went down to Mount Sinai and did some traveling during that period. And the Lord Jesus inculcated him with the same kinds of things that he spoke of in Matthew 28 when he said, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. Well, if Paul is an apostle, he's got to know those same things as well.

And so Jesus taught him all those and church age truth. And these are things that Paul and his companions communicated as they went establishing churches, teaching, building up saints in the faith. So we, meaning this isn't just something Paul is making up, say to you by the word of the Lord.

We are telling you something that has come from the Lord himself. There's a lot of study that's been done on kurios in the New Testament, especially in the epistles. It almost always refers to Jesus.

And this would make sense that Jesus would communicate this, as I've already noted. This we

say, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord. As soon as you have the coming of the Lord, we have this question of, well, is it the coming that is spoken of in the scripture where, for example, in Matthew 24, and Jesus says, as lightning goes across the sky, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.

And we end up needing to address the question of, is there one or two comings spoken of in scripture? And as I mentioned in the first session, we need to quickly distinguish these two things. There are people who believe that they are one and the same. Others of us recognize that there is a distinction.

This is our clearest passage on the rapture. We also have major passages at 1 Corinthians 15 and in 2 Thessalonians. Let me just quickly note some of the distinctions.

I am not going to give you scripture for these. You can easily find the scriptures, but in the interest of time, and because if I give a scripture, I like to look it up and read it. You know how long that would take.

So I'm just going to make these points, and you can find the scriptures easily documented. I can point you to sources after class or whatever, but let me just point out the differences. This is why we believe that there is a rapture seven years prior to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

First of all, there is a specific statement regarding the transformation, the translation, if you will, of church age believers. The dead and the living in our passage are raised and meet the Lord in the air. Obviously, those who are alive and remain, when they are caught up, well, something has happened.

We know from other passages that we will be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul talks at length about the nature of this not being unclothed, being clothed upon, as the body in this earth is terrestrial, so that body will be celestial. Star differs from star, so shall it be in the resurrection, etc.

So there is this translation, transformation, and catching up. At the second coming, there is not an explicit statement of this taking place. Certainly not for the church.

There is no descriptive passage. What you see are passages like Ezekiel, where prophesy to these bones, flesh and sin who cover them prophesy again, breath enters them, and they stand upon their feet. But we know from our study of Ezekiel, the Millennial Temple, and so forth, the fact that people can die, the fact that they sweat, the fact that they eat, the fact that they offer sacrifices, the fact that there is such a thing as capital punishment, and that there is still the possibility of poverty and sickness and so on, that there is a mortal existence during the Millennial Kingdom, and those who have been raised and participated in that kingdom are of that type of cloth, of that kind of flesh.

Not so that we will be like him, Scripture tells us at the rapture. So that's number one, the difference in the quality of the translation or transformation. Number two, the saints spoken of in the rapture meet the Lord in the air.

At the second coming, you have the focus on the earth. It is an earthly dwelling. John 14, I go to prepare a place for you.

I go someplace other than earth to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, which is not earth, there you may be also. That's the residence for these resurrected saints.

It is different for the Millennial Kingdom. It is earthly. There is the land.

There is tribal allotments. There is temple worship, all of those things that pertain to an earthly dwelling. Number three, there is no mention at the rapture of judgment of the earth.

There is the judgment of the saints. Paul speaks of it even here in Thessalonians. But there is not anything related to judgment of the earth associated with the rapture.

The second coming is a time of great judgment. You look at Jude talking about what is going to happen when the Lord cometh with 10,000 of his saints. And there is judgment.

All the ungodly men with their ungodly deeds and their ungodly ways, ungodly, ungodly, ungodly, are judged at that time. Number four, there is nothing intervening as we wait. This has sometimes been called the doctrine of the imminency of the rapture.

I'm not so sure imminency is something I can sign off on 100%, meaning it could happen at any time. But there is nothing that needs to take place, prophetically speaking, before the rapture can come. But the second coming, Jesus says, there will be signs.

There will be signs in the heaven. There will be wars and rumors of wars. There will be earthquakes, diverse places, famines, the Antichrist.

All kinds of things take place before the second coming. Armageddon takes place before the second coming. None of that is spoken of in the rapture passages.

The second coming of Christ to the earth is spoken of often in the Old Testament. Rapture is only spoken of in the New Testament. Now, some of these you can say, well, this is sort of a circular argument.

It's in the New Testament, so you say that's the rapture. Well, the New Testament also speaks of the second coming. But there is nothing of the rapture in the Old Testament because there is nothing of the church in the Old Testament.

But the Old Testament does have prolific amounts of Daniel's 70th week, the Son of Man would cut off naught for himself, the rock made without hands that comes and smashes the statue, and all of these things speak of the second coming. Only those in Jesus, this is number six, only those who are in Christ seem to be affected by the rapture. That's the only people that it seems to apply to.

Everybody is aware of and affected by the second coming. The whole earth, lightning goes from the east to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Every eye shall see him, every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

That's an open, visible, manifest, everybody sees it coming. Where the rapture, it's often been called the secret rapture because it seems to be sort of a thief in the night type of thing. The rapture is before the day of wrath, and this is somewhat controversial for those who believe that it happens in the middle of the day of wrath, and post-trib think it comes after, it's before.

We are not of the night or of the darkness. Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come. We have passages that tell us this.

There is no reference to any inhibition of Satan associated with the rapture. This is number eight, if you're keeping track here. Satan is bound at the second coming, bound for a thousand years.

None of Paul's discussions, in fact, he says, that day will not come except there come first the standing away, then the man of sin will be revealed. If anything, Satan is loosed to operate after the rapture, but Satan is bound after the second coming. At the rapture, Christ comes for his own, for those who are in Christ.

At the second coming, he comes with his own. He is surrounded with saints. At the rapture, this is the tenth point, he comes in the air, and he meets his people in the air.

We are with him in the air. At the second coming, he comes down to earth, plants his feet on the Mount of Olives, which splits, and so on. It is apparent that only those who are in Christ see him at the rapture.

There's no indication that anybody else sees it. You get the idea that this is like God speaking at the baptism of Jesus. People just heard a noise.

Or Jesus speaking to Saul on the Damascus Road. Some thought it had thundered. Saul was the only one who could hear the words.

You get the idea that there's going to be something. People are going to know something happened, but they're not going to know what it was. Whereas, every eye shall see him at the second coming.

Finally, the tribulation begins after the rapture. The tribulation ends at the second coming. There

are copious amounts of scripture.

Dr. Wolvard has summarized these in his writings in several places. He's got a book on the Millennial Kingdom. J. Dwight Pentecost and Things to Come gives a nice summary of these.

I'm sure you can find it on the web in innumerable places. These are fairly common. I think also Dr. Chaffer, in his Systematic Theology on eschatology, as well as ecclesiology, talks about these things.

In fact, Dr. Wolvard says the contrast should make it evident that the translation of the church is an event quite different in character and time from the return of the Lord to establish his kingdom. It confirms the conclusion that the rapture takes place before the tribulation. This is sufficient by way of review for our purposes.

You can do a very detailed and extensive study. It's good to review these things once in a while. Fundamentally, the rapture is Jesus coming for his own.

It is consistent with what we see in the scripture, where God reveals himself to those who are his intimates, to those who are watching. Remember when the Lord Jesus came? How many people knew when the Lord Jesus was born? Who was aware of that? Well, you've got Zacharias and Elizabeth. You've got Anna and Simeon.

You've got the shepherds. You've got the wise men. You've got a select few, and those in the periphery of some of those people, who come to an awareness that the Messiah has come.

But it's largely a private revelation. Later, when Jesus, after the wedding feast at Cana, even then, his time had not yet come. But when his time has come, he openly proclaims the kingdom.

In the same way, when Jesus begins that end times clock by coming to get us, that first revelation is somewhat private. Those who are intimate, those who are in Christ, those who are of Christ, those who belong to Christ, those who are his at his coming. Then comes the 70th week of Daniel.

Then comes the open, worldwide revelation and parousia of the Lord Jesus Christ. Alright, well. This we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord.

It's kind of interesting, because as Paul says this, he's talking to living people, and he himself is living. These people are all dead. So when he says, we who are alive and remain, it's kind of a hypothetical.

Because none of the we here have been alive for nearly 2,000 years. But whoever's reading this passage, whoever is currently digesting the truth of this passage, is the we. We who are alive and remain.

All of us may be dead, gone, and blown to dust by the time this takes place. Nobody knows the day or the hour. It could be decades hence.

It could be centuries hence. We just don't know. I kind of have a sneaking idea it's going to be sooner rather than later.

But people have thought that for a long time. Things seem to make sense to me. I was thinking about this.

Did you ever wonder why Lazarus was in the tomb for four days? I would have thought he'd be in there three days. Sort of prefigure and foreshadow the Lord Jesus in the heart of the earth, sign of Jonah, and so on. Why is Lazarus in there four days? Well, remember, why was the Passover lamb kept up for four days? You know, this number four.

And when you look at at least the traditional distance between the beginning of the human race and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, it by all appearances seems to be 4,000 years. And there is a kind of death. By the law comes the knowledge of sin.

The sting of death is sin. The strength of sin is the law, and so on. Four days.

There's four days of experiencing the death of separateness and separation from God, of only minimal ministries of the Holy Spirit, induments and temporary visitations, and individuals that experience it, and only men like Elijah and Elisha who have a real constant presence or maybe a king of Israel. But people are largely under the law, demonstrating how inadequate and fallen and incapable we are in that death that is separation from God. And it is the Lord Jesus who comes and speaks, come forth, come out from under, come out of darkness into the light.

And I think that that is yet another indication that there is sort of this seven structure to human history. Four days before the Lord Jesus, two days after, and early in the morning on the third day, you have the sign of Jonah fulfilled, the resurrection, the resuscitation of the Old Testament saints, and within seven years all of God's saints are raised. We get a little week jump on them, a week of years, 70th week, and then all the rest of them come to further the forward movement of God's plan.

But this is the notion here. Now it says, we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord. So this coming is in fact the rapture coming, the first of two, for we will by no means precede those who are asleep.

This is a great word, precede. It is in Greek, the word phano, P-H-T-H-A-N-O. It's one of those words where you want to be standing a couple of feet away.

Phano, phano, P-H-T-H-A-N-O. Now, phano is used elsewhere in the Bible, and it has the notion of overtaking, or jumping ahead of, or getting the better of someone. It has sort of a physical

connotation.

It's kind of like musical chairs. If you played that when you were in kindergarten, you run around, run around, and when the music stops, everybody's got to get a chair. Well, if you get there just before somebody was going to sit down, you phano'd them.

You beat them to the punch, sort of. And the best way to get the sense of this word is to look at just these few other places that it's used in Scripture. For example, in Matthew 12, 28, Jesus says, if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has phano'd you.

If you remember the context of that, they're accusing Jesus of casting out demons by the prince of demons and so on. He says, look, if you're wrong, and this is by the Spirit of God, the kingdom of God has arrived, and you're not ready. It got here ahead of you.

It has beat you to the punch. You should have known, you should have been ready, and you're not. It has preceded you, in a sense.

Same thing in Luke 11, 20. It's the same episode in another Gospel. In our own book here, 1 Thessalonians 2, verse 16, Paul is talking about those who forbid us to speak to the Gentiles with a view toward them being saved.

So, as always, to fill up the measure of their sins, but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. In other words, and we have in other places where it talks about the fact that the blackness of darkness has already been reserved for these people. Remember that? There is already a judgment in place for people who apostatize it to such a severe extent.

They're believers, but they're enemies of the cross. They're spots on your love feast. They lead away silly women captive.

They do all of these horrible things, and blackness of darkness is reserved for them. It's ordained for them, it says in another place. Well, in 2.16 of 1 Thessalonians, wrath is already sitting there waiting on them, in a sense.

It is thano. Not just come upon them, it's sitting there waiting on them. 2 Corinthians 10.14 is another place when Paul talks about we are not getting ahead of ourselves when he's talking about authority and so on.

You can read that passage. But there it means getting ahead of oneself. In Romans 9.31, Israel pursuing the law of righteousness has not gotten there, has not attained to the law of righteousness.

And thano there is translated attained. And Philippians 3.16 is the other passage where it's found. To the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

To the degree that we've gotten there, to the degree that we've kind of gotten ahead of this thing, that where we're supposed to be and we're moving forward. So it has a real physical sense of arriving and hopefully arriving first and getting there, as they used to say, fustest with the mostest. Getting there and being ready for the next thing to happen.

That's what we have here in our passage. We who are alive and remain are not going to get there ahead of those who are asleep. We're not going to beat them to the punch.

We're not going to get something that they don't get. We're not going to obtain or attain something that they do not obtain or attain. We're not going to walk in ahead of them.

For this, for the Lord, Himself, once again, you have those who are asleep for the third time. Again, this tact and also this notion that you might think you would get there ahead because they are asleep. Now, if they're conscious and in the presence of the Lord, it seems like He'd be offering the opposite kind of comfort.

Those who have fallen asleep are not going to get there ahead of you. You think, well, if they've gone to be with Jesus, aren't they going to already be in there? Am I going to be last card Charlie? Have they fanoed me? Have they gotten there well ahead and they're enjoying heavenly bliss and presence of the Lord and the company of angels and celestial brightness and glory and all these other things? Did they get there ahead of me because they've died and I haven't? Should I slit my throat so I can join them or drown my kids so they can be there? Are the ones who have died ahead of us? Well, no. And once again, when He uses asleep for the third time, you get the notion that you could understand how it would be possible for those of us who are alive and remain and are conscious to experience the presence of the Lord before these who are not conscious is the picture.

And it kind of makes sense. And Paul does not disabuse them of that by saying they're not really asleep. They're alive and floating in the presence of the Lord.

He doesn't. If you're going to give comfort in the face of sorrow, and this is the comfort, by the way, which is consistently offered without any scriptural support to speak of at funerals and times of bereavement. Oh, they're in a better place.

They're looking down on us and smiling and watching over. There's no hint of that in scripture. The most you can say is absent from the body, face to face with the Lord, which is susceptible to more than one explanation.

We will not precede those who are asleep. We will not preempt. We will not get there ahead of those who are asleep.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven. And this is where we'll pick up next time. What is the order of events? What is the nature of these events? Why are these specific things

mentioned? But for now, it is sufficient to see that when everything is in stasis, nobody is with the Lord, nobody sees the Lord until this event.

And at this event, we will not get ahead of those who are asleep. And the purpose of it is not to sorrow and to comfort one another, to sustain our hope. We have a confident expectation of the return of the Lord Jesus, being united with Him in the air and ever after being with Him.

Maybe at varying distances, but we will be with Him. So this is a great sustaining truth. When we find ourselves down, it doesn't have to be a bereavement or loss of a loved one.

Anytime we are beset with the blackness of despair, for whatever reason, comfort and hope are obtainable by meditating on, renewing our faith in these truths, these promises, these confident expectations we have from God. It is a sure and certain hope. It is an anchor within the veil, in the eternal realms.

The line may extend back out here to earth, but the anchor is already behind the veil in the rock of eternity. All we have to do is make sure our anchor holds and grips that solid rock. This is where we will pick up next time, verse 16, next week.

Father, thank You for this great truth, this great passage, and the comfort and encouragement that it offers to us. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will help us to understand it and see its relevance and pertinence to our lives day by day, hour by hour, challenge by challenge, opportunity as each comes our way, that we can live in the light of that eternal future. We see the gate already opening.

We see the light of the eternal future shining toward us. And as we move ever closer to that day and to that place and to that time, we pray that these truths will sustain us and motivate us to live the life to which we have been called in the power and grace that You have extended to us. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.