

(1 Thessalonians) the Great Escape

by Brian Brodersen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding Bible prophecy, particularly the rapture and the second coming of Christ, and encourages believers to comfort one another in times of death and loss with the hope of the resurrection and the rapture.

Duration: 56:11

Topics: "Eschatology", "Salvation Assurance"

Description

In this sermon, the pastor begins by discussing a question he received about a pastor who has never taught the Book of Revelation despite teaching for 30 years. He emphasizes the importance of being prepared for the return of Jesus and the judgment that will follow. The pastor highlights the assurance that believers have in their salvation and the fact that they are not appointed to wrath. He also addresses the timing of these events, stating that the specific times and seasons are not necessary for the believers to know.

Transcript

All right, let's turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, and we are picking up in our study here in 1 Thessalonians in the 13th verse. You know, I received a phone call yesterday while doing the Pastor's Perspective program, and the question had to do with a pastor that has been teaching for some 30 years but has never taught the book of Revelation. And the question was, you know, what do you think about that? And I really didn't get a chance to answer the question because the program ended at that time.

But, you know, thinking about that, there are many people who will refrain from or draw back from teaching on the subjects that the book of Revelation has to deal with. And then, of course, the primary subject is Bible prophecy, what's going to happen in the future, and all of that sort of thing. And there are people today, and there have been throughout the history of the church who would just say, well, you know, we can't really understand any of that, and, you know, it's not really for us to try to figure that out, we'll leave that alone, and we won't touch it.

But, you know, that was not the mentality of the Apostle Paul. When Paul went to Thessalonica, and he wasn't there for all that long, some people say that he was there for only three weeks, I doubt that, it seems to me that he was there for a bit longer, but he wasn't there for that long, he might have been there for maybe a total of six months, say. But during that time, he evidently had taught the believers about the things that pertain to the second coming of Christ.

And so Paul didn't have that attitude that some people have today at all, that, well, you know, that's something that we just really are never going to know anything about, and we might as well just, you know, sort of stay away from it. He did not have that attitude. And it's not the right attitude.

We should not think in those terms at all, because the New Testament tells us much about the second coming of Christ and the events that surround that. And of course, those kinds of things, they were sealed or hidden in previous times. At the time of Daniel's prophecy, it was told to Daniel that, seal the book, Daniel.

These things are for a later date. But you know, the book of Revelation specifically is referred to as a book that is not sealed. Why? Because the time is at hand.

So we want to follow the example of the Apostle Paul, and we want to be aware of these things. We want to study these things. And it's something that we need to do as God's people.

Because we need to be aware of the situation that we're living in. We need to be aware of the fact that Christ is going to come again. And that, of course, is going to be impetus to, you know, really be seeking him and serving him while we wait for him to return.

So it's obvious that Paul spoke to the Thessalonians about those things, because he now has to write back to them and clarify to them some of the things that they had misunderstood. And so that's what's happening as we pick up here in verse 13. So Paul says, 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.

Now, evidently, Paul had taught them about the second coming. He had taught them about the rapture of the church. And they, of course, were anticipating that this could happen any time.

And that's what we anticipate as well. But what happened is that certain people in the fellowship had died. And so the Thessalonian believers were now concerned that maybe those that had died were going to somehow miss out on all of this glory that Paul had spoken to them about regarding the coming of Christ.

And so he's writing to them to assure them that that is not the case. That those who have fallen asleep, basically, you know, he's saying to them, hey, don't worry about them. Everything's going to be fine.

They haven't missed out on anything. And that's what he goes on to tell them here. So concerning those who have fallen asleep.

This is a New Testament way of referring to death, falling asleep. Lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus.

Now, fallen asleep or sleeping in Jesus. Some have looked at this and drawn the conclusion that when a person dies, they go into a state of what they call soul sleep. They go to sleep for a period of time and then wake up at the time of the resurrection.

And they think of it in terms of their soul actually going to sleep. But that's not what's being talked about. The soul doesn't go to sleep in that sense.

The Bible tells us in, say, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, that to be absent from the body, which, of course, is the soul vacating the body. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. So the soul doesn't go

to sleep.

The soul goes to be in the presence of the Lord. What goes to sleep? The body goes to sleep. That's what's being spoken of here.

Perhaps you remember Daniel chapter 12. The messenger said to Daniel, he said, many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake. Sleeping in the dust of the earth.

He's talking about the body. The body goes to sleep. So, 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.

So, you see, they were thinking that somehow now those people that had passed away, those people that had fallen asleep, that they were somehow now at a great disadvantage. Oh, no, they've fallen asleep and Jesus hasn't come back yet. And when he comes, what's going to become of them? They were concerned about that.

They were worried about that. Paul says, listen, we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, we will by no means precede those who are asleep. In other words, he's saying they're not at any sort of a disadvantage.

You don't have to worry about that. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. So Paul tells them, hey, they are going to rise first.

When the archangel sounds the trumpet, the dead in Christ, those that have died in faith, their bodies are going to be raised up out of the dust of the earth. And then he says in verse 17, we who are alive and remain 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.

Therefore, comfort one another with these words. So Paul says, no, don't, don't be concerned. Those that have fallen asleep, they're going to be resurrected and we are going to be caught up.

Now, this 17th verse is where we get the term rapture. We talk about the rapture of the church. We're talking about the catching up of the church.

The Greek word that's translated caught up is the Greek word *harpazo*, so which means to be caught up or to be snatched away. The Bible was, of course, originally written in the Greek language, but it was translated into Latin. And in the Latin translation of the Bible, the Greek word *harpazo*, which we translate caught up here, was translated by the Latin word *rapturo* or *raptus*.

And so that term, for whatever reason, that that's the term that stuck. So we don't really talk about the snatching away so much. We don't really talk about the catching up.

What do we talk about? We talk about the rapture. Now, some people in the church have actually said that there's no such thing as the rapture, and they say the word's not even mentioned in the Bible. Well, it depends on what version of the Bible you're reading.

If you're reading the Latin version, it is mentioned in the Bible. But even though we don't have the English word rapture in the Bible, the idea, the concept is certainly here. We're reading about it.

Paul talks about those who are alive and remaining until the Lord comes. They are going to be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Now, this isn't the only place where Paul spoke of this.

He spoke of this in his epistle to the Corinthians as well in the 15th chapter. And in the 50th verse, he said, he said, brethren, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. And then he said, behold, I show you a mystery.

We shall not all sleep. There's that term again, sleep. We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet for the trumpets shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. And he's talking about the same thing to the Corinthians. This transformation that's going to occur where in the twinkling of an eye, this corruption will put on incorruption, this mortal will put on immortality, and then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

You see, the rapture of the church, do you know what it is? It is the public declaration of Christ's victory over death. It's the culmination of that public declaration that began at the resurrection of Jesus Christ himself. So Jesus rose from the dead, demonstrating his power over death.

There's an entire generation of believers who are going to go to heaven without experiencing death. That will be the ultimate demonstration of Christ's triumph over death. That's why Paul says, then shall be brought to pass a scripture that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

The rapture is the fulfillment of that scripture. An entire generation of believers that death has no effect upon. Death does not touch them.

They go to heaven in the twinkling of an eye. This mortal puts on immortality. This corruption puts on incorruption.

We're changed. So be sure that the doctrine of the rapture is firmly rooted in the New Testament. This isn't something that was invented later on down the road.

You know, some people even tried to say that the rapture did not come into anybody's thinking process until the 1800s. Well, we just read about it from the pen of the apostle Paul, right here in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15. So this is the promise of God.

That his people will one day be caught up in the clouds together with him, meeting the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. And so Paul says, comfort one another with these words.

Now, you know the word comfort. The word really, literally means, it means to come alongside and to strengthen. That's the actual meaning of the word comfort.

And so strengthen one another with these words. Encourage one another with these words. And you know, living in the world that we're living in, we need to take this to heart.

We need to encourage one another. When somebody that we know dies, as we would say, or more accurately falls asleep, even better than that, goes to be with the Lord. We need to take comfort and encouragement that this isn't the end.

That we're going to be reconciled with that person or those people once again. The trumpets going to sound and they're going to be resurrected. Their bodies are going to be reunited with their spirits that have gone to be with the Lord in his presence.

And we who are alive and remain, we're going to be caught up and we're going to receive that glorified body at that moment as well. Now, I've heard people speculate that perhaps when the rapture occurs, it would not necessarily be that this body would be transformed. It might be that this body would actually just be left behind and then we would step into our heavenly bodies.

But I think you have a hard time supporting that scripturally because Jesus, of course, did not leave his body behind, did he? He rose in the same body that he died in. It was a different body in a sense. It was a glorified body, but it was certainly the same body because he says, touch me and feel the prints of the nails in my hand.

And my feet and put your hand upon the wound in my side. But Paul tells us in Philippians chapter 3 as well, he says, our citizenship is in heaven from whence we look for the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly bodies and fashion them like unto his glorious body. You see, the bodies aren't going to be left behind.

The bodies are going to be transformed and made like unto his glorious body. Here's something that might shock you, but this is a reality. You're going to be in the body you're in forever.

But don't get discouraged because it's going to be a glorified version of it. But it's going to be the body that you have. I think that's really the teaching of the New Testament.

That, you know, again, talking about those who are sleeping. He's talking not about the soul. He's talking about the body.

The dead in Christ are rising. You know, in Revelation, what is it? The 21st chapter, maybe. 20th or the 21st chapter.

Maybe you remember reading this and maybe you were even puzzled by it. But it talks about the dead being raised up to stand before the great white throne judgment. And it makes reference to death in the grave.

Give up the dead that are in it. And it says, and the sea gave up the dead who are in it. Now, that could only be a reference to the body.

How many millions of bodies have been buried at sea over the centuries? Sure, millions upon millions. And the sea is going to give up the dead that are in it. The bodies that have been buried at sea will be risen up out of the sea.

Now, of course, the whole idea of a resurrected body poses some huge problems for some people. They think, well, you know, come on. How in the world is God going to find all the bits and pieces of the people that died centuries ago or millennia ago? How in the world is he going to find all those bits and pieces to put everybody back together again? Well, you know, even if we looked at it in such a primitive way as that, I would have to say that that wouldn't be a problem for God.

God knows everything, including where every particle of every person that's ever lived happens to be right this moment. He knows all of that. But that's not even necessary.

If we want to bring it down to something we can, you know, get a grip on, all of our bodies, in one sense, are made of the exact same thing. Remember, what was Adam formed from? He was formed from the dust of the earth. And what was the curse that was placed upon Adam? From dust you came, to dust you shall return.

The distinguishing factor between us is our DNA code. So, God doesn't necessarily need to find every particle of you. He can just take a bit of dust, squeeze it together in his fingers, and spit some of your DNA into it, and you're right back there with your body once again.

But, you know, when we get into this sort of thing, well, you know, and back in the days of Jesus, the Sadducees, they were, they completely rejected the idea of a resurrection. They thought it was absurd. Because they had all of these kinds of hypothetical, but what if this, and what if that, and, you know, a person dies and is buried, and then their body decomposes and goes into the fertilizing of the plants, and then a cow comes along and eats the plant, and then, you know, and all this and that, and, you know, God's got to track you down through all of these different things.

And, you know, they came to Jesus, you remember, trying to show the absurdity of the resurrection by talking about a woman who had been married to seven different men. None of them had left her any children. At the resurrection, whose wife is she going to be? And they thought they had really stumped Jesus on this whole thing.

And I love what he said to him. He said, you know, your problem is, is this. You don't know the scriptures, and you don't know the power of God.

And, you know, anybody who has a hard time with the idea of the resurrection doesn't really know the power of God. This is not a problem for God. There's nothing that's hard for the Lord.

And so, our bodies, if we were to go to be with the Lord prior to the rapture, our bodies, of course, will remain here and be planted into the earth. And returned to the dust of the earth, our spirits would go to be with the Lord presently. But at his coming for his church, those bodies are resurrected and glorified, made like unto his glorious body.

And so, Paul says, comfort one another with these words. Concerning those that had died among them, he said, we weep, but not as those who have no hope. Sure we weep.

Sometimes in people's immature state in their Christian life, they think that, you know, any thing like that would sort of be indicative of some kind of a lack of faith or something. Tragedy strikes, you just handle it with a stiff upper lip. We're Christians.

We know that all things work together for good. And we shouldn't be worried about this. And what are you crying about? You know, here at your dad's funeral, don't you know he's going to rise again? Get over it.

You know, we don't approach things like that because, of course, there's the human element. And there is the sorrow. And death is a tragedy.

Death is the penalty for sin. And every time somebody dies, we're reminded of that great reality, that sin entered into the world and death came through sin. And it's painful.

It brings anguish and grief to us. But we stop short of where the rest of the world is because although we weep, we do not weep like those who have no hope. We know it's just a matter of time before we're all going to be joined together once again forever in the presence of the Lord and in his glorious kingdom and nothing will ever separate us again.

Those are the things Paul says comfort one another with these words. But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. So the question arises, of course, well, when is this going to take place? And that question has been asked over and over again for the past 2000 years.

And for century after century after century, generations of Christians have anticipated the Lord's coming and believe that he could possibly come in their day and rightfully so, because that's the message that Jesus left with us. He left with us that reality that he could return at any time. That is known theologically as the doctrine of the eminency of the return of Christ, that his return is eminent, meaning that it's at hand, meaning that it's it can be at any given moment.

You see, there's nothing that needed to occur prior to the rapture of the church. Now, there are certain events that have had to be fulfilled in order for Christ to return to the earth a second time and set up his kingdom. But we have to realize that there are two aspects to the second coming of Christ.

Some people have a problem with that. They say, oh, yeah, two second comings. You guys are really getting imaginative.

But, you know, there were two first comings of Christ. He came as a babe in Bethlehem. He was heralded by the angels.

A small group of people were aware that he had entered into the world, but his public manifestation was not until some 30 odd years later when he rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy in the ninth chapter. And there he was hailed as the Messiah. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Two aspects to the first coming. So there are two aspects to the second coming of Christ. There's a private coming in a sense, just like there was a private coming at his first appearance.

And he comes in a sense privately for his people. His people are caught up, taken out of the world to be with him. But then he comes again publicly sometime later.

And every eye shall see him even they that pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth shall mourn because of him. So Paul goes on to say concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you for you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

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. So you see, Paul says, you have no need that I write to you about the times of the seasons because you already know that this event is going to come suddenly. It's going to come as a surprise.

It's going to take the world by surprise. Jesus stated this in Luke's gospel in the 21st chapter. He there admonished us to be alert, to be on our guard because, as he said in other places, at an hour you think not the son of man is coming.

But there he said, take heed to yourselves. Lest your hearts be overcharged with drunkenness, with carousing or partying and with the cares of this life, so that that day comes upon you unexpectedly. For so it will come upon all those who dwell upon the face of the earth.

It'll come unexpectedly. It'll come suddenly. It'll come just as Paul is saying here, just as a thief comes, a thief comes suddenly and unexpectedly.

Six different times in the New Testament, Jesus speaks of his coming like a thief comes suddenly and without warning. Now that cannot possibly refer to the second coming of Jesus Christ into the world to set up God's kingdom because there's not going to be anything secret about that. There's not going to be anything subtle about that.

There's not going to be any big surprise in one sense when after seven years of judgment, tribulation, angels flying through the midst of heaven with the everlasting gospel, witnesses slain in the streets of Jerusalem and rising from the dead and testifying to the reality of Christ and, you know, all the cataclysmic events and the judgments that are going to come upon the world. I'll tell you this. When Jesus shows up at the end of this, I don't think anybody is going to be shocked by that.

Oh, what's he doing here? Oh, who's that? We didn't think Jesus was going to come. No, everybody's going to be well aware of what's going on at that point. The point that he comes unexpectedly is at the rapture.

You see, that's when he comes unannounced. That's when he suddenly comes for his people. And we don't know when that is.

That's why Paul said there's no need for me to write to you about the times of the seasons because you already know that this event is going to occur unexpectedly. It's going to occur when people least anticipate it. So, and Jesus, you know, he said this over and over again.

And what was his point? His point was always be ready and you don't even have to worry about it. That's the message behind the imminent return of Christ. The greater message behind it is be ready all the time.

Be ready constantly because you never know when it is going to occur. Now, he goes on and he says this. He says, but you brethren are not in darkness so that this day should overtake you as a thief.

You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as others do.

But let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night and those who get drunk or drunk at night. 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.

Listen, for God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So Paul says, this day is going to take the world by surprise. He says, but it's not going to take you by surprise.

Why? Because you're children of the day, not children of night. We're living in the spirit, so it's not going to take us by surprise in the sense that we're going to be caught off guard and miss the opportunity. As we're living in the spirit, we're going to be ready for the event to occur, to occur.

But this is what he says. He says, for God has not appointed us to wrath. Now, I want you to notice a couple of things.

Notice back in verse 16 of chapter four. And here's where we see an unfortunate chapter break in our New Testament, because it's obvious that there is no break here. It's a continuation of the same thought.

But Paul speaks of, as we've already mentioned, the Lord himself, descending from heaven we who are alive and remain, being caught up. And then in verse two of chapter five, notice he says, for you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. He connects the rapture with this phrase, the day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord is used 17 times in the Old Testament. And every single time, it is a reference to the period that we commonly refer to as the Great Tribulation period. In the Old Testament, it is more commonly referred to as the day of the Lord.

It's also referred to as the time of Jacob's trouble, the day of wrath. In the New Testament, this phrase, the day of the Lord, is used four times. And then a similar term, the day of Christ, is used three times.

The day of the Lord refers to that period of judgment, but it also includes the coming of Christ. So it includes the coming of Christ for his church. That's a connection that Paul makes right here.

He connects this with what he's previously said. He connects verse 2 of chapter 5 with verses 16 and 17 of chapter 4. So when we read this term, the day of the Lord, we're talking about the rapture of the church, the tribulation period, and the second coming of Jesus Christ. We're talking about those things are the three events that are included in this term, the day of the Lord.

So he says, the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night. They're saying peace and safety, and suddenly they're finding themselves in a place of judgment. In Matthew chapter 24, Luke chapter 17 and 21, Jesus gives some illustrations regarding this.

He talked about the days of Noah, how people were eating, drinking, marrying, giving in marriage right up until the very day that Noah entered the ark. And what happened? The door was closed and the judgment came, but business was going on as usual. People were just living their lives and thinking that life was going to go on forever.

Jesus also illustrated it with the situation in Sodom and Gomorrah. People were just living life as usual, and then Lot fled the city and the judgment came. Now, in verse 9, this is the verse that I want to bring us to, Paul assures us of this.

He assures us that we are not appointed to wrath. Wrath is another reference to the day of the Lord, the day of God's judgment. So, we do not know the time of the rapture in the sense of a particular date on which it's going to occur, nor do we know the year that it's going to happen in.

This is what we do know about the timing of the rapture. We know that it is going to happen before the wrath of God is poured out on this planet. That's what Paul assures us of.

For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation. Or deliverance is another way of translating the word salvation here. God has not appointed us to judgment.

He has not appointed us to go through the great tribulation, in other words. That's what he's saying, but to be delivered from that through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Now, of course, this is a debated issue among Christians.

There are some Christians that believe that the rapture doesn't happen until after the tribulation period. They're known as post-tribulationists. Rapture takes place after the tribulation is over.

There are others who are known as mid-tribulationists, and they believe the three-and-a-half-year point, believing that the period is seven years long, based upon Daniel chapter 9 and the necessity of one final seven-year period to deal with the nation of Israel. So they say, well, the Lord's going to take his church out in the middle as he begins to pour out his wrath. Then there's another group that's similar to that, but slightly moreover in the pre-tribulation camp, and they're known as pre-wrath.

And they believe that the church is going to be taken out before the wrath of God is poured out. They don't necessarily connect that with the beginning of a final seven-year period. And then there is the position of the pre-tribulation rapture, and that is the position that we hold to that says, in essence, that before the tribulation begins, the church will be taken out of the world.

And I think that that's what Paul is alluding to here. We who are alive and remain are going to be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. When is this going to happen? Well, you have no need that I write to you because you know that this day of the Lord, this judgment is going to come as a thief in the night.

So Paul is connecting the rapture with the day of the Lord, that they happen either simultaneously, that the rapture occurs and the day of the Lord begins, or that the rapture occurs and the day of the Lord follows it very closely and no one can say for sure which it is. But here's the great news. The great news is that we are not appointed to wrath.

There is, of course, tribulation in this life for us as Christians. But it's not the great tribulation. We do go through tribulation.

Jesus said in the world, you will have tribulation. That's a fact. And the church has gone through many difficult seasons.

But the great tribulation is yet to come and the church does not go through the great tribulation. Sometimes people argue against the church being delivered from the tribulation by saying, well, you know, look at the Christians in the past, look how they suffered and look at the great tribulation that they went through. Look at the Roman persecutions of the church or look at the communist persecutions of the church or, you know, any number of persecutions you want to look at.

And then they say, and you mean to tell me that you think you're going to escape? But I think they fail to take into consideration that what happened under the Romans and what happened under the communist or, you know, whoever else is persecuted. This has been tribulation at the inspiration of the devil and carried out generally by the hands of men. But when we talk about the great tribulation, we're talking about God is the force behind the great tribulation.

God is the one who's bringing the judgment. And if we understand the purpose of the great tribulation, then we realize there just isn't any place for the church in the great tribulation. Because the purpose of the great tribulation is to, first of all, punish the world for its evil, according to Isaiah 13.

Secondly, according to Daniel, it's to break the power of the holy people. It's to finally bring Israel to their knees in a literal sense so they can embrace their Messiah. So it's to punish the wicked because of their evil.

It's to deal with Israel. And it's also to judge the nations that come against God's people. Now, when you think about the purpose of the tribulation, you realize the church doesn't really fit because we haven't rejected Christ.

We've received him. We're not Israel, so it's not a matter of the power of us being broken. And, of course, we're not part of those nations that are persecuting Israel.

So the tribulation, there is no reason why the church would have to go through. There's no necessity of it. There's no place for the church in the tribulation period.

God has not appointed us to wrap, but to obtain salvation. And yes, the church has gone through great seasons of persecution and will continue to do so as long as we're in this world. But when God comes to that moment, when he stands up to judge the world, the church is not under that judgment.

And so he snatches us away. He catches us up. He raptures us.

He takes us out of this world. And as Paul tells us here, we are caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. What a wonderful thing to be caught up, suddenly to be there in the presence of God.

And then he says this, speaking of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, whether we're alive or dead, we should live together with him. Therefore, comfort each other and edify one another just as you are doing. So Paul says, take these truths and strengthen each other.

Take these truths and build one another up. You know the word edify? We find that word in our New Testaments. We use that word.

You know, it's related to the word edifice. An edifice is what? It's a structure. You look at a great building, you say, wow, look at that edifice.

Well, edify, it is the process of bringing about an edifice. So Paul's saying, take these truths and strengthen each other with these things. Build each other up with these things.

Encourage one another with these truths. These are great and glorious and wonderful truths. Now, I suppose if God had appointed us to wrath, we would handle it.

He would give us the grace to do so. But the fact of the matter is he hasn't appointed us to wrath. So I don't have to worry about that.

I have met over the years many people who have been brought up in their Christian faith without the hope of this great deliverance that we call the rapture. They have been taught that the church is going to go through the tribulation period. And for many people, that has frightened them.

It's intimidated them. It's even at times kept them back from feeling that they could witness to people. Now, all of that might be wrong.

But nevertheless, that's the impact that it's had upon the lives of some. And those same people, once they discovered that the rapture was God's means of delivering them from the tribulation period, oh, it just completely changed their perspective on so many things. It lifted that dark cloud from off of their heads and that heavy burden from off their shoulders and gave them a new confidence in their evangelism to be able to tell people, hey, this is what's coming down on planet Earth.

But guess what? You don't have to be part of it. Now, there are some, you know, hardcore people that see all of this as just escapism. And you guys just want to escape and you're, you know, you're not really manly Christians like we are.

You know, I've even heard people with an attitude like, you know what, I'm just, you know, I don't care if the rapture is pre-trib. I'm going to skip it and live through the tribulation. Show God I'm serious about my faith, you know.

I don't need any of this escapism stuff. I can go through it. Take the antichrist on myself, you know.

Hey, go ahead. That's what you want to do. I'm out of here.

I don't want to have any part of that, you know. It's not the easy way out. It's not escapism.

It's God's promise. It's his blessing for his people. It's his declaration of victory over death.

And it's his means of delivering us from a time that is so dark and dismal and unimaginably horrible. You know, we've just seen in the past, what, you know, a few years. We've seen things shaking up and things going on.

And, you know, we're looking around at tsunamis and earthquakes and hurricanes and, you know, looking at the devastation and just, oh, you know, unbelievable kind of stuff. This is nothing, nothing compared to the tribulation period. We're talking about the majority of the population being wiped out in the tribulation period.

There's presently six and a half billion people on this planet. If the tribulation period started right now, by the end of it, seven years later, there would be less than a billion people left in the world. Now, that's some serious carnage there.

And that's the kind of stuff that's coming in the future. And it will make Hurricane Katrina and the Asian tsunami and the Pakistani earthquake and the Twin Towers in New York City. It'll make that all look like nothing.

Jesus said, it's a time of tribulation such as there never was, nor shall ever be again. And if the days were not shortened, there would be no flesh saved. The greatest period of tribulation the world has known to date was the flood.

Jesus said, this is going to be greater than the flood. Unbelievable, unimaginable. When you think of what a little flood did to New Orleans, think of what the flood in Noah's day did to the entire planet.

And Jesus said, what's coming in the future is far worse than that. Never been anything like it. But here's the wonderful reality.

No one has to live through it. We have an opportunity to escape. And that's what Jesus said in Luke 21.

He talked about this day coming like a trap upon all those who dwell on the face of the earth. And then he said this. He said, pray, therefore, that you may be counted worthy to escape these things, to escape these things and to stand before the Son of Man.

Oh, that's it right there. What does Paul say? We're caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. It happens before the day of the Lord because God hasn't appointed us to wrath.

Jesus says, pray that you can escape these things and stand before the Son of Man. He's talking about the same thing. So, we don't, you know, take a hostile approach to believers who disagree with us over this point.

We understand that that's their prerogative. And we still love and embrace them as fellow Christians. But we simply do not agree with them on this particular point.

Because God hasn't appointed us to wrath. God does not judge the righteous with the wicked. Even Abraham knew that that would be inconsistent.

And when God was on his way to judge Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham said, what if there are 50 righteous there? What are you going to do? God said, I won't judge it if there's 50. Well, what if there's 40? I won't judge it if there's 40. What if there's 30? I won't judge it if there's 30.

Oh, God, I can't believe I'm going to do this. But what if there's 20? What if there's 10? God said, if there's 10, I'll spare it. There wasn't 10.

There was one, one righteous man. His name was Lot. And what did God do? God delivered him from that city and then he destroyed it.

And Peter alludes to that in his epistle. That God knows how to deliver the righteous and to reserve the ungodly for judgment. Just like he did with Lot.

He delivered him. And interesting, when you go back to Genesis and you read that story there, you know what the angel said to Lot? He said, flee this city for I cannot judge it until you are safely out of it. I think that's significant.

I think there's a picture there. That God will not judge this world until he first removes his people from this world. And then the judgment will come.

But we are not to be caught off guard. We are not to be overtaken by this because we are to be walking in the light. Sons of the day, not of the night.

Seeking the Lord, following him, living for him. Now, some have said that believing in a pre-tribulational rapture, believing that Christ can return at any moment, helps to live a purified life. And they've actually, at times, used that as sort of an argument, implying that those who hold to a different view, like a mid-trib or a post-trib, would not have that same incentive and therefore probably wouldn't be living as wholly a life as they possibly could.

But that's not really a good argument. There have been people that have not even believed in the rapture at all that have lived very godly lives. And there have been plenty of people that have believed in the pre-tribulational rapture that have lived ungodly lives.

But it certainly should motivate us and John tells us that in his first epistle, that we would purify ourselves. We do not know what he'll be like, but we know that we will be like him and we shall see him as he is. And whoever has this hope purifies himself.

So, just having the hope of seeing Jesus, having this hope of him, you know, suddenly appearing, that should be a strong incentive for us to live the way he's called us to live. It ought to be. Unfortunately, it hasn't always been, but it certainly should be.

Because after all, if we really, really believe that the Lord could come at any moment, which we ought to believe because that's what the Bible tells us. People say, but what about, you know, aren't there certain prophecies and things that need to be fulfilled? No, not for the rapture. There are certain prophecies that must be fulfilled for Christ to return again.

And here's the interesting twist on everything. We see things going on in the world that indicate to us that the second coming of Christ must be somewhere in the not too distant future because the events that had to occur have occurred and are continuing to occur. Israel had to be back in their land.

They've been there for over 50 years now. Europe had to come together as it once was under the Roman power. And it's moving back in that direction again.

And there were other things that had to take place. Those things have either taken place or are currently taking place. So all of those things give us, you know, a reason to say, hey, it looks like the second coming is soon.

But here's the, here's the clincher. The rapture comes before the second coming. It precedes the second coming by at least a seven-year period.

So we have got that sort of double incentive because I see the world moving in the direction of preparation for the second coming of Christ. That tells me that the rapture is even that much closer. And so in closing tonight, I just would remind you that now is a time to be as serious as you can possibly be about the Lord.

It's time to cast off the works of darkness that Paul would say to the Romans to put on the armor of light. And he says it right here, 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. That's where we ought to be right now in anticipation of the Lord's coming.

If he doesn't come as soon as we think, then that's all right. He's just giving us more time. But if he comes sooner than we think, we don't have to worry about it because we're ready.

How do I know that I'm ready for sure? Well, it starts with that receiving of Christ. Receiving him personally as your Lord and Savior and then walking with him, following him. You know, the proof that we really have received him and know him is the fact that we're walking with him.

And as we do that, we can have that confidence that should that trumpet sound, that we're ready to go. If you hear the trumpet and you don't go, you missed it because it happens too quick. You can't prepare

once the event is in action.

You've got to be prepared before it hits. So God help us to be ready, loving Jesus, believing in him, following him, serving him. That's what we're called to do.

And we can rest. We can lie down at night in peace, knowing there is a judgment coming. But thank God by his grace and goodness, I am not appointed to wrath, but to obtain salvation.

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