



# HG5: 1 Thessalonians (5/6) 'The Hope Of Christ's Coming'

## 1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:10

### Home Group Sermon Notes

2<sup>nd</sup> November 2008 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**Introduction:** The church in Thessalonica mistakenly believed, along with many of the early Christians, that Jesus would return during their lifetime and it looks as though this created a bit of a crisis. It may have been that one of their friends had died and were they concerned their friend would miss out or be at a disadvantage. Paul responds to their concerns and answered their doubts; giving words of encouragement and explaining how Jesus' return offers hope to the believer and comfort to the broken hearted. Jesus' return is, probably, one of the most mind-boggling, difficult, supernatural aspects of the Christian faith to understand and, as a consequence, has pretty much fallen by the wayside and been lost down the years in endless controversies/speculations - yet it's one of the most distinctive Christian beliefs we have. It is known as eschatology (Not to be mistaken for escapology!). It's a theological word that has its roots in two Greek words *eschatos*, meaning last and *logos* meaning word. And so when we use the term eschatology, it literally means *the last word* and is known as the doctrine of the last times. Some people ridicule this doctrine/belief of the Christian faith and argue that the Church has been waiting for 2000 years and Jesus has not returned yet. However, Peter points out (2 Peter 3:9) that God keeps his promises whether we believe them or not and, whilst His seeming delay is a trial to the church, it's an opportunity for the lost to find Jesus before it's too late.

**1) Return:** Jesus is coming again, 4:13-15: Paul taught that Jesus was coming again and wrote, vs15 that this hope was: *According to the Lord's own word* (John 5:24-29; 11:21-27). Paul uses the word sleep to describe believers who died - a term that is never used in the NT of anyone but believers. Jesus said of Jairus daughter: *She is sleeping* (Mark 5:39; John 11:11-13.). There's a wonderful comfort in this - death, for the believer, is nothing more than sleep. The Bible teaches that the body goes to sleep, but the soul goes to be with the Lord (Philippians 1:20-24). The OT taught this (Job 14:13-15; 19:23-27; Psalm 16:9-11; Daniel 12:2) and Jesus taught it (Matthew 22:23-33). However, the word sleep is not applied to Jesus. Paul was very careful to state that Jesus died vs14, rather than fell asleep and, it is because He died and rose again that the fear of death is taken away.

**2) Resurrection:** the Christian dead will rise, 4:16: All of us have lost a loved one. And, no matter how long it's been, we never stop loving them; we never stop missing them and, if they died a Christian, we never stop longing for the day when we can be together again. The good news is that this day is not far away! Carol, as with many Christians, has a hope in the resurrection and a hope that Jesus is coming back from heaven with our Christian loved ones, and we will meet again in the most joyful reunion there has ever been! Paul writes, vs16, that Jesus himself will come down from heaven and give a *shout of command* just as He did outside the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:43). In John 5:28 we read that those: *in the graves shall hear His voice*. Have you ever wondered why Jesus called Lazarus' by his name when he told him to come out? Because if he hadn't, all the tombs in the graveyard would have opened up. Paul writes, vs16, that the voice of an archangel will sound (suggesting that the angelic hosts will share in the victory shout when Jesus comes) followed by *the trumpet call of God*. In the Bible, trumpets were used to announce special times, events and seasons; to declare war; and to gather people for a journey (Numbers 10). When God gave the Law to Israel, the event was preceded by a trumpet blast (Exodus 19:18-20).

**3) Rapture:** Living believers caught up, 4:17: Theologians continue to debate when Jesus will return and there are several different schools of thought:

- ⇒ **Post-millennialist:** who believe that Jesus will come after the 1000 years (Revelation 20:1-10) and that this will usher in a period of peace and prosperity which will usher in the second coming.
- ⇒ **Pre-millennialist:** who believe that Jesus will return *before* the 1000 years and set up his kingdom on earth.
- ⇒ **Pre-tribulation pre-millennialist:** who believe that Jesus comes before the millennium and before the tribulation.
- ⇒ **A-millennialist:** who believe that it is not to be interpreted literally at all and only exists in the life of a believer.

Some of you may have read the *Left Behind* series of novels based on the book of Revelation by the American authors Tim Lahaye and Jerry Jenkins? I read them all. And, whilst they are weaving prophecy with fiction, I found them to be interesting, uneasy and thought provoking read. They paint a graphic picture of a world thrown into turmoil when all the believers are taken to a 'better place' and they give a plausible explanation for the way in which the anti-Christ comes to power. They suggest that the rapture of the church takes place before the period of tribulation and I'm inclined to agree with them. In this scenario, millions of people will vanish instantly creating absolute chaos. The world will wonder what has happened, except those who know something of what the Bible teaches. Those who attend church, know about Jesus, but don't know Jesus. And it is those people, who are not Christians at the rapture who will, I believe, be the believing remnant when the 'Church' is taken out of the world. The world will be caught by surprise because they will not hear God's Word or heed His warnings. God warned Noah the Flood was coming; yet only eight people believed and were saved (1 Peter 3:20). Lot warned his family that the city would be destroyed but they would not listen (Genesis 19:12-14). Jesus used the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of his return in Matthew 24:37-39 and Luke 17:26-30. In Matthew 24:40-41. Jesus said: *Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left.* The parallel passage in Luke 17:34 reads: *On that night, two people will be asleep in one bed; one will be taken and the other left.* When the Lord returns for His Church we will meet him in person. We have walked with Jesus by faith now: *we shall see Him as He is, and become like Him* (1 John 3:2). It will be a *glorious* and *everlasting* meeting. **Glorious**, because we shall have glorified bodies. The suffering we endure today will be transformed into glory when He returns (John 17:22-24; Romans 8:17-19; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18). **Everlasting**, because we will be, vs17: *forever with the Lord*.

The word rapture is not used in these verses, but that is the literal meaning of 'caught up.' The Latin word *rappo* means 'to seize, to carry off' and we get the English word rapture from it. It's worth spending a few moments thinking about the different Greek translations of the word rapture because each meaning adds a special truth to our understanding of Jesus' return.

**To catch away speedily.** This is the translation of Acts 8:39, where the Spirit: *suddenly took Philip away*, after he had led the Ethiopian to faith.

**To seize by force.** (Acts 23:10). Paul is saying that when Jesus returns, we will be snatched from the earth to meet Him in the air. At least I hope this is what it refers to and not that some Christians will be so attached to the world that they must be dragged away kicking and screaming!

**To claim for one's own self.** This views the rapture from Jesus' viewpoint, coming to claim His bride.

**To move to a new place.** This was promise in John 14:2-3, to prepare a home for us and to return to take us to that place. *I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

**To rescue from danger.** (Acts 23:10). This suggests that the church will be taken home before the time of Tribulation that will come to the world, 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9 seem to support this.

**4) Response:** It is our Responsibility, 5:1-10: But Paul's teaching doesn't just stop there. He recognises the eternal differences that Jesus' return will make for those who believe and those who don't, so he asks them to consider their response to the Gospel of Jesus.

**a) Expectancy or Surprise? 5:1-3:** When Paul taught about the *day of the Lord*, he would have explained it as a day of judgment: a time when God will judge the world. The Thessalonians were asking about times and dates, just as the disciples had asked Jesus (Mark 14:4; Acts 1:6). Why were they asking this question? Not, it seems, out of idle curiosity, but for practical reasons. The Thessalonians thought they could be better prepared for the judgement if they knew when Jesus would return - slightly naïve, perhaps, but understandable none-the-less. In Mark 13:32, Jesus said: *No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.* Jesus told the disciples before he ascended to the Father, Acts 1:7: *It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.* Paul was able to say, 5:2: *For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night ...* Because it was an extension of Jesus teaching about himself. Thieves don't tell us when they are coming. They make no announcement of their arrival and it's not their habit to send us a postcard in advance. A thief enters silently and unobtrusively, does his work and that, says Paul, and Jesus, is the way Jesus will come. In vs3, Paul is referring to those who are complacent; those who say *peace and safety* (that is, they imagine they are secure – a false sense of security) *destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.* Jesus said in Matthew 24:44: *The Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.* Revelation 1:7 makes the point that when Jesus returns: *Every eye will see him.* We don't quite know how that will work. God is omnipresent and so it should present him with little difficulty! However, with the advance of global communications, live satellite links etc., any occurrence, anywhere in the world, can be on our TV screens within seconds of it actually taking place. Whilst, a few years ago that might have seemed an impossibility, today it's a reality. The world will be enjoying a time of false peace and security before these cataclysmic events occur (Read Joel 2:31; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Isaiah 2: 2-21 for a description of this period).

Whilst we don't know what the sign of Jesus' return will be, it will be so terrifying, so frightening, it will produce fear among the nations of the earth, Luke 21:26: *Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.* As we look for signs of Jesus' return there will be false messiahs, telling us that they are the Second coming of Jesus. Jesus knew this would happen, Luke 21:8: *Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name claiming 'I am he' and then 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.* Babies, like burglars, don't make an appointment before the turn up. But the point about being pregnant is that the baby is definitely coming at some point. You don't know when, but there's an inevitability about it. A pregnant woman needs to have her bag packed and be ready for the baby's arrival. And it's the same with Jesus' return. So, putting the two illustrations together, we can say that Jesus' coming will be *sudden and unexpected* (like a thief in the night), and *sudden and unavoidable* (like labour at the end of pregnancy). We don't know when and we can't find out. But it's definitely going to happen. And when it happens, vs3, no one will miss it

**b) Light or Darkness? 5:4-5:** What does Paul mean when he refers to us being sons of light and not belonging to the darkness? Paul is reminding us, once again, in case we missed the point in previous chapters, to live holy lives. Why? Because we are *sons of the light* and we should not live as those who belong to the darkness. Paul is talking about Christian discipleship. He's talking about how, if we follow Jesus we live in the light. If we don't, we live in darkness. Romans 13:12-13: *The night is nearly over, the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light ...* So the question Paul asks us, is this: Do we belong to the night or to the day? Do we know Jesus, the Messiah as our own personal Saviour? Has the light of Jesus Christ shone upon us (John 8:12)? A mark of a true Christian is their eagerness for the coming of Jesus. As we grow in the Lord, we not only look for His appearing, but we love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). Because we have this hope in Him, we keep our lives pure so that we may not be ashamed at His coming (1 John 2:28-3:3).

**c) Sober or Drunk? 5:6-8:** To make the contrast more vivid, Paul pictured two groups of people: one who were drunk and asleep while the others were awake and alert (To be alert means: being sober-minded; living with our eyes open; wide-awake and ready). So darkness, sleep and drunkenness are three reasons why people are unprepared for the return of the Lord. Some people are morning people, while others are evening people. Some people are wide awake before the alarm clock rings; hit the floor running and never have to yawn or throw cold water in their faces. Others wake up slowly, first one eye then the other and slowly shift gears as they move into the day. So, when it comes to the return of Jesus we must all be morning people: awake, alert, sober and ready for the dawning of that wonderful new day. Sober-minded believers are not complacent, but neither are they frustrated and afraid. They hear the tragic news of today yet don't lose heart. They experience the difficulties of life, but don't give up. They know the future is in God's hands and live each day calmly and obediently. Paul highlights the need for us to be properly armed for the Christian warfare. When we dress up we are to put on, vs8: *faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.* Only the 'armour of light' will adequately protect us in these days before our Jesus returns. It's time to wake up, clean up and dress up.

**d) Salvation or Judgement? 5:9-10:** The prophet Amos said: *Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light ... pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness.* Some Thessalonians were afraid of Jesus' return and Paul responds to these concerns. Firstly, vs9: *God did not appoint us to suffer wrath* (to endure the condemnation our sins deserve) *but to receive salvation* (rescue from judgment) *through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Christians have always experienced tribulation but I don't believe Christians will experience the day of the Lord - that awful period of judgment that God will send on the earth - it's not part of God's plan for us. Secondly, Jesus died for us so that, vs10: *... we may live together with him if we are awake or asleep.*

**Conclusion:** Paul was writing to a group of 'faint hearted immature Christians' to give them comfort with the news of Jesus' return and taught that we have absolutely nothing to fear if we live according to His plans and purposes. Paul wrote how we need to be ready for Jesus' return. How we need: to live in the light, not the darkness; to be alert and self-controlled; to be responsible and sensible and not descending into immorality. How we shouldn't: give up our jobs; expect Jesus to come back at 2am in the morning; fill up our lives with so many activities that we have no space to think and pray. But let me ask you a question: are you ready for Jesus' return? It's a very important question because we need to be ready. The Scottish preacher, Robert Murray McCheyne, used to ask people: *Do you think Jesus Christ will return today?* Most of them would reply: *No, not today.* Then McCheyne would say: *Then, my friend, you had better be ready: for He is coming at such an hour as ye think not* (Luke 12:40).



## ***HG5: 1 Thessalonians (5/6)*** ***'The Hope Of Christ's Coming'***

**1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:10**

### **Home Group Study Sheet**

2<sup>nd</sup> November 2008 - Revd Paul A. Carr

COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.*

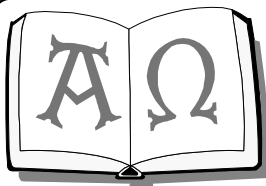
#### **Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins)**

In this passage, Paul (the apostle) talks a lot about expecting the unexpected. Share with your group, what you consider to be, the most unexpected, yet exciting, experience you've experienced in your life?



#### **Looking Upwards - Worship (10 mins)**

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



#### **Looking Upwards - Bible Study (40 mins)**

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

1: Paul (the rector) suggested that the doctrine of the return of Jesus is: "... *one of the most distinctive Christian beliefs we have.*" Would you agree with this statement? Do you find the physical return of Jesus easy to accept or, do you, like many others, struggle with this core belief?

2: Do you think (the apostle) Paul's teaching about the 'resurrection of the dead' is a comfort to those who mourn the loss of loved ones? In what ways might grief be different for a Christian than for a non-Christian, 4:13-18?

3: If you have you read the 'Left Behind' series of books by Tim Lahaye and Jerry Jenkins, how has this shaped your thinking regarding the end the rapture? Are you post or pre-millennialist or ... ? Which of the translations of the word 'rapture' best describes your understanding of the rapture?

4: Why are the examples of a thief and labour pains, 5:2-3, helpful analogies of the day of the Lord?

5: The return of the Lord in this way can be a frightening thought can't it? Take a few moments to: a) reflect on, and affirm, your own relationship with Jesus; b) pray for those nearest and dearest to you who don't know Jesus for themselves.

6: Jesus gave a warning about the many false Messiah's who will claim to be His second coming, Luke 21:8: *Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name claiming 'I am he' and then 'The time is near.' Do not follow them.* How can we know with some certainty that those claiming to be Jesus are false Messiah's? What should we be looking for?

7: A recurring theme throughout 1 Thessalonians is the need for Christians to live holy lives. Paul (the apostle) makes the contrast between 'light and darkness' and 'sober and drunk' and he explains that our defensive weapons are the virtues of faith, love and hope 5:8. In what ways can we clothe ourselves with these virtues? How can we help others to do the same?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



### Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



### Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

*(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).*

