

Study Guide: “Thinking About the Rapture”

Carter Sanger, May 2009

Introduction

Last week we looked closely at Matthew 24 in which Jesus describes the coming destruction of the temple and Jerusalem as a judgment upon Israel for “killing the prophets” and ultimately the Messiah. That judgment would be the birth pains of Christianity apart from Judaism. God would have no confusion. Only those believing in His Son would be saved. The time for Jewish tradition derived from Old Testament ceremony was past. The ceremony was a means of understanding the coming Christ. Since Christ had come, the purpose of the ceremony was fulfilled. This day of judgment that would mark the end of Old Testament ceremony (tied to the temple) was a significant day. While it was talked about as imminent, it had yet to come at the time of Paul’s writing of his letter to the Thessalonians. In the meantime, followers of Jesus were dying and people in the Thessalonian church were afraid those that had died would miss the glory of it. This is the occasion of this passage.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

- What is Paul’s purpose in the passage that follows?

I. Destiny

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. Paul writes to explain how they are to live

- How does Paul say they are to live? How do you apply this to living in the 21- century?
- What is the reason we can live so differently? What is our destiny? How does this speak to people who bow before Jesus as King? How does this speak to people who don’t?
- From what are Christians saved?

II. Destination

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

- Where does Paul say believers will go after they meet Jesus in the air?
- Paul alludes to the Old Testament (cf Ex 19:9-14) and Triumphal entries in Roman times. How does this help our understanding of the *purpose* of this text? Why do you think Paul uses such powerful metaphors for his readers?

III. Death of death

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:17

- Who is it that will rise first? How does this statement help accomplish Paul’s original intent of informing the church?
- As a conquering general marched triumphantly into the city, he marched with his conquered enemies before him to be put to death in view of all the citizens. What is being put to death in Jesus’ triumphant return? (cf Rev 20:11-14)
- This passage speaks of the resurrection. A more pronounced passage is found 1 Corinthians 15. Read 1 Cor 15:51-56. What is transformed? When will this happen?
- How does Paul describe the transformation of believers? How does John describe it in Revelation 21:4? Can you see how these descriptions offer encouragement in times of suffering?

Wrap-up

Read Psalm 47.

- How does this Psalm relate to the final day of the Lord?
- To what do you bow? What is it that you trust in?