

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

Evangelist W. Paul Redmond Sr.

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Are You Ready for the Rapture? (Part 6) I Thessalonians 4:13-18

Last month we continued looking at evidence for a pre-tribulation rapture. We are on the third piece of evidence—The Imminency of Christ’s return. We concluded with just a brief mention of Philippians 3:20-21. We will pick up at that point right now.

Philippians 3:20-21 says, *“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”* We will look at verse 21 later in the message, so right now I want to focus on verse 20. Let me briefly mention the context of Philippians 3:20-21. Earlier in the chapter Paul had talked about his desire to know Christ even better than he had previously known him (3:10). He then talked about pressing on in service to God and encouraged other believers to do the same (3:13-16). He continues with a few comments about false teachers who will not follow Christ (3:17-19). After discussing the believer’s walk and service to Christ, Paul gives a two part conclusion—we should desire to be like Christ now because this world is not our home, and one day He will change us to be like Him.

The word conversation does not mean, as we normally use the word, two people talking to each other; rather, it refers to citizenship. As one songwriter said, “This world is not my home, I’m just passing through.” Why do we care so much about this world? I know there are some things that we have to do here because we are living on this earth. However, most believers are more concerned with things right now on this earth than they are about eternal things. That is what Paul is trying to get these Philippian believers, and us, to realize—this

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earth, and the things on it, are not the most important aspect of life. In fact, our citizenship is not of this world. Stop focusing on now and focus on eternity. Do what has to be done while on this earth, but focus mostly on the things of Christ.

Because our citizenship and focus should be on heaven, we should “*look*” for Christ. The word look means “to expect anxiously; to await eagerly; the combination of words indicate the eager but patient waiting.” It reminds me of one family inviting another to their house. The family coming has to take care of some important business and cannot be sure of the exact time that they can come. The other family is busy preparing the meal. Every so often, the mother or dad sends one of the children to look out the window to see if the other family has arrived. The child will announce, “Not yet.” The family will continue making all the preparations while they are continuing to look for the other family to arrive. They do not sit around and complain that the other family has not arrived. Remember the definition of look involves “eager but patient waiting.” They want them to come, but they also understand that they have not finished their business. They will come as soon as it is over.

That must be the attitude we have in relation to Christ. Every so often we can think, “He may come today.” We then will go on with the tasks at hand, but often thinking that He may come. We do not complain that He has not already come, but we stay busy doing what He has commanded us to do. We also do not fail to look for Him. Just because He has not come does not mean that He will not come. That should never be our attitude, but it so often is. He will come! The fact that He did not come yesterday or years earlier does not mean that He will not come. In fact, it means that we are closer to His coming than ever before. That makes great sense. It does not take a genius to figure that out. However, we often end up with the same attitude as unbelievers. We think, “He has not come, so He must not be coming.” No, may we never think that way! He has not come, but He is coming, and it may be today! We must continue to look for Christ!

The very idea of the word look implies that it could happen at any moment. The coming is certain, but the time is not. Every generation of believers has been given this command. For those in the past, they did not live to see the “*blessed hope*” become a reality. But because we are still on this earth, we may see Jesus come for us. We do not know when, so we should, we must, be looking for Him.

Another verse that describes the imminency of Christ’s return is Colossians 3:4. The verse says, “*When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*” The word appear means “to render apparent; to manifest; to show; to make plain.” As He did in Philippians, the Holy Ghost had Paul to mention Christ’s coming in the midst of writing about living the Christian life. Paul writes in verses 1 and 2, “*Seek those things which are above*” and “*Set your affection on things above.*” Why should we be concerned with heavenly things more than with earthly things? Because when Christ appears, you will be ashamed if you are thinking more about, and doing more, earthly things than heavenly things. Following the mention of Christ’s appearance, believers are commanded to “*mortify therefore your members,*” put off attitudes of the flesh, “*lie not one to another,*” and to put on things that are pleasing to God (3:5-15). All of the commands not to do something or to do something are based on the thought that Christ may appear at any moment. If you are living like Him, you will be ready and excited when He comes. If you are not living like Him when He comes, you will be ashamed.

The next verse about the imminency of Christ’s return is I Thessalonians 1:9-10. It says, “*For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*” Paul is writing about the conversion of the Thessalonians. Notice that the result of salvation is “*to serve and to wait.*” One cannot be a true servant of God without waiting for Jesus to come. Notice that the waiting is not a

sitting around and doing nothing. It is combined with serving. The word wait means “to wait for someone whose coming is expected, perhaps with the added idea of patience and confidence; the present tense refers to continual waiting.” The passage here in I Thessalonians reemphasizes what Philippians and Colossians have said—Christ is coming and the believer should be looking and ready when He comes. As the definition says, the coming is expected. However, as we know from what we have looked at, the exact time is never revealed. That is why we are told to look, to wait, and Christ shall appear. He is coming, but we do not know when He will come. We must be ready at all times.

The last two verses that I will mention that prove the imminency of Christ’s return are I Timothy 6:14 and James 5:8. I Timothy 6:14 says, “*That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Here the word appearing is focusing on the brightness of Christ’s coming. The other passages focused more on the reality of His coming; here the focus is on how He looks when He comes. However, the context is very similar. Believers are commanded to flee wicked things, “*fight the good fight of faith,*” and “*lay hold on eternal life*” (6:11-12). All of this is in light of Christ’s magnificent appearing. Again, the coming is certain, but the time is not. We must faithfully serve Christ at all times, so we can be ready when He does come.

James 5:8 says, “*Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*” The Holy Ghost leads James, as you would expect, to write something very similar to what Paul writes. The particular group may be different, but they are still believers just like the Colossians, Thessalonians, etc., that Paul wrote to. James had given commands throughout the book about how believers should live their lives. As he is about to finish, he gives the reasons behind those commands—Christ is coming soon. Every believer will live differently if they really believe that Christ will come at any moment. Christ’s imminent return is found throughout Scripture. He is coming at any moment. We must be ready when He

comes. That is the third piece of evidence for the pre-tribulation rapture.

Now we turn our attention to the third part of the message. Having considered the expressions and evidence about the rapture, we now see **The Elements of the Rapture**. Turning back to I Thessalonians 4, we see The Sounds that are made at the time that the rapture takes place. The first sound is *Of the Master*. Notice the words of I Thessalonians 4:16: *“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.”* The verse begins by saying *“the Lord himself.”* The Lord will not send an angel, even the highest angel to gather His bride to Himself. In talking about the marriage relationship, we noted that no bridegroom would ever send someone else to bring his bride to him. Likewise, Jesus will not send anyone else for the church. When the time is ready for us to be joined unto Him, He will come Himself. What a glorious truth is found in those three words! Jesus is coming for us—Himself! Not another. Are you ready for Jesus Himself to come for you? Rejoice about that until next month.