

# The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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Are You Ready for the Rapture? (Part 5)

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

Last month we began looking at the third piece of evidence for the pre-tribulation rapture–The Imminency of Christ’s Return. I mentioned how even good men get sidetracked by talking about and looking at things other than Christ. The Bible nowhere tells us to look for anything or anyone else. Christ should be the focus of our Christian life, and we should be looking for Him to return for us. Nothing else has to appear and no prophecy has to be fulfilled. As we will see in several verses, Christ could return at any moment to rapture us out of this world. That should not be cause for fear; instead, it should be cause for rejoicing.

The first passage that we will look at that teaches the imminent return of Christ is John 14:3. Christ is speaking to His apostles in the upper room on the night of His betrayal and arrest. They have finished the passover meal, Jesus has washed His apostles’ feet, and He has announced that Judas will betray Him and Peter will deny Him. Their hearts are troubled after being told of the betrayal and denial, but Jesus tells them not to be troubled. He reminds them of the mansions that are already in Heaven and then says, “*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*” Some of the words used throughout this passage are used in relation to marriage. In this passage and especially in verse 3, Jesus is talking about Himself as the bridegroom returning for His bride the church.

Let us look at a few of these words to help us understand the passage better. This passage, as wonderful as it is, is often among the most misquoted in all of Scripture. Many people and songwriters have perpetuated the notion that Jesus is preparing a mansion right

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now. That is not what the passage says. As I mentioned earlier, He says the mansions are already there–“*In my Father’s house are many mansions.*” The verb are is present tense. He did not have to go prepare them. The verse ends with the statement, “*I go to prepare a place for you.*” These two sentences are often transposed and run together–Jesus is preparing a mansion. Again, the verse does not say that. The mansions **are** there already. They were there when Christ spoke it 2,000 years ago. But He is preparing a place. What is the place? Some think it refers to Calvary. That sounds good, but it does not match the language in the passage. The word prepare means “to make ready; to make the necessary preparations; to get everything ready; the word is used of preparing a feast or supper.” That makes me think that the “preparing” being done by Christ is the preparing of the marriage supper of the Lamb. We can only speculate as to what that involves. The only other time the marriage supper is mentioned is in Revelation 19:7-10. Not many details are given, but it is so wonderful that John falls down to worship. It will be a wonderful time when our salvation is complete, and we are joined with Christ forever. That is what I believe this verse is talking about–Jesus is preparing the marriage supper.

After promising to prepare the marriage supper, Jesus states in verse 3, “*I will come again.*” Jesus Himself will come for us. That is a blessed promise. He is not sending someone else such as an angel or some great saint like Moses or Elijah. Jesus loves each of us so much that He is coming for us Himself. He is coming to “*receive*” us to Himself. The word receive means “to take with one’s self; to join with one’s self.” It is the same word that is used in Matthew 1:20 and 24 where the angel tells Joseph to take Mary as his wife. As Joseph took Mary, so Jesus is coming to take His bride, the church, to be with Him.

This passage is better understood when we have some understanding of the Jewish practice of marriage. Their customs were different than ours. The Bible gives a little description of Jewish customs, and others we can learn from history. Once the

bridegroom received permission to marry his bride-to-be, he would return to the place that they would eventually live and make everything ready. They may have had an idea as to how long it would be, but the date would not be certain because the bridegroom would only come back for his bride when everything was ready. The bride was expected to be ready whenever the bridegroom showed up. In my mind, I can picture the bride looking out the door thinking that this could be the day that the bridegroom comes. Every day she would expect him even more. When everything was ready, the bridegroom came and he would take his bride to be with him.

That custom of Jewish marriage is exactly what is described in John 14:2-3. The apostles would have understood what Jesus was saying. He is the bridegroom, and the church is the bride. He has gone to prepare the marriage supper and when everything is just the way He wants it be for His bride, then He will come back for her. I suppose that there may have been an earthly bride who became lazy and indifferent while waiting for her bridegroom. I say that I suppose it may have happened, but I cannot imagine that it did. I know what it is like to wait for a marriage to take place. When Tamatha and I were married, I could not wait for the day of the wedding. Our customs are different from what the Jews used to do, but the anticipation would have been the same. Some girl may not have been looking for her bridegroom, but I really doubt that she failed to do so. If that is true of an earthly marriage, then why do we get lazy and indifferent in waiting for our heavenly bridegroom? Why are we so tied down to this world? Our bridegroom is coming to take us out of this world. This is not our permanent home. He is coming to take us to our permanent home. We should be looking for Him. As the earthly Jewish bride did not know exactly when her bridegroom was coming and had to be ready at any moment, so you and I who are saved, the church, must be ready at any moment for Jesus to come for us.

I spent a good bit of time on the John 14:3 passage because I wanted to make it absolutely clear that Jesus will come at any

moment. There are several other passages that I want to mention, and there is more to cover in the message, so I will not spend as much time on these remaining passages. The next one is Acts 1:11. In this account, Jesus is talking with his disciples on the way to the Mount of Olives. He knows that He will ascend to Heaven at this time, but they do not. He is talking with them up to the moment of His ascension. His last words are Acts 1:8—*“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* After giving the command to spread the Gospel, Christ ascends to Heaven. The disciples stare in amazement until two men (angels) tell them in verse 11, *“Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”* This verse confidently assures us that Jesus Himself will come for His own. It also teaches us that the rapture could happen at any moment. The disciples did not know that Jesus was going to ascend at that moment. We know that Jesus was with the disciples for forty days after His resurrection. But they did not know that it was only going to be forty days. Unless I have forgotten, Jesus never told the disciples that He was departing from them after forty days. When the time came, He departed. The angels promised that He would return *“in like manner.”* There are many things that may be involved in the phrase *“in like manner,”* but one of them is that He will come at any moment. We must be ready when He does come.

The next passage is I Corinthians 15:51-52. In this chapter, Paul declares and defends the importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. One thing that Paul emphasizes is that because Christ resurrected, we can and will be resurrected. If Christ had not come out of the grave, then we would have no hope. But Christ did conquer death. Therefore Paul could write, *“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall*

*be changed.*” We will cover the details of what happens at the rapture later in the message, but right now I just want to focus on “*the trumpet shall sound.*” The Holy Ghost did not lead Paul to say that anything else would happen because there is nothing else to happen. He says that the dead will be raised and the living will be changed. The verse does not describe catastrophic events that will happen nor anything else. It just says “*the trumpet shall sound.*” It could happen at any moment. Nothing has to be fulfilled. Are you ready for the trumpet to sound?

The next verse is Philippians 3:20-21. Notice the wonderful truths found in these verses: “*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 discuss the change in our bodies later, but right now just focus on the word look. It means “to expect anxiously; to await eagerly; the construction of the words indicate an eager but patient waiting.” As the definition shows, one does not become angry when the person that is looked for does not come. It is eager but patient. I will pick up with this thought next month, but I close with this question, Are you looking for Him?