

Assurance: The Certainty of Christ's Return

Dr. Glenn Robertson

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We know the Messiah will come again because He came the first time.

To those who scoff at the second coming of Christ saying it has been a long time and he still has not come. Remember, it was a long time between the prophecies and Christ's birth. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He came, fulfilling prophecies, some going back to the Garden of Eden. At the right time, Jesus came. At God's time, He will come again.

Our world and our nation are filled with troubling things. Jesus warned us that in the last days every nation would hate us because of His name. That seems to be our day. If we are the last generation, we must take hope, Jesus is coming soon. However, I must warn you as I have often warned you, that you do not put your hope in the escape of trouble with the rapture. The Apostles never expected to escape trouble and they never taught the rapture idea.

⁹ "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. (Matt. 24:9 NAS)

⁹ I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance *which are* in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. (Rev. 1:9 NAS)

If the Apostles did not feel they would escape tribulation why do you think you will? "God will save the church out of the Great Tribulation." Says, who? Not the Apostles. Not John who wrote Revelation. The word tribulation is most often used in the New Testament to speak of Christian persecution. Jesus even calls it a great tribulation in which most of God's people will not survive (Matt. 24:21). So it is used in Revelation to speak of the church under persecution. Even now, throughout the world, the church is suffering persecution. They have not been able to escape this world-wide tribulation, so why do you think you will? – Because some modern prophecy soothsayer says so?

Yet, Jesus is going to come back again. Let's hear from the Apostle Paul who wrote to the Thessalonians about Jesus' second coming.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 NASB

¹³ **But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.** ¹⁴ **For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus**

¹⁵ **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, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.** ¹⁶ **For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.**

¹⁷ **Then 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.** ¹⁸ **Therefore comfort one another with these words.**

1. Jesus will return, and with His return, the dead will be raised.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul addresses a question they have raised about those who have died. **Do the dead in Christ get to partake in the second coming of Christ?** It seems they believed Jesus would return in their lifetime. Yet, some had died (fallen asleep). Do they miss out on the second coming? Paul writes to assure them that those who die in Christ will rise from the dead at his second coming.

The hope of Jesus' second coming gives us hope in the face of grief.

We are not to grieve as those who have no hope. The world suffers grief in the blank stare of hopelessness. They may hope the spirits of the dead move on, but they have no real assurance. Hindus hope in a constant reincarnation until they can enter nirvana. Islam hopes in paradise, but with no assurance they will get in. Shinto religion believes the dead are spirits in the underworld. Atheists there is nothing after death. "You are dead. That's it. Life is over." Atheism is the harshest of all. It offers no meaning for life. All you have lived comes to nothing.

Yet, we have faith that the dead will rise. All of us will be given new bodies in a new world. Our loves, our hopes, our lives will remain with meaning and purpose because Jesus has been raised from the dead.

Note the sequence: Resurrection, transformation, ascension.

Paul assures us that Jesus will return, and those who have died are not separated from Him.

¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

After Jesus appears with his saints, the angel's trumpet sounds and two things happen: The dead are raised from their graves; and the living in Christ are transformed into their eternal bodies. After this, the saints are caught up to be with Christ in the air.

¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

¹⁷ Then 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.

Jesus comes to the earth again. He brings with him all the spirits of those who have died in faith in Him (v.14). They come with him on the clouds. This is His appearance. Yet what follows is the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the living (vv. 16-17). The saints who return with Jesus are in their spirit-bodies. They then are raised up from the graves as resurrected bodies. Thus, the resurrection of the dead occurs.

Following immediately after, those who remain alive at Christ's return are transformed into their immortal bodies. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 15 that our mortal flesh cannot enter into the kingdom of God. It must be transformed. (below) This happens at the last trumpet. When they are transformed (which happens in an instant), they join those being resurrected and they ascend together as a group up in the sky to meet Jesus in the air. This is Paul's teaching.

“Rapture” – Caught up at the resurrection (when Jesus appears)

What people call rapture is really the Latin word for being caught up. It describes the ascension of the resurrected. The Greek word here means to be seized and carried off. Yet the text also says it will happen *at the same time* as the dead being raised up, and be done *together* with them. These are not separate events, just differ aspects of the same resurrection event. In 1830, Irving and Darby introduced the idea that rapture was a separate event. It would be a secret event that happens before Jesus appears in the sky. In this way, the church escapes the bad stuff of the Great Tribulation. Yet, that is not what the Scripture actually says, as I have pointed out to you.

C. Jesus will return in the sky with the angelic trumpet call.

Paul's teaching follows Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 24. This passage also agrees with Paul's teaching on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Let us look at these passages and see how the transformation of the living happens at the last trumpet, as well as the resurrection. Note these things:

- **Visible appearance of Christ in the sky.**
- **Angel's sounding of a trumpet.**
- **Ascension of the living and resurrected souls.**

Matt. 24:29-31 NASB

²⁹ "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, ³⁰ and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky,

and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. ³¹ "And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

1 Cor. 15:50-52 NASB

⁵⁰ Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

What people call the rapture is really the second coming of Christ as the dead and transformed living ascend to meet Jesus in the air. The sequence is Jesus appears, trumpet sound, dead raised & living changed then they ascend.

So, to the question, Will the dead in Christ participate in the second coming?, the answer is yes. They come with Jesus. Then they are raised from the dead in the resurrection, as we who are alive are changed.

2. Jesus' return will not precede the rise of the antichrist.

Another passage we should look at is 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. In the first letter, Paul affirms Jesus is coming again. In the second letter, he addresses a false teaching claiming that Jesus has already come.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 NASB

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, ² that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? ⁶ And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way.

⁸ And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;

⁹ *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰ and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

¹¹ And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, ¹² in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul writes to correct a false idea that those who die before Christ's return do not participate in eternal glory. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul writes to correct another false idea, that Christ has already come. He says, No, Christ will not come until the antichrist is revealed. So let's look briefly at what Paul tells us about the rise of the antichrist.

What is the antichrist?

Everyone wants to know "Who" is the antichrist. It is best to understand what is the antichrist. If you don't know the what, you will never know the who.

- **A leader who opposes Christ.**

The Greek prefix anti means opposite or against. Paul and John both speak about the antichrist. John says there were many in the first century already (1 Jn 2:18). So, an antichrist is a leader, presumably a world leader, who rises to power, but who hates Jesus. Jesus does not mention an antichrist per se. He mentions the world hating us. In Revelation, Rome as a nation is antichrist, with the emperor as the supreme antichrist. People look toward a world figurehead as such a leader in the end.

There have been many antichrists in our world in the last century. Hitler, Stalin, for two. Progressive politicians in our day are threatening to be antichrists because they want to label Christianity as a hate religion.

- **Man of lawlessness.**

Paul actually use “man of lawlessness” instead of antichrist, but the role is the same. “Lawless” can mean either that he opposes God’s Law in immorality, etc; and it can also mean, he is a person who perverts all civil law as well as God’s law.

- **Rises in the age of the Apostacy**

The rise of the man of lawlessness happens when the apostacy occurs. Apostacy means a general revolt against God and His Laws. We are living in a day of apostacy. It is open rebellion against God and His laws. From New Age, to progressivism, to open sexual perversions demanding acceptance, to anarchy in the streets. The populace has turned a maddening mind away from God and His Laws. It has set the stage for the man of lawlessness to reign. It will be a work of Satan, as people follow this leader. That leader will oppress Christians around the world in the Great Tribulation.

Yet, we must take heart! This life is temporary. The kingdom of God lasts forever. We must never surrender our devotion to the world to get off the hook to please those who rise in rebellion against God.

Jesus is coming back again.