

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 — What Happens To Christians When They Die?

April 28, 2024

Good morning, CrossWinds! A few weeks ago, we had the funeral of a much-loved man and former elder at the church. Whenever we have a funeral, people have questions. They ask good questions about what happens to a Christian when they die. Does a Christian go directly to heaven, or is there an intermediary place? What happens to the bodies of Christians? Do we go into a state of soul sleep until Jesus returns?

These are important questions. They aren't just important questions to us. They were also some of the same questions the young Christians in the Thessalonica were asking. When Paul wrote the letter of 1 Thessalonians to them, he knew, as we saw last week, that they had developed a preoccupation with the return of Jesus; some even gave up work to wait for Jesus' return. Others were serving others less because they were consumed with the thought of Jesus' imminent return.

As they focused on Jesus' return, they questioned how things transpired when Jesus returned. Paul made the return of Jesus sound so impressive that they were worried their loved ones who died would miss this glorious day. They knew their Christian loved ones would be in heaven, but would they be stuck in heaven when Jesus returned, so they missed this wonderful day?

Look what Paul had already taught them about Jesus' return.

...how you 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, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 (ESV)

When Jesus comes back, there will be wrath against sin, but Jesus will also deliver them from his wrath. That would make it a great day.

Paul believed it was possible that Jesus might return in his lifetime. Paul didn't say Jesus would return in his lifetime, but that he could return in his lifetime. This is part of what left the Thessalonians so excited about this day. It could happen at any moment.

For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 1 Thessalonians 2:19 (ESV)

Not only were they waiting for Jesus' return, but they knew when Jesus returned, as Christians, it would be a great day for them. They were the source of Paul's great hope and joy that day.

Last week, we saw that the Thessalonians were so excited about the day of Jesus' return that by the time we get to 2 Thessalonians, some thought they might have missed it.

not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 2 Thessalonians 2:2 (ESV)

In this excitement for the return of Jesus and all the excitement of this day, they were concerned for their loved ones who died. Would they miss this day? Would they be stuck in heaven when Jesus returned? Those are the questions Paul answered this morning in our text. Let's read it together then study it.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who

are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (ESV)

In verse 13, Paul says he didn't want them to be uninformed or ignorant about what happens to a Christian when they die. At the end, in verse 18, he mentions the word comfort. What he shares in these verses is first to help the Thessalonians not be ignorant about what happens when a Christian dies and second, to comfort us in those days of loss.

These verses are intended to be pastoral in nature. They were not written to develop end-times theological graphs and timelines on the specific details of Christ's return. Unfortunately, many people have used them for that purpose. This morning, we will stick to their intended purpose, which is to be more pastoral in nature.

What happens to Christians who die?

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 (ESV)

Paul begins by saying, "I don't want you to be uninformed or ignorant. I don't want you to worry about those who died before the return of Jesus. He calls those who died "those who are asleep."

Why does he use the word sleep instead of death?

The Bible typically uses the word sleep instead of death to describe the death of Christians. It is the Greek word *koimao*. We get our English word cemetery from it. The word cemetery means the dormitory or the sleeping place. This is the optimistic way early Christians spoke about death. When Christians

die and are put in the ground, they are not dead. They are asleep until Jesus returns to wake them.

When death is described as sleep, it always refers to the bodies of Christians. The only part of us that goes into a state of unconsciousness at death is our bodies. Look how Jesus describes the death of Lazarus.

...he said to them, "[Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.](#)" John 11:11 (ESV)

We know Jesus was not asleep. He was dead. Jesus was going to wake up his dead body.

And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." [And when he had said this, he fell asleep.](#) Acts 7:60 (ESV)

Stephen was being stoned. He died. It was death from a human viewpoint, but it was sleep from God's viewpoint because his dead body would only be in the ground temporarily. One day, Jesus would wake his body from the nap of death. His spirit did not go into a state of unconsciousness in the ground; only his body did. We know that by looking at the verse before this.

And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "[Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.](#)" Acts 7:59 (ESV)

Stephen's spirit went to be with Jesus immediately upon death but his body went to sleep in the dust of the earth because Jesus would wake his dead body up.

That is why many of you are weak and ill, and [some have died](#) (see Bible footnote). 1 Corinthians 11:30 (ESV)

At first, it looks like we have an occurrence of the body of a Christian described as death, not sleep. Keep reading. If you have good Bible, like the ESV, you will notice there is a footnote on this verse that says the Greek literally

read, “some have fallen asleep.” It is the Greek word for sleep that is used here in place of the word for death. That is because the death of a Christian’s body is always temporary. Verse after verse describes death for the Christian as sleep.

Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 1 Corinthians 15:6 (ESV)

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. 1 Corinthians 15:51 (ESV)

Death, for the Christian, is called sleep because the death of our bodies is a temporary thing from which one day we will wake up. Those who die apart from Jesus will also have their bodies raised to life. They, too, will one day receive an indestructible body, but that is for them to face eternal damnation in the lake of fire. They will be awoken from temporary death to face eternal death in a body that is indestructible in the lake of fire. This is why those who die apart from Christ do not have their death spoken of as sleep. We wake from sleep refreshed. We wake from sleep to life. Those apart from Christ will have their bodies raised to eternal life. They will only have their bodies to face judgment and eternal death in the lake of fire.

Is there soul sleep?

Whenever we talk about the Christian’s body being buried and put to sleep in the ground until Jesus comes back to wake it to life, we always have people who wonder if the soul sleeps with the body. Seventh-Day Adventists claim this is what happens. The Bible flatly denies it. At the moment of our death, our souls are completely conscious from that point on for the rest of eternity.

Luke 16 is the parable of the beggar and the rich man. Lazarus died and was brought to Abraham’s side in a place of comfort. The rich man died and was

brought to a place of conscious torment, a place of fire. Neither of them died and experienced soul sleep. They died, and their soul was conscious. It was alive.

The rich man wished his soul could sleep because he was in eternal agony.

And he (the rich man) called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' Luke 16:24 (ESV)

The rich man and Lazarus sound conscious to me. Paul also says this about death.

Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8 (ESV)

Paul describes the Christian's moment of death as the moment when he/she is instantly brought home to be with Jesus. It is not a time when our soul goes to sleep. It is a time when our soul is very much awake and alive.

I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Philippians 1:23 (ESV)

Paul was confident his soul wouldn't go to sleep in death. His soul would instantly be brought to be with Christ, which would be better than life. Paul describes the death of a Christian as an upgrade. For us, death is better than life.

For Christians, you are either here on earth or with Jesus in heaven. There is no intermediary place, no purgatory. Our body goes to the cemetery, which is the dormitory, the sleeping place, where it rests until Jesus returns to wake the body up,, but our spirit is instantly with Jesus, which is far better than life.

Should we grieve when a Christian dies?

Paul says to the Thessalonians, "I do not want you to be ignorant about those who have fallen asleep or to grieve..." We should pause here. Paul doesn't

want us to grieve. Does this mean Christians shouldn't cry at a funeral? Is it wrong to shed tears when a loved child or spouse dies?

At a funeral, Christians can grieve and should grieve. Jesus grieved at the funeral of Lazarus. Jesus knew that one day in the future, Lazarus would be raised to life, but he still wept. Jesus knew that only moments later he would call Lazarus from the grave to experience revivification, yet he still wept in the face of death. Death is so painful that even though our loved one is experiencing joy in heaven, we weep not for them, but we weep for ourselves because they are loved and will be missed. When Christians cry at a funeral, it is not a sign of weak faith. It is a sign of great love for the one who went home to be with Jesus.

Paul tells us this in Romans.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Romans 12:15 (ESV)

We should cry with those who cry.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he wrote about Epaphroditus who was ill and almost died. He said these words.

Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Philippians 2:27 (ESV)

If Epaphroditus died, even though he was a Christian, Paul would have been overwhelmed by sorrow with his death, not for Epaphroditus' gain, but for the temporary loss of his companionship.

When a child we love dies or when a spouse we love dies or when a relative we love dies, there is nothing wrong with crying.

What is our hope when we grieve?

Paul said Christians are not to grieve without hope. What is that hope? Where is hope found in death for the Christian? For those who don't know Christ, death is the end. They will never see that person again. They will never hear their voice. They will never look them in the eyes again. They will never hold their hand. That is not so with a Christian. Death for the Christian is only a, "See you later." Christians never say goodbye to another believer in death. We will always see them again. That is our hope. For those apart from Jesus, there is no hope of seeing one another again. There is no reunion to anticipate. As Christians, we look forward to a great family reunion.

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 Thessalonians 2:1 (ESV)

When Jesus comes back, that is when the family reunion begins. That is when all Christians will be gathered together around Jesus. We need to get that into our hearts. This is our hope. As Christians, all of our partings from one another in death are only brief. The parents who lose a child in infancy will be with that child again when Jesus returns. Mom and dad whose son knew Jesus but was cut down by a tragic accident while only a teenager will see that son again. You will hear their voice again. You will hold their hand again. Not so for those who do not know Jesus, but that is our hope for all who know Jesus. When will this gathering happen? What are the details of this gathering when Christ returns? How will it take place? That launches Paul into a topic called the rapture.

Where do we get the concept of the rapture?

It comes from verse 17.

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,... 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (ESV)

“Will be caught up” is the Greek word *harpazo*. It means to snatch or seize by force. It is a sudden, irresistible force that moves you. It is similar to what the tornadoes in southern Iowa did this past week. A sudden irresistible force swept in and picked up people and buildings. When the Bible was translated into the Latin Vulgate, the Latin word for this was *rapio*, from which we get the word rapture. This Latin word is also where we get the English word rape. It is a sudden and irresistible force that acts upon us.

In the rest of this passage, Paul tells us four things about the rapture, this sudden gathering up of believers by Jesus at the moment of his return. He tells us. 1. The pillars of the rapture. 2. The participants in the rapture. 3. The plan of the rapture. 4. The benefits of the rapture. We will end with an addendum, “Why the rapture is probably not what you think.”

The Pillars of the Rapture

When we hear about the rapture, know it is not built on philosophical speculation. It is not a fable by well-meaning people who want to make folks feel good. It is in the Scriptures, but as we will see at the end, the rapture in the Bible is probably different from what you were taught. The three pillars upon which the rapture is built are: 1. The death of Christ. 2. The resurrection of Christ. 3. The Revelation of Christ.

The Death of Christ

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 (ESV)

To believe there will be a rapture and understand Jesus is coming back for his church to snatch them away, you have to believe in the death of Jesus. Jesus' death paid the penalty for our sins. It was the death of Jesus who forgave our sins and gave us eternal life. It is because Jesus became sin for us on the cross that his death fulfilled all the conditions required to pay the penalty for our sin. It is only because Jesus died in our place that there can be a gathering by Jesus of his people into Jesus' presence. If we were still in our sins, there is no way we could be in the presence of God. If we were still in our sin, there is no way Jesus could be able to return to gather us to himself. It is because of the death of Jesus that our souls are brought into the presence of Jesus upon our death and our bodies will one day be raised.

The Resurrection Of Christ

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 (ESV)

Jesus didn't just die for our sins, on the third day, he rose to new life. That tells us God the Father approved of the sacrifice of His son. Jesus successfully died in our place for our sins, paying for them in full. Jesus' triumph over death by his resurrection doesn't just mean triumph over death for himself but for every Christian. Jesus' resurrection guarantees our resurrection.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 (ESV)

God will treat those who have trusted in Jesus the same way he treated Jesus. He will resurrect their bodies. Jesus died but God raised his body back to life and transformed it into a resurrection body that would never get sick, get weak, be destroyed or die. It is known for its power, not its weakness. It is known for its ability, not its inability. What God did when he raised Jesus' body is what he will one day do for the body of every Christian. One day, the very same body buried in the grave will come out of that grave as an indestructible resurrection body to live forever. Jesus' resurrection body was the prototype of our resurrection bodies.

But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:23 (ESV)

First fruits means the first of the harvest, the early harvest. It was typically small, but it was a promise that only a few days later, or weeks later, a massive harvest of the rest of the grain would arrive. That was Jesus' resurrection. He was only the first to be raised to new life from the dead and given a resurrection body. He will not be the last. A massive harvest of resurrection bodies for Christians is yet to come when Jesus returns.

...Because I live, you also will live. John 14:19b (ESV)

And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. 1 Corinthians 6:14 (ESV)

...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. 2 Corinthians 4:14 (ESV)

The Thessalonians were worried their deceased loved ones would miss the great gathering of Christians on the day of Jesus' return. Paul said there was no need to worry about that. Your loved ones will get a resurrection body, too.

The Revelation of Christ

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 1 Thessalonians 4:15 (ESV)

What Paul is about to teach us about the rapture is not just built upon the death and resurrection of Jesus, but it comes as a direction revelation from Jesus. By word of the Lord means by a divine revelation. What Paul is about to tell us about how the return of Christ will transpire comes as direct revelation from Jesus. I don't know if Paul is referring to something Jesus said in the gospel or oral tradition Jesus taught that is not found in the gospel. He may be referring to information Jesus gave him directly. I don't know. We do know that Paul didn't make this up in his head. It came from Jesus, so it can be trusted.

2. The Participants In The Rapture.

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 1 Thessalonians 4:15 (ESV)

He will teach us two groups: those who are alive when Jesus returns and those who have fallen asleep. There is some interesting Greek in this verse that is lost in English translation. This Greek is extremely important to understand the significance of what he says. When it says "will not precede" those who have fallen asleep, the Greek for "will not precede" is in the double negative to emphasize the point. Maybe a better way to say this is those who are alive when Jesus comes back will certainly not or will absolutely not or will definitely not precede those who are asleep when Jesus returns. When Jesus returns, living Christians will have absolutely no advantage over dead Christians. The

deceased Christians will not miss out on the rapture. Living Christians will have no benefits over them when the rapture takes place.

3. The Plan Of The Rapture.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 (ESV)

The Lord himself will descend. This is the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus will not send his angels to take care of this at the rapture. He will be there personally. He is coming for the bride he loves, his church. In Greek, this is in the emphatic tense. The Lord Jesus Christ himself will return for us, not a substitute.

He will descend from heaven with a cry of command. In Greek, this is a military term. It describes a commanding officer screaming his orders to his troops on the field. It was said loud enough so all could hear.

When Jesus comes back, I picture him saying, "All rise," and the dead in Christ rise first! All the deceased Christians from history instantly have their bodies raised from the dust and transformed into resurrection bodies, just like Christ's resurrection body. Those bodies rise into the air to meet with and be joined to the souls of Christians in heaven.

While writing about this, I kept thinking about when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. It is a good thing he specified Lazarus by name when he called him out of the grave or all bodies would have come out of the grave, like this moment. Here is a passage from the Gospel of John that supports this.

Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. John 5:25 (ESV)

So the first group to rise from the dead are the Christians who have died. At the word of Jesus, their bodies are recomposed from dust to live again and be transformed to be just like Jesus' resurrection body and live forever. Their bodies will meet and be joined with their spirit returning from being with God.

It also says the Lord himself will descend from heaven with the voice of an archangel. Archangels are only mentioned here, and Jude 9. In Jude 9, the archangel is named Michael. Michael is also involved in the resurrection of Israel in Daniel 12. I don't have a decibel meter to measure the cry of an archangel, but I think it is loud.

At that time is also when the trumpet call of God will sound. Trumpets are used in the Old Testament for different purposes. One of their common uses was as trumpets of assembly. When you heard that trumpet blow, the nation assembled together. That appears to be what happens here. This is the trumpet call of God that assembles God's people from all of history.

...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. 1 Corinthians 15:52 (ESV)

Jesus calls his church to attention. The dead in Christ rise first getting their resurrection bodies. They are first in line. The trumpet call of God is sounded to assemble God's people.

Why do the dead in Christ rise first? Somebody once said that is because they have 6 feet further to travel to meet Jesus. That probably isn't true. Remember the Thessalonian's concern about their deceased relatives. Would they lag behind at the return of Christ? Paul's definitive answer is they will not lag behind. They are not second class citizens. They will be the first to have their

bodies rise from the dead and be transformed into resurrection bodies, just like Jesus'. Encourage those who are grieving over their loved ones with those words. On that day, there will be a great reunion of all Christians from all time in their resurrection bodies. Spouses that died, you will see them again. You will be able to hold their hand again. You will be able to hear their voice again. You will be able to look them in the eyes again. Children that died, you will see in the flesh your children that died in Christ whom you love. There will be hugging and laughing and weeping with joy.

What about those who are still alive when Jesus returns?

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (ESV)

There is the Greek word *harpazo*, which means to be forcibly caught up or snatched up as by a tornado. In Latin, it is *rapio*, from where we get the term rapture. At that time, after the dead in Christ are taken out of their graves and given resurrection bodies, the living are also swept up to meet Jesus in the clouds, and they will also have their living bodies transformed into eternal resurrection bodies.

who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Philippians 3:21 (ESV)

Think of the joy of that day. All Christians, dead and alive, will be restored to life and have resurrection bodies that last forever. Our resurrection bodies will look like our current bodies, but they will be indestructible. They will never die. From that point forward, we will always be with the Lord. Not only will we be with our loved ones again, but we will have our eyes fixed with immense gratitude

upon Jesus, who made all of this possible by his amazing grace that none of us deserve. That is good news!

4. The Benefit Of The Rapture

Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:18 (ESV)

When someone is grieving the loss of a loved one, we are to comfort them with these words. We don't grieve like other people. When a Christian dies, their spirit is with Jesus, but their body is only asleep in the grave. When Jesus returns and says, "All rise." Just as instantly as Jesus created everything out of nothing by only his word, when Jesus returns and simply says the word, the dead and decayed bodies of all Christians will instantly rise from the dead and be transformed into eternal bodies. Your deceased loved ones will not miss this great day. Parents who lost their child in infancy will be hugging them. The husband who lost his wife to cancer will be hugging her. No Christian, dead or alive, will miss this glorious day of a massive family reunion. My friends, that is a comfort for every Christian at the funeral of a loved one.

This brings us to an interesting question before we close. I need to switch hats. Instead of talking pastorally and comforting you, I want to briefly talk theologically before we close.

Addendum — The rapture may NOT be what you think.

There is a school of theology that has put great emphasis on this passage, claiming it teaches a secret rapture of the church to take us out of the world before seven years of tribulation, and then Jesus will return with his church afterward. We need to examine that and let the text speak louder than a particular school of theology.

1. The return of Christ in this passage is not secret.

Notice what it said in verse 16. Jesus returns with a loud command. That is the word used for a general calling troops into action. It is not silent. It is not a secret. Paul says this return will be with the voice of an archangel. I have a sneaky suspicion that is loud, louder than anything anyone has heard on the planet. This is also described as the trumpet call of God. I had a friend whose son was learning the trumpet. A trumpet is not a quiet instrument. Added together, these portray the return of Jesus as a very public event where both Christians and non-Christians know exactly what is happening. This isn't speaking about a secret return of Christ, but instead a very public one'

Second, "To meet the Lord" is a technical term. It is the Greek word *apantesis*. It is a term that has a very precise meaning. It refers to the widely known custom in Paul's day of sending a delegation out to meet an important dignitary, then escorting the person the rest of the way into the town from which the delegation came.

The Thessalonians, as one of the most important cities in the Roman Empire, understood this term and the tradition. If an important person visited the city, the city sent a delegation down the Via Egnatia highway to welcome him and return to the city with him. The key thing to know is this term *always* refers to sending a welcoming party to welcome a dignitary *back* to the town from which the delegation came.

There is a theological system out there that teaches in this passage Jesus comes back for a secret rapture of his church, then he returns to heaven with

them for seven years. That is grammatically impossible in this text. The Greek word for to meet always refers to sending a welcoming party to escort an honored individual back to the city from which the welcome party came, not to head with them someplace else. The meaning of this word never varies in all secular Greek literature.

The word *apanetsis* occurs two other times in the Bible. In both of those occurrences, it refers to sending a delegation out to welcome somebody back to town from where the delegation came. It doesn't refer to sending a delegation out to greet an honored guest and then leaving for another location.

But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Matthew 25:6 (ESV)

In this parable, the virgins went out to meet the bridegroom and to welcome him back to the wedding party. The virgins do not go out to meet the bridegroom and head for the home moon leaving the bride at the altar.

And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. Acts 28:15 (ESV)

Paul was on his way to Rome. He had appealed to Caesar. Christians from the church in Rome heard Paul was on his way, so they sent a delegation of people out to meet him and accompany him to Rome. They didn't leave Rome to meet with Paul, then head somewhere else.

When people ask you if you believe in the rapture, you need to ask them what they mean by that question.

If, by the rapture, they are speaking with confidence about the return of Jesus to resurrect the bodies of dead Christians to resurrection life, and

transform the bodies of living Christians to life, and to together meet Jesus in the air in our physical resurrection bodies, then to return to earth with Jesus as part of his welcoming party, which is what the text says, then you can say with confidence that you believe in the resurrection.

If by the rapture, they mean a secret return of Christ to resurrect Christians out of this earth and take them to heaven for seven years while the earth goes through a time of tribulation, then have Jesus return with Christians again, that may be part of a theological system, but it is hard to prove from this text. It is hard to affirm that with confidence.

Conclusion

There are two important things to remember from this morning.

1. At CrossWinds, the rapture, the way it takes place is a topic we discuss at the church. We don't divide over it in this church. This pun is intended. More important than the exact details of Christ's return is whether you will be "left behind" when it happens. Don't leave today arguing over the details of the rapture. Focus on the resurrection of Jesus and the wonderful reunion in physical resurrection bodies that we look forward to when Jesus returns. That is what is important.
2. The purpose of this passage is to comfort those who have lost loved ones, not to build end-times charts and timelines. Remember that. Paul doesn't want us to be ignorant of what happens to Christians when they die. He wants us to be comforted about what the future holds for the Christian and their body when we bury it in dirt. When Jesus returns, they will be back with

strength, power, vitality, and might for all of eternity to the praise of Jesus for his amazing grace. What a glorious day that will be!



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