

The Return, Resurrection, and Rapture

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

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Take your Bibles please and turn to 1 Thessalonians 4. We have come to the passage that we encountered many months ago. It was a point of contention and it was difficult and some were exasperated with some of the interpretation that was rendered. So, let's just present a disclaimer right off the bat, let's just present a good solid disclaimer which is: you do not have to agree with me tonight. Okay? You do not have to agree with me tonight. This is not an issue like I was this morning when I said to you from 2 Thessalonians 1, "This is it." I'm not saying it like this, okay? This is teaching and I want to provoke you tonight. My goal is to get you thinking. I want you to think. I'm going to ask questions and not answer them and that's going to make you uncomfortable because many of us don't want to think. Many of us don't want to be challenged. Many of us just want to be told and then, "I don't need to think anymore about it." But this is not the case.

And I want to confess to you that I haven't always understood it this way. And I want to confess to you that I was guilty of taking what was told to me and not examining it the way I should have. So, we have to do our very best tonight as an individual and as a congregation to leave our presuppositions at the door. Now, this is hard. We come into the lesson with presuppositions. You enter Sunday School with presuppositions. You come into every preaching service with all kinds of presuppositions. You bring them with you, you can't even not bring them with you. They come with you. It's very hard. I cannot tell you the number of times that I was told from this passage, "this is what it means." Just told, "this is what it means. There's no need to examine it in light of the rest of the book, there's no need to examine it in light...this is what it means." And then when you're told, "this is what it means," then you interpret within that grid and that grid becomes the glasses that you put on to read the passage and you see the passage that way every time. Why? Because you were told, "Read the passage with these glasses."

And so, it wasn't until we got into the Book of Mark that I took the glasses off and said, "Oh, my goodness, from the Book of Mark I need to put a different set of glasses on because this is not what I have previously been told." And it became very, very bothersome. I mean, I've got to tell you church, I didn't want to go down that road. I mean, the pastoral staff will tell you, I didn't want to go down that road. And so, that's what we enter this in with tonight.

Alright, let's be clear: if you disagree with me, you do not have to leave the church. Let's be even clearer: if you disagree with me, you don't have to be quiet about it and only gossip on Facebook about it. You can say, "I disagree." But, you have to say it from a biblical perspective. You can't just say, "I disagree" for the sake of disagreeing. You have to say, "Pastor, you failed to consider this verse." And then, I promise you, I'll consider it. I give you my word. I am open to being corrected by the Word of God. I am ready for you to correct me from the Word of God. I am ready for you to show me where I went wrong. And as long as I can see it and it's plain and it's a reasonable interpretation, then I'll go. And I'll do you one better, I'll preach it. Would you afford me the same? Is that reasonable? Let's just enter into a relationship where I can correct your thinking from the Word of God and you can correct my thinking from the Word of God and we'll let the Word of God be the trump card. Can I use that phrase?

Now, let's remember, from the Word of God, let's give ourselves some ground rules. Number one: our immediate context is 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians corrects 1 Thessalonians. Is that reasonable? It's one letter, isn't it? So, we've got to interpret this passage from within what? The letter. I wouldn't want you to take a letter that I wrote you, Rob, and read just the middle paragraph and not read the introduction and the paragraph number one in the body and then grab what you want. I would want you to look at the whole letter. Is that fair?

Number two: if I write a follow-up letter to bring greater clarity to letter number one, will that letter also be important? Yes. So, first of all, we want to make sure that we interpret this passage within 1 Thessalonians and then we want to interpret it within 1 and 2 Thessalonians because same author, same church, same issues and a follow-up letter. So, we would expect a follow on letter to provide even greater clarity, wouldn't we? Isn't that reasonable? And then, we want to interpret it within the New Testament. Within the New Testament.

So, let's get started. Here's our text and it's an awesome text. And we don't want anything that we struggle with as correct interpretation of this text to lose the awesomeness of this text. Because, I mean, this text will preach and if we didn't want to teach on it tonight, we could just preach an incredible message from this glorious text when he writes, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." I mean, that verse right there is enough to just get on fire about. It really is and we don't want anything about our eschatological discussion to lose the glory of this text.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 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: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up," what? "together with them," this glorious. And then verse 18 is the icing on the cake when he says, "Wherefore comfort

one another with these words.” I mean, comfort yourself with these words. Man, we need some comfort sometimes. Go to these words and allow them to be comfort to you.

So, point #1 and point #1 is the most important point and so we bring it to you up front, right away. The primary point of this passage is to provide the people of Thessalonica hope and comfort concerning the dead. The primary purpose of this passage is not to answer the question: when will the rapture occur in regard to pre, mid or post-tribulation. That’s not the primary purpose of this passage. Paul was not writing to answer that question, Paul was writing because there were those in Thessalonica that thought, “What about the dead? Are they going to miss the Second Coming of Christ? Are they going to miss the parousia? I mean, we’re looking forward to the parousia. It’s going to be an amazing event. What about them? Will they miss it?” I mean, come on. It’s like dying before the Super Bowl. It’s like dying before Christmas. You know that a lot of people can hang on until after a major event like that, you know that. An anniversary, a birthday, a major event. Who wants to miss the coming of Jesus Christ?

So, thus Paul says, “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” The word “asleep” is very intentional, people who are asleep wake up which is precisely the picture Paul wishes to communicate to his readers. These fellow believers who have passed away from this life are not dead they are asleep. I don’t grieve when my son is sleeping. Why? Because he’s going to wake up, right. And that’s how Paul wants us to think about our lost loved ones. Recognize, they’re just asleep. They’re not dead, they’re asleep. They’re going to wake up. That’s the idea here. This is the main point. This is the point by which we comfort ourselves with these words. Christians are to be different in how we grieve. Let them go. It’s better over there. Let them go. We’re living in a world in which every life-support system is available to keep people alive forever even in a state of practical misery. Let them go. Let them sleep. That’s the idea.

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again...” He goes right to the heart of the Gospel. Every time Paul is making reference to this Christ dying and rising again, it’s the Gospel, it’s the death, the burial, the resurrection. It is 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. He goes right to the heart of the Gospel and he says, “If these people believed the Gospel they’re asleep.”

Point #2, the hope of the believer is resurrection of future believers is grounded in the resurrection of Christ. It’s grounded in the resurrection of Christ. He draws out attention to the resurrection of Christ and says, “Look to that as the model by which God follows.”

“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming,” the word “coming” is the parousia. That is an exceptionally important point that we want to drive home tonight. “The Lord shall not prevent them,” or precede them, “which are asleep.” If this idea of the rapture of the church is a mystery which I had been told for years and years and I’ve read books that tell me that and those of the Sermon Audio listening audience have been told the same thing, that the rapture of the church is a mystery known only to Paul and revealed by Paul.

Alright, if that is the case, then I am quite confused personally, you may not be but I am, as to this language that looks something like this, "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord." Now, if you allow yourself tonight just to gloss over these points, then you'll probably just enter believing one thing and go out the exact same way. You probably will because there's not going to be this giant blanket statement. These are small details that we're paying attention to and trying to figure out why is he telling us about the word of the Lord if Paul is revealing a mystery that nobody else knew about. And then why is he using the plural pronoun "we" if Paul is revealing a mystery that nobody knew about because he says this WE by the word of the Lord. Okay?

Some suggest that the rapture of the church is not found in the Gospels but instead is a mystery, 1 Corinthians 15:51, revealed by Paul alone but the mystery that Paul communicates is the miracle of some people being changed without having to die. That's the mystery. How does this happen? How is it? I mean, we understand the idea that when you're dead and you're resurrected you receive a glorified body. That makes sense to us, but Paul says, "There are some who will not die and they, too, are going to receive a glorified body." And he says, "Now, that change is quite the mystery because it happens in the twinkling of an eye." How does that happen? That's a mystery. That is a miracle. That is amazing.

MacArthur normally a hero and a man that I clearly respect and I certainly don't take him to task lightly, but that doesn't mean that he's the Pope and we are allowed to take every word out of every preacher's mouth and critique it just like you're allowed to do that with me, and MacArthur says, "The word of the Lord was Paul referring to some saying of Jesus found in the Gospels. The answer is, no. There are none exact or even close." Well, I'm going to disagree with him completely. I'm just going to completely disagree with him at this point. MacArthur goes on to say, "The only explicit reference to the rapture is in the Gospel of John 14:1-3." So, let me show that to you. The word "explicit" is defined as "fully revealed or expressed without vagueness, implication or ambiguity; leaving no question as to the meaning or intent." That's the word "explicit."

Let's look. I don't see it. I don't see rapture there. I see a promise that where I am you'll be. That's all. I don't see a snatching away. In fact, the same Greek word is not even used. It's not even there. So, I don't know how you have something that's explicit when the word is not even there. It's not even there. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 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." I don't see anywhere a reference to a catching away of believers. Okay? This is my thoughts. You work on that yourself this week.

One of the most important points, a dispensational, pre-tribulationist must address is the question of whether Paul describes in 1 and 2 Thessalonians both the rapture and the Second Coming of Christ as two separate events with a period of time in between them. That's the entire issue. That's the issue right there. We're done preaching about the text

and how it speaks to us, we can do an entire sermon on that. We do it at funerals, we talk about how it's an encouraging text. We're now getting down to the nuts and bolts of the issue. This is the issue right there. This is the issue that has to be addressed. This is what you decide: is Paul the Apostle in his 1 and 2 Thessalonians, is he describing two events with a period of time in between there of seven years? Is this event #1 called the rapture and is this event #2 called the parousia and are there in fact seven years in between here? Is this what Paul is doing? Can we see this in the text? That's the question. That's the heart of the issue right there. That determines the entire understanding of the passage.

So, here's what we want to look at. Verse 15, "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain," at the parousia, "of the Lord shall not prevent," or precede, "them which are asleep." So now, is that parousia event that Paul is making reference to, does that happen before the tribulation or does that happen after the tribulation? That's the question, or somewhere in between, I guess.

Alright, hold your place and turn over to 2 Thessalonians. Now, if there's any single thing that has sealed the deal for me and if there's any single thing that I'm going to have to get over with, if you're going to help me get beyond this and get to the correct position on this issue, I need to understand how I am to reconcile 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 to this passage in chapter 1. Now, let's look at again. We saw it this morning in our preaching but let's look at it one more time. "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us." Now, I want to draw your attention to "rest with us" to "comfort one another with these words," in verse 18. I want to draw that parallel; I want you to see that. I want you to write a note in your Bible.

If you're a student of the Word of God and you care anything about what the correct interpretation is, this is a key point. I want you to see that in chapter 1 of 2 Thessalonians he is telling them that they are not to be troubled, that they can be comforted, they can rest with us. In fact, I have a Scofield Reference Bible in front of me tonight. I don't know where my small preaching Bible is so I grabbed this one and Scofield actually has the word "comfort in persecution" down. Comfort in persecution.

Now, tell me church: who would be most comforted by these words but the saints that are living during the tribulation? They would be comforted by these words. They would be comforted by these words. How would those saints who are living during the tribulation not see that Paul is speaking to them when he says, "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that are troubling you and to you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in a secret rapture." No. No, it doesn't say that. It doesn't say anything like that. In fact, it says just the opposite. Nobody's going to miss this event. This is not what you see in the Left Behind series. This is "the Lord Jesus Christ being revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified

in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.”

Now, look, I don't know a single pre-tribulational dispensationalist that thinks that this coming occurs before the tribulation in 2 Thessalonians. Everybody agrees this is a post-tribulation coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. So then, what I need to understand is how is this different from what I just read in chapter 4. How is it different? How is it different? How is it different? You have to answer that question for yourself, I'm just throwing it out there because I see them as the same coming, same event. I don't see them as a different event. “Comfort yourself with these events.” “Comfort yourself.” This is what you can expect. This is the Lord Jesus Christ coming.

For example: did you notice that Paul makes particular reference to an archangel? Did you see that in verse 16 that there is that particular reference to an archangel? And did you notice in verse 7 of chapter 1 that there are “his mighty angels”? I see an archangel and mighty angels going together. Why? Because the archangel leads the mighty angels.

This word “parousia,” it's the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Second Advent. It is the arrival. It is the future visible return from heaven of Jesus to raise the dead, hold the Last Judgment and set up a formally and glorious Kingdom. Now, this is the Strong's definition, this is the universal understanding amongst Baptists. This is not a unique perspective and that's the parousia, folks. Well, that's the parousia, that's the setting up of the Kingdom. So, how can we use the parousia event in the same sentence as the rapture event if they're not happening together?

Those who are dead, asleep in Christ, will not miss the parousia. Christ is going to bring them with him when he comes. The parousia is mentioned in chapter 2, it's mentioned in chapter 3, it's mentioned in chapter 5. The parousia is mentioned four times.

So, in chapter 1 we are waiting for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead. We're waiting for Jesus. In chapter 2, what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Are you, not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? Again, his coming, the parousia. In chapter 3, “To the end that he may establish your hearts unblameable, in holiness before God, even our Father at the parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”

Now, I've got to tell you, folks, you need to explain to me how he's coming with all his saints before seven years of tribulation when there are at least 144,000 that are getting saved. You've got a major problem there because all isn't all at that point. It's not even close to all.

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” So, please understand if, in fact, Paul is communicating a rapture and a parousia as two separate events with a seven year period between them, this is what Paul does which is very, very confusing. Chapter 2, he's talking about the second event that happens after

the tribulation. In Chapter 3, he's talking about the second event that happens after the tribulation. In Chapter 4, he flips to the first event and in chapter 5 he goes back to the second event and he's used the same Greek word. Paul, how confused were you?

Folks, please understand something: I was never taught like this when I sat in the pews that you are sitting in. I was never taught like this. I was never taught to think like this and ask questions and study the Greek word out from chapter to chapter. I was never taught that. I was taught, "this is what it is and that's all." There wasn't even option #2 as though there was a second choice on the table.

So now, having now examined what Paul says, I need to ask this question: when Matthew starts using this word "parousia" should I think they are the same events or different events? I mean, do we have a parousia subtext one and a parousia subtext 2? Do we have a little triangle like in the Excel document and when you mouse over it, a box pops up to tell you which one we're talking about? Or is it reasonable to assume that all the Apostles were referring to the same event when they used the word "parousia"? Because if not, how would I ever have a clue as to what they're talking about. How would I ever know when they're going back and forth to parousia number one, to parousia number two.

So now, let me ask this again, a follow-up question: when I see them using the same Greek words, should I as a student of the Word of God seek to harmonize or separate the events. Now, this is interesting to me because in every other area we typically harmonize. When we see Matthew and Mark, we harmonize. When we see Mark and Luke, we harmonize. We don't try to create two separate events when the man came up, what we often say is, "He was describing the event from the north and he was describing the event from the south but they were talking about the same event, talking about minor differences." We don't pick apart our Gospels looking for every little difference and try to create two different events.

Now, this is very important because what I've found in my studying as your Pastor and as the leader who is trying to teach you something tonight, is I found that people are looking for every possible distinctly different thing to somehow justify that we're talking about two different events but they don't do that in any other section of their interpretation. They don't do that when they're trying to compare the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They decide that he had one perspective and he had another perspective. But now, all of a sudden when it comes to eschatology, we are trying to shred it apart in our attempt to create two different events when in reality I would like to suggest to you, that what we should be doing is taking what the Lord Jesus Christ taught us and all that discourse and what Paul taught us and attempt to harmonize them. That's what I think we should be doing because we don't do it in any other area. We don't try to create two Gospels; we say that there's one Gospel taught by Jesus and his Apostles.

Now, you will see modern commentators and I have several of them, and I said modern commentators, and I'm not talking about the Left Behind series now, I'm talking about modern commentators using this word "secret," a secret rapture. A secret rapture. A

secret rapture. This is the snatching away in which people are on the aircraft and so they look over and you've got more room because the guy's gone. Okay?

Please look, "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." Folks, there's nothing secret about that. There's just no way in the world that you can tell me that's secret. When the Lord comes with a shout and with the voice of an archangel and with the trump of God, that is loud. There's nothing secret. There's no doubt that that's the Lord coming.

So, what we are to believe according to this pre-tribulational perspective is that the Lord comes with a shout and with the voice of the archangel, the dead in Christ rise first and then 3 ½ years later the world is going after the Antichrist having seen this glorious appearance of the Lord. Really? Why would they do that? They saw the Lord descend with a shout, with the trump of God and the dead in Christ are rising first. It doesn't say that they don't see the dead in Christ. There is nothing in the Scripture at all that says they don't see the dead in Christ. Folks, do you not think that bodies coming up would grab somebody's attention?

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up," there's our word for rapture right there. By the way, that's a verb. "Together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Here it is right here: catch up, take by force, snatch away, pluck, catch and pull. Those are our King James options: catch up, take by force, snatch away, pluck, catch and pull. It's to seize, to carry off by force. It's to seize, to carry on eagerly, to snatch out or away. The word is found 17 times in your New Testament and it's used in 13 verses and do you know what? It's never used like this. This is the only passage that it's used like this.

There are two others that are almost similar but not quite. Let me show them to you. This is Philip being caught away and then Paul being caught up to the third heaven. So, here's what we've got folks, we're building an entire case on a pre-tribulation rapture from one verse. One time it's used this way. That's awkward. I am not prepared to create a separate event based on a verb in a single verse. You can. You have the liberty of doing that, but I am not prepared to do that. Not when I see it being used in the same sentence and same paragraph as the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. What I would suggest to you is that the rapture occurs at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Would anyone reading this letter from Paul without any presuppositions think the reference to the rapture is a separate event from the parousia in verse 15? Would you take a moment and just look down at your Bible right now with me.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming," or the Second Coming or the parousia, "of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 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: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together.” So, it’s “caught up” in verse 17 is the rapture and the parousia is made reference in verse 15. Can anyone at all explain to me how you could pick a seven year time frame between those two verses? How would I get that clue? How would I get a clue from Paul that really I’ve just described to you two separate events: one that occurs before the tribulation, one that occurs after the tribulation. Where would you get that in that context right there? How in the world would anyone pick up on that? Does anyone think in all honesty with no presuppositions, not dispensational separations based on what you’ve been told, that anybody in the church of Thessalonica would think Paul’s talking about two different events separated by seven years?

To me that’s pretty important because we always say around here that the first thing we need to determine is what did the original author mean to the original recipient. Our Sunday School teacher, that’s what we always say, before we can draw up a case in the 21st century, we have to decide what did the first author mean when he was writing to his original audience. And we have to ask ourselves, does anyone think that the church of Thessalonica would have created two different events separated by seven years from that passage? I think the answer is no.

So, is this event here a subcomponent of the parousia or is it a separate event? That’s what you have to decide. If there is one verse in the New Testament that talks about Christ’s coming back twice separated by seven or more years then I will concede the entire argument. If you can find one single verse. One verse. Just one verse that separates two events by seven years. Just one verse. Just one verse. Seven years. If there’s anything that’s got both events in one verse with a seven year gap in between there then I’ll concede the entire argument but I can’t find that verse. We’re looking for something that has a rapture and then seven years and then the complete return to earth. We’re looking for any verse that has those components in it right there, that’s what you’re looking for. Twenty-seven books of the New Testament, find one verse that has a rapture and then something referring to seven years and then a return.

You see, only a few deny the Second Coming. The real issues are: is there a pre-trib rapture of the church; will there be seven specific years of tribulation; is there a 1,000 year Kingdom on this earth. Those are the issues that people are arguing about. No one is arguing about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. That’s not the argument. The argument is: is there two events separated by seven years; will there be specific seven years of tribulation; are there really 1,000 literal years?

So, what do you believe, Pastor? I believe there are definitely seven years of tribulation; I believe it’s called Jacob’s Trouble. I believe there’s clearly a 1,000 year Kingdom according to the Book of Revelation that you just can’t get around. I believe it’s so black and white in the Book of Revelation that it’s 1,000 years, there’s a resurrection before it and there’s a resurrection after it. To me it’s crystal clear. I get the whole Jacob’s Trouble, I get that that’s crystal clear. What I’ve not found is the same kind of verses for this. If I find it, I’m ready to be corrected because anybody who denies the 1,000 year Kingdom has to explain what are we going to do with Revelation 19, 20 and 21. What are

we going to do with it? Because it's literally right there. You've got to turn it into something and say it's not quite what it is and it's some kind of allegory or it's a metaphor," or something like that.

But we don't have the same kind of verse here. Here's what we do have. Let me just tell you what we do have: we have a burning desire not to suffer. That's what we have. So, we have created a system of eschatology that gets us out of here before it hits the fan. Because it's going to. And because we live our cushy lives here, we want an eschatology that fits our cushy lives. "Surely, Lord, you wouldn't want me to suffer? So, I've created a system that allows me to get out of here and I hold on to it. I hold on to it desperately."

So, are there clues in this passage and letter that connect it to the rest of the New Testament? Are there clues? Are there clues in this passage that connect it to the rest of the New Testament? Can I find things in this passage that allow me as a diligent student of the Word, remember, we're Bereans, that allow me to connect it to the rest of the New Testament? I think the answer is absolutely yes and I've organized this chart. So, if you don't like it, blame me. I've organized 17 points of contact, 17 clues. I'll be happy to email this out to you, I've put it on church Facebook. I'd be happy for you to do the research and show me where I'm wrong. But when I find 17 connect-the-dot events between the Olivet Discourse and 1 and 2 Thessalonians, I'm not ready to tell you it's two different events. Okay? I believe there are too many points of connection. And that when there are minor difference, we should not seek to create two events, we should seek to harmonize them like we do everywhere else in the New Testament.

If I narrow it down to just the Olivet Discourse and if I narrow it down to 1 Thessalonians, I've got points 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 all very similar. I've got the same Greek word *parousia* being used. I've got a visible descent from heaven. I have a reference to clouds. I have great power in the Day of the Lord. I have an archangel and I have angels. I have a sound and I have a shout. I have a gathering and I have the word "caught up." I have souls from heaven coming and I have people on the earth being gathered. I have concluded for myself personally that these are not two separate events.

Why is this so important? Because the disciples asked this question: "Tell us, Lord, when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of thy coming and the end of the world." See it. And the end of the world. And there's the issue right there.

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Well, there's no way in the world I can get pre anything out of that passage because look what it says, "Immediately," what word does it say? "After," so the only way that I can do this is I'm going to create a dispensational separation and I'll say that was written to one audience and that was written to another audience and then I can go phew. How do I do that because I don't do it with anything else? I don't do it with the Great Commission. I don't say the Great

Commission was given to the Jews. By the way, that's Matthew also, same author, same book, only a couple of chapters later. So, I want to know, I want to know why isn't this the rapture? I want to know.

“And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” I want to know why isn't this the rapture? I want to know why isn't this part of this catching away that occurs. I want to know why isn't this the rapture, “then two shall be in the field and one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill, one taken and the other left.” I need to know why I should not look at that and say, “That looks a lot like snatching away to me.”

MacArthur says, because he knows the issue, “One will be taken. Taken in judgment just as in Noah's day. This is clearly not a reference to catching away of believers described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.” You see, he's got to address it so he just tells you it's not it. That's good enough; it's not it. I want to know why it isn't it.

“I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.” I want to know why this isn't the rapture? Why shouldn't the reader connect the angels gathering of the elect in verse 31 to the one will be taken and one be left in verse 41. I don't understand why we shouldn't make a connection there.

Why shouldn't the student of the Bible connect the presence of an archangel in 1 Thessalonians to all the angels gathering in Matthew 24? Why wouldn't I make that connection? Why wouldn't I think that if you're sending angels to accomplish a task, that you wouldn't have an archangel in charge of the task?

Do we normally seek to harmonize or divide the Word of God? Sometimes 2 Timothy 2:15 is quoted from the King James as the justification for an eschatological division created between the Olivet Discourse and Paul's letters. And what they'll say is, “We've got to rightly divide the Word of God. We've got to rightly divide the Word of God.” Do you understand that the word “divide” there is not divide like we're thinking?

Look at this alternate rendering and then I'm going to show you the Greek word. “Do your best to present yourself as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of God.” I've got it, not dividing, not chopping it up, not seeking to create different eschatological events but handling it.

Here's the Strong's definition of the Greek word that's often translated “divide”: cut straight. You know, measure twice, cut once. Cut straight. Get it right. Be diligent. Really seek to get it right. Don't be loose with your interpretation. Handle it precisely. That's what we're trying to do tonight. That's why I've said 15 times, “I'm ready to be corrected from the Word of God. Just show me where I'm not handling it right.”

Why shouldn't see these two events and compare them? “He shall send his angels with the great sound of a trumpet and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds

from one end of heaven to the other. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout and with the voice of the archangel, the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first.” Why shouldn’t I connect those? Why shouldn’t I see souls in heaven being united with glorified bodies on earth when the dead rise up, why shouldn’t I see the connection there?

Verse 27 of chapter 13 of Mark, “And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.” Does this happen twice? Is there a gathering event that actually occurs twice, once before the tribulation? And then, because there’s going to be more believers during the next seven years that they actually gather everyone twice? Is there a mass evacuation of everybody and then a rebuilding of believers for seven more years and then another mass evacuation?

What does at stake, Pastor? I’ll tell you what’s at stake: the idea that American Christians who live spoiled pampered lives will have to endure a miserable Great Tribulation, is what is at stake. That’s why the line has been drawn in the sand.

Let me just be even clearer: when you write books about this and you receive support as a missionary, you’re locked in and you can’t change because do you know what happens in the Baptist world? If you change, we drop your financial contributions. So, you can’t even change. You can’t even be open to changing because if word gets out that you’ve changed and you’re on that side of the argument all of a sudden, then it’s like a heresy. It’s like a heresy. Why? Why?

I say to you one more time: you are more than welcome to remain in this congregation. We want you here. This is not an issue that we’re going to fight over. This is not an issue that we’re going to fight over. You can hold to that until your dying day. You can hold to it. This is not an essential. No one is getting saved because of this issue. Then why did you bring it up, Pastor? Because I was preaching through the Book of Mark, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, that’s why. I didn’t set out to engage on this topic. I just all of a sudden as I was studying it in Mark, fresh for our preaching service, and I started going, “Well, wait a minute. I remember this passage over there in Thessalonians. It’s got the shout. Wait a minute, should I seek to harmonize or should I seek to divide?” And because I’ve been trying to harmonize the Bible over and over again, I naturally gravitate towards harmonizing. That’s my default.

Note, the Lord of the host can return his focus to Israel without having to remove his church. Sometimes the argument goes something like this: “Pastor, don’t you understand that that’s Jacob’s Trouble. And because it’s Jacob’s Trouble God must remove the church in order to focus on Israel because I believe that God’s going to return his focus to Israel.” I really believe that. I believe that there is a time when God is going to return his focus on Israel. I believe there’s a time when God is going to give the land to Israel that he promised Abraham. I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is going to rule and reign in Jerusalem I fulfillment to the promise he made to Abraham and to David. I believe that. But I do not believe it’s necessary to evacuate the church in order to do that.

You say, "Pastor, where did you get that from?" I got it from this perspective: God did not evacuate Israel in order to focus on the Gentiles. He left them here on the planet. Do you notice that the Jews were left? Did you notice there wasn't a mass rapture of Jews in order to allow Gentiles to be the attention? Do you know that they left them there? And Paul said, "I'm done with the Jews, I'm going to the Gentiles." And the focus was on building a Gentile bride but the Jews were still here.

I would suggest to you that the same thing can happen again. I will suggest to you that God is more than able and willing and capable of returning his focus to Israel while leaving Gentiles here and that during that time Gentiles will get saved in the same way that in the time when there was a focus on Gentiles, Jews were getting saved.

How much should we use 2 Thessalonians to help us understand 1 Thessalonians? I would say we should use it to the nth degree. If I send you a follow-up letter to bring greater clarity to what I wrote in my first letter and you ignore my follow-up letter, I don't understand why you would do such a thing. So, when he is talking to me about this event right here "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God," I know this is not a secret rapture event that occurs before the tribulation.

Does Christ take vengeance on unbelievers before or after the tribulation? According to the Left Behind series, the answer is after. After. Has Paul now switched in his talking to the church at Thessalonica about a completely different event than that event? Is that what's happening here? Do we have a Paul that is confused and he's flip-flopping?

Alright. That's the end of the arguments. You work through it on your own.

Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we pray that we would be diligent students of your Word tonight. That we would be careful students. That we would do our very best to allow the Word of God to inform our opinion and that dispensational charts would not trump the revealed Word of God. We pray, Lord, that we as a body would learn to be critical thinkers and that we would not accept commentary from authors as inspired Scriptures. That we, Lord, would be able to discern presuppositions that are designed to influence our thinking in particular ways. And God, we acknowledge that tonight, for the most part, most of us will die before the tribulation unless something radically changes. And so, in many regards, this is not a significant point because absent from the body is present with the Lord. So Father, help us not to create an issue that isn't an issue in this church. In Jesus' Name. Amen.