

20:20 Vision Ministries – Devotions by Roger Browning

Week 16 (April 12-18, 2015)

All preachers are commanded to “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and **encourage**” (2 Timothy 4:2, emphasis mine). I want to **encourage** you this week with the Biblical doctrine of the **Rapture of the Church**. This is a natural follow-up to the weeks we spent on the importance of prophecy (weeks 10-14).

Sunday, April 12 (read John 14:1-3)

*“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.” (John 14:3, KJV, emphasis mine)*

I am always amazed at those who do not believe in the **rapture** of the Church, but who insist on the reading of John 14:1-6 during the funeral of a loved one. Jesus taught much about the signs that precede His return to earth (ex. Matthew 24), but this is His only direct reference to the rapture. How can we know that He is prophesying about the rapture? Notice that He says “and **receive you** unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” When He comes back to earth, we come **with** Him (see Revelation 19:11-21), but this promise says He will **call us** to where He already resides (in Heaven). We will be with Him in Heaven for seven years while the tribulation takes place on earth; then He returns **with us** to defeat the antichrist and his false prophet. That is the great **encouragement** given to all true believers. He may call us home any minute!

Monday, April 13 (read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. (1 Thessalonians 4:14)

Today’s text is one of the two clear teachings of Paul that we will study regarding the rapture. God does not want you to bury your loved ones without the assurance of eternal life for those who have accepted His death and resurrection as full payment for their sins (v. 13-14). During funerals, I don’t mind talking about personal accomplishments of the deceased, but none of those will count toward the price of salvation. Eternal life is His gift to us; all we can do is to believe it and receive it! Today’s printed verse says, “that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.” How does that work? Great question! We will explore that in tomorrow’s devotion.

Tuesday, April 14 (reread 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

How can the dead come back in the clouds with Jesus (v. 14) and also be called out from the grave? Another great question! When a Christian dies, his living **soul** goes immediately into heaven (2 Corinthians 5:8 & Philippians 1:23). His dead **body** goes into the ground (water, urn, etc.). At the rapture of the church, the two of them come together again, only this time the body is recreated to be like His glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21). Our deceased loved ones get their new bodies before the people who are alive at the time of the rapture get theirs (v. 16-17). Why? I believe it is so that we will recognize our loved ones immediately when we arrive to be with them! Are you encouraged yet?

Wednesday, April 15 (reread 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

Can you understand this marvelous text now? The souls of all Christians who die go immediately into the presence of God where they await the rapture of the Church so that they can get their new heavenly bodies. Living believers on earth disappear from earthly view and reappear in the presence of Jesus and their loved ones, having received their new heavenly bodies on the way up to Christ in the clouds (v. 17). We will see this more clearly when we examine Paul's letter of 1 Corinthians. For now, let's "**encourage** each other with these words" of truth (v. 18). Death has been defeated (2 Timothy 1:8-10)! Because He lives, we will live also (see John 14:19)!

Thursday, April 16 (read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:9)

The first three verses of today's text are referring to our Lord's **second coming** to earth at the end of the tribulation. We know this because in Scripture the phrase "Day of the Lord" always means the Day when He returns to judge the nations and put an end to the rule of the antichrist and his one-world government (see Revelation 19:11-21). Certainly, no one can claim that the Jews are saying "Peace and safety" at this time in history (v. 3). They will feel safe only after the antichrist signs a "peace" agreement with them during the tribulation. Paul then addresses the Christians who are waiting for the rapture (v. 4-11). He tells them (and us) to stay awake (v. 7) and live in the glorious light of our Lord (v. 8). We will not suffer the wrath of the tribulation (v. 9), so we win whether we are dead or alive (v. 10). "Therefore **encourage** one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (v. 11, emphasis mine).

Friday, April 17 (read Revelation 3:7:13)

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. (Revelation 3:10)

The Apostle John was exiled on the Island of Patmos "because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Revelation 1:8-9) where he had an encounter with the glorified Lord Jesus. John was told to write seven letters that would be dictated by Jesus Himself to seven actual churches (see Revelation 1:10-20). Two of the churches (Smyrna and Philadelphia) received no negative comments. Smyrna was a very poor church (Revelation 2:8-11) while Philadelphia was very weak, but faithful and obedient (v. 8). The members of this weak Philadelphia church were given a tremendous promise: "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut" (v. 8). This is a picture of the **rapture** when millions of living Christians will be transported into Heaven! God will keep all believers who are faithful to His Word from suffering the trials of the tribulation. He has prepared a wonderful future for those who trust Him (v. 11-13). I pray you have spiritual ears to hear what God is saying to **encourage** you this week.

Saturday, April 18 (read 1 Corinthians 15:35-41)

But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" (1 Corinthians 15:35)

I am introducing the material in 1 Corinthians that we will study next week. Have you ever asked the questions listed in the printed v. 35 above? Paul reminds us that the resurrected body will be vastly different from the one that is buried in the ground (v. 36). He then gives several examples of the changes that occur from the time a seed is planted until the time of reaping (v. 37-38). He repeats the lesson by referencing animals, birds and fish (v. 39). Finally, he illustrates using the diversity of heavenly bodies in outer space (v. 41, the 2nd heaven). This gets us ready to see the parallel to our own resurrected bodies. That will be our topic of study next week.