TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR

1 & 2 Thessalonians

Key Verse: 1 Thessalonians 4:17

“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.”

Thank God for blessing our study of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Thank God that we now have the chance to overview these books of Thessalonians. May God help each one of his people here to accept one word very personally. When we study the Bible, we see that the words of God can be about faith, love and hope. It is so particularly in Paul’s epistles. Faith, love and hope are all important and they are connected. Yet one of the three can be more emphasized in certain books. In 1 and 2 Thessalonians, hope is very much stressed, specifically the hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus which is contrasted with the coming of the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist.

Christian faith, love and hope are truly amazing. The faith is in Christ Jesus who died for our sins and rose again from the dead. The love is God’s love that from the beginning he chose us to be saved through the gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ, whom God sent into this world. The hope is concrete based on our Lord Jesus’ own words and so many promises of the Bible that he will return to the earth in power and great glory. It will be the greatest event as the culmination of all human history. 1 and 2 Thessalonians display this hope so wonderfully and vividly with the clear teaching of how we are to live in light of this hope.

**1 Thessalonians:** In this epistle, Paul says in 1:2-3, “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul thanked God for their faith that produced work, their love that prompted labour and their hope that inspired endurance. Paul knew that they were loved by God and God had chosen them. The church of Thessalonians was born through Paul’s preaching of the gospel. They were unbelievers, worshippers of Greek gods and sexual immorality in the corrupted city. But the gospel of Christ Jesus came to them not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. As for them, in spite of severe suffering they welcomed the message of the gospel with joy given by the Holy Spirit. As for Paul, with the help of God he dared to tell them the gospel of God in spite of strong opposition. The Thessalonians’ attitude toward the word of God is admirable. Paul said in 2:13, “…when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of man, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”

The gospel of the word of God bore good fruit in them. They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who would rescue them from the coming wrath. The gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection planted in them the hope of waiting for the Son of God from heaven to rescue his holy people from the coming wrath. We see clearly that the gospel faith includes serving the living and true God and waiting for his Son from heaven. From the beginning they had this awaiting and this hope.

Here Paul said “…Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath”, he included himself to those who have this hope of being rescued from the wrath of God. Paul further shares his hope in 2:19-20, “For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.” Thank God for S. Ian’s serving of Kane who has been studying the Bible for the last two years and attends worship service faithfully. Now Kane is willing to prepare and share his life-testimony at our Canadian SBC. What truly remains in life in view of the Lord Jesus’ coming? What can we present before our Lord Jesus? It is not our wealth or any other accomplishment in this world but the very souls whom we serve and are saved in the Lord. We are reminded of what Jesus said after talking about the way of Christ and the way of disciples, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” (Mk 8:36; Lk 9:25). The salvation of souls is what truly matters in life.

Paul also says in 3:13, “May he (the Lord) strengthen your hearts so that you will blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” In this way, Paul helps the believers to focus their lives on the time when our Lord Jesus comes. Then Paul reveals something stunning and spectacular in 4:13-18. “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 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. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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. 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. Therefore encourage each other with these words.” What a vivid incredible hope and vision! All the dead in Christ will rise in all over the place on the earth and those who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet to the Lord in the air. It will be the bridegroom snatching away his bride from this world of Satan to bring them into the heavenly kingdom to live together forever with no separation at all.

This is in accordance with what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must cloth itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” The event of the dead in Christ rising and the still living being changed and caught up in the clouds along the resurrected will happen in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, not a long period of time, not even a day. It is not a matter of time, but a matter of the power of God Almighty. What happens after being caught in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air is written in Revelation 19:7-8, “Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” We praise God for this amazing, glorious hope and vision. May we keep this hope of meeting the Lord in the air in our hearts and encourage each other with these words God!

Consequently, Paul says something quite contrasted in 5:1-3, “Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” Here, we are not talking about times and dates. There will be two things; only two things will happen to people, sudden glorious change or sudden horrible destruction.

In light of this future event, Paul reminds the believers of who they are and how they are to live in 5:4-11, “But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” May we always keep in mind that we are children of the day and so to be alert and self-controlled putting faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet, and to live with the Lord who died for us and through whom God appointed us not to suffer wrath but receive salvation.

About how we are to live in the hope of our Lord Jesus’ coming, we can think more of the words of God in 5:16-22, “Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold onto the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” And here is Paul’s prayer, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May our whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesu Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”

**2 Thessalonians:** In this epistle, Paul says in 1:2-3, “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.” And he says more of their hope in Christ Jesus that God will pay back trouble to those who trouble them and give relief to them who are troubled, and this will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. Paul continues, “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed.” Here also two kinds of people are contrasted, those who are punished with everlasting destruction being shut out from the presence of the Lord, and his holy people in whom the Lord Jesus is glorified. They are those who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus and those who have believed.

And then in chapter 2:3-11 Paul specifically mentions the man of lawlessness: “Don’t let anyone deceive you in anyway, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God…Now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.” Here, Paul unambiguously says of the coming of the man of the lawlessness, the time of his appearing, his destiny and his work. He will be overthrown by the Lord Jesus’ breath of his mouth and destroyed by the splendour of the coming of the Lord. Interestingly those who love the truth and so are saved, and those who reject to love the truth are contrasted and so believe the lie, delighting in wickedness and perish.

Then Paul reminds the believers of God’s love that from the beginning chose them to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth and urges them to stand firm holding to the words of God that were passed on to them. He wants them to know that the Lord is faithful and he will strengthen them and protect them from the evil one. As we studied, we are actually not looking for the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist, but we are looking for Christ, the Lord Jesus in whose glory we will share.

We cannot forget Paul’s prayer in 2 Thessalonians in 1:11-13, “…we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of the Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ”, and in 2:16, “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word”, in 3:5, “May the Lord direct our hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance” and in 3:16, “Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.”

Thank God for the wonderful words of God in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. May we keep the amazing, glorious hope of meeting the Lord in the air in our hearts and live with the Lord as the children of the day, loving the truth in this deceptive world with the assured victory of our Lord Jesus overthrowing the man lawlessness with the breath of his mouth and destroying him with the splendour of his coming.