



















1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians is the earliest of Paul's letters, but already Christians were growing impatient that Jesus had not returned, concerned that members of their community who had died would miss the second coming and life in God's eternal realm. Paul tells them not to worry; both the living and the dead will rise in glory upon Jesus' return.

This text, that describes people being "caught up in the clouds" has been used as the foundation for belief in the Rapture. Introduced in the 1830's by Irish preacher John Nelson Darby, this interpretation was popularized by the 1990's "Left Behind" novels. Darby preached that Jesus would return to earth and snatch all true believers up to heaven, after which there would be seven years of tribulation and destruction before Christ came again.

But a careful reading of 1 Thessalonians 4 doesn't support this idea, and most mainline church scholars have dismissed the Rapture as unbiblical. N.T. Wright is one of the biblical scholars who critique the Rapture as "escapist" theology. It's easy to deny the needs of our planet, and each one of us if all will one day be destroyed—and you get "raptured up" before things get real bad. The community of believers plays an important role in Paul's eschatology. We are to cooperate with God in transforming the world, not escaping from it.

**For reflection:**

Have you heard someone speak about their belief in a "rapture?" How did they support their belief? What do you think inspires this belief? What does this belief support?

**Breath Prayer (1 Thessalonians 4:18)**

Breathe In: Encourage

Breathe Out: One another