

UNIT 5

BF232 OUR FUTURE HOPE

We're going to continue our study of our future hope by looking now at the Church.

THE CHURCH IS A MYSTERY, OR WAS A MYSTERY, IN GOD'S PLAN.

From the very beginning, God planned to fill the world with people who worshiped Him as the living God. God wanted the nations to be blessed through Abraham's seed. When God called Israel, God called Israel to be a kingdom of priests to the nations.

I'm showing you these things from the beginning so you can see God always had a heart for the nations. God always wanted all the world to know Him. God wanted the world "to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord," as Habakkuk says, "like waters cover the sea."

God's heart was always for the nations, but Israel failed in her calling as a kingdom of priests. We saw that when we were in the Old Testament. God predicted in Deuteronomy that Israel would fail to keep her covenant, and she would have to be punished and eventually taken out of her land. After that long period of waiting when we got to the book of Matthew, we saw that Jesus came as the promised King. He and John the Baptist proclaimed the Kingdom of Heaven was near. God was ready to begin the Kingdom with Israel; but because Israel rejected Jesus as the Christ, the plan took a different direction.

Jesus commanded His disciples to take the Gospel to the nations. We saw in Matthew that because of Israel's rejection of Jesus, God is now doing something new; and the new thing that He is doing is building His Church.

In Matthew, we were looking at

GOD'S PLAN IN LIGHT OF ISRAEL'S REJECTION

I will remind you that:

JESUS SPOKE ABOUT THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S KINGDOM DURING THE TIME BETWEEN THE 1ST AND 2ND COMING OF CHRIST

He said that the gospel would go out, there would be sons and daughters of the Kingdom, there would be people that would enter the Kingdom when the Kingdom begins, but the Kingdom would not begin until Jesus comes back a second time. Jesus also began to speak of His coming death, burial and resurrection. We saw in Matthew that:

FROM THEN ON, JESUS BEGAN TO TELL HIS DISCIPLES THAT IT WAS NECESSARY FOR HIM TO SUFFER, TO BE KILLED AND RISE ON THE THIRD DAY

The idea is that Jesus was not telling them about His death, burial, and resurrection until the Jews had rejected Him as the Christ. In light of Israel's rejection,

JESUS ANNOUNCED HE WOULD BUILD SOMETHING NEW CALLED THE CHURCH

We saw this in Matthew as well. Jesus said,

Matthew 16:17-18 Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."

Christ is building His Church now. We know that the Church is different from Israel. Israel was a nation of people; but in Christ, Galatians says,

Galatians 3:28 There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Paul calls this time period that we know as the Church age, a mystery in God's plan.

THE CHURCH WAS A MYSTERY IN GOD'S PLAN

This is what he says in Ephesians.

Ephesians 3:3-4 As I briefly wrote earlier, God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me. As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ.

Paul says God did not reveal this to previous generations. This is something that Isaiah didn't know about. This is something that Daniel didn't know about. This was something that was not known until Paul came. It was not known that God would do something different, that God would have a people called the Church and that inside of this group called the Church, there's Jew and Gentile together.

He goes on to say,

Ephesians 3:5 by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets.

This means that God, through His Spirit, revealed these truths to Paul and the other apostles. This is God's plan, both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News, the Gospel, they share equally in the riches inherited by God's Children. They are part of the same Body. They enjoy the promise of blessing because they belong to Christ Jesus.

You remember how God was at work in history to restore His blessing to mankind? That blessing is found in Christ; and believers who are Jewish Christians, believers who are Gentile Christians or Christians from other nations, God makes us one Body together by His Spirit when we believe in Christ and what He did for us. It was a mystery that there would be a new Body called the Church. **God's plan for the Church is different from God's plan for Israel.**

ISRAEL, THE CHURCH AND GOD'S PLAN

GOD WANTED ISRAEL TO BE HIS WITNESS TO THE NATIONS.

BUT BECAUSE ISRAEL BROKE HER COVENANT, GOD'S PLAN INCLUDES JUDGMENT UPON HER IN THE GREAT TRIBULATION.

We saw this in Daniel. There would be 70 units of seven. That final unit of seven, that final seven years, would be great distress and tribulation for Daniel's people. That means for the Jewish people. I also mentioned that Jeremiah 30:7 calls this time period the time of Israel's trouble. It is a time period that God will discipline Israel. He will use this to bring her to repentance. This is because God wants Israel to be saved. It's a special time period that God has planned for Israel.

GOD'S PLAN FOR THE CHURCH IS DIFFERENT. GOD'S PLAN FOR THE CHURCH IS FOUND IN THE LETTERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE BLESSED HOPE OF THE CHURCH

God's plan for the Church cannot be found in the Old Testament because we just saw that Paul said it was not known in the Old Testament. This is new information that God is giving through the apostles. In this course, we began in Genesis 1 and 2 with God's plan. We've been looking at God's plan as it unfolds, and we have been focusing on God's plan for Israel. **But now, we're looking at God's plan for the Church.**

We find that in the letters of the New Testament. Our study of God's plan for the Church and our future hope is going to be in 1 Thessalonians. We will start this in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, and we will go through to verse 18. I will read this first verse here. Paul said,

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died you will not grieve like people who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.

I want to just point out a few things with these verses. First of all,

THOSE WITHOUT CHRIST, OR THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW JESUS, ARE WITHOUT HOPE.

Do you see what he says? He says that he doesn't want them to grieve like people who have no hope. There are some people who have no hope because there is no hope apart from Jesus. That's why it is important to get the Gospel message to all people. Only the Gospel gives us hope for eternal life. Paul knows that the people who died without the Gospel have no hope.

There was a piece of stone found in Thessaloniki, the place where the people to whom this letter was written lived; and on that piece of stone, words were engraved, chiseled into the stone that goes back to the time of Paul. Here's what those words said, "After death, there is no life. After the grave, we will never meet again."

The Thessalonians believed that when they died, it was completely over. They didn't know about the wrath of God that comes upon unbelievers when they die, nor did they know about the hope of the Gospel. Paul says don't grieve like people who have no hope. What is happening here, is that some of the Christians' family had died. People that they knew had died, and they were very sad. God is not saying that it's wrong to grieve, but He is saying not to grieve as if there were no hope. Even though it's sad when someone who is a believer dies, we know that there's hope. Paul says we don't grieve like other people. The reason we have hope, he says,

1 Thessalonians 4:14 For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.

BELIEVERS SORROW AT DEATH, BUT NOT IN THE SAME WAY AS OTHERS

THE BELIEVER'S HOPE IS CERTAIN

Notice how certain our hope is since we believe that Jesus died and rose again. "God also will bring with him those who have died in Christ." What this is saying is that just as surely as Christ rose from the dead, believers will come with Him when He comes again. Our hope is as certain as the resurrection; and the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead is a promise that He will raise all believers from the dead when that time comes.

THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST

Paul tells us how this will happen.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 We tell you this directly from the Lord:

That means that Paul's words are not his own words. They are the words that God gave him to write down. He says,

1 Thessalonians 4:15 We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died.

I'll stop there for a moment. The Thessalonians were worried about the believers who had already died. Maybe they thought that when Jesus comes back, those believers will just miss out because they're already dead. Paul says, "No, we won't meet the Lord before they do. They will meet the Lord first." He says,

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves.

The picture that Paul gives us is that Jesus will come for His Church. When He comes, He will shout. There will be this loud sound, and His voice is like an archangel. His voice is like a trumpet call of God. Every believer who is alive when Jesus comes at this event will hear Him. Maybe you've been in a crowd of people before, and someone is trying to call your name, but you can't hear. When Jesus comes back, every believer will hear. He will call for us; and He will get our attention.

He says that the believers who have died will rise from their graves. This is the resurrection where Jesus will resurrect believers who have already died. It's the resurrection that we're looking at. He tells us that the dead in Christ will rise first. Notice how he says that believers who have died will rise from their graves. It's not talking about Israel and Old Testament believers. It's talking about the believers who are in Christ, those who are part of one Body called the Church. Those who have died will be resurrected. Verse 17 says,

1 Thessalonians 4:17 Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.

THE LIVING BELIEVERS WILL BE TRANSLATED OR CHANGED.

Notice how he says we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds. I want to mention that you may have heard of the word rapture before. The word rapture, is a word believers use to talk about this event. The word rapture isn't a word that's found in the Bible; but it's a word that we use to explain what is found in the Bible. Paul simply says we will be caught up. The idea is that when Jesus calls from heaven, when His voice shouts like the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God, then believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Then, we will be with the Lord forever.

Paul is talking about an event. In this event, those who have died are resurrected first. Then, those who are still alive meet the Lord in the air. It's probably one, and right after that, the other. What's beautiful about this is that Paul says, "Then, we will be with the Lord forever."

Right now, we walk by faith. We've never seen the Lord. At this moment when the rapture happens, for the first time ever, we will see with our own eyes the Lord Jesus who died for us and rose again.

This is an important event for us.

WE WILL BE FOREVER IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST.

He says, "Then, we will be with the Lord forever."

THE HOPE OF CHRIST'S COMING GIVES US COMFORT AS WE WAIT.

He says to encourage each other with these words.

GOD'S PLAN FOR THE CHURCH AND GOD'S PLAN FOR ISRAEL

What I want to do is talk about the differences between God's plan for the Church and God's plan for Israel. I'm going to do that by talking about the rapture, which is the event in 1 Thessalonians 4, and the Second Coming of Jesus, which we've also called the second advent. This comes at the end of the Tribulation.

I want to let you know that Christians have different views on end times. Some of these things are debated. There are different opinions among Christians; but I will teach you what I believe the Scripture is saying.

There is the Rapture and the Second Coming. With the Rapture,

THERE'S NO REASON WHY CHRIST COULD NOT RETURN FOR THE CHURCH TODAY.

People say that the Rapture is imminent, or it could happen at any time. One of the reasons why we believe that is because Paul says, "we who are alive and remain until the Lord comes." Of course, Paul died before the Lord came; but he assumed that he could be alive when the Lord comes. The rapture could happen at any time.

The Second Coming of Christ cannot happen at any time. You remember from Matthew 24, Jesus said,

**THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM MUST BE PREACHED IN ALL THE WORLD
BEFORE THE END CAN COME.**

The Rapture could happen now, but the 2nd Advent cannot happen until after the Tribulation. This makes us think that they are different events. One is God's plan for the Church. The other is God's plan for Israel.

THE RAPTURE WILL HAPPEN BEFORE THE TRIBULATION.

We will look at this in the next chapter of Thessalonians.

Paul says, "God has not appointed us for wrath," talking about the Tribulation. The Rapture must happen before the Tribulation; but

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS IS AT THE END OF THE TRIBULATION

as we saw in Matthew 24.

WITH THE RAPTURE, BELIEVERS ARE CAUGHT UP TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR.

That's God's plan for the Church. Zachariah said,

**WITH THE SECOND COMING, CHRIST WILL COME DOWN TO THE EARTH
TO ESTABLISH HIS KINGDOM.**

These are different events. This is at the end of the Tribulation when the Kingdom comes.

WITH THE RAPTURE, SATAN IS NOT BOUND.

His activity increases following the Rapture.

WITH THE SECOND COMING, SATAN IS BOUND FOR 1000 YEARS.

It says this in Revelation 20. These are different events.

WITH THE RAPTURE, THE LORD HIMSELF COMES FOR THE CHURCH;

**BUT WITH THE SECOND COMING, GOD SENDS ANGELS TO GATHER HIS CHOSEN ONES THAT
THEY MAY ENJOY HIS EARTHLY REIGN.**

WITH THE RAPTURE, THERE'S A RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD IN CHRIST.

That refers to Church saints, or believers, who come to faith during the Church Age.

THE SECOND COMING IS A RESURRECTION OF OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS.

In Daniel chapter 12, God told Daniel it was about his people, talking about Israel.

**THE RAPTURE WAS NOT REVEALED IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES, JUST AS OTHER CHURCH
TRUTHS WERE NOT REVEALED.**

WITH THE SECOND COMING, IT'S MENTIONED IN BOTH THE OLD AND THE NEW TESTAMENTS.

IN SUMMARY

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST IS PROOF THAT THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL BE RAISED FROM THE DEAD AND CAUGHT UP TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR.

Our hope is connected to the resurrection of Jesus. Because God delivered Him from the grave, we know that even if we die before the Rapture, Jesus will raise us from the dead also when He comes.

We also know that,

OUTSIDE OF CHRIST, THERE IS NO HOPE WHATSOEVER.

This is the urgency of the Gospel message to the nations. Their only hope is found in the Gospel message.

OUR FUTURE HOPE IS CONNECTED TO THE RAPTURE.

I'm not going to read all these verses, but let me explain what they're talking about. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that we will not all sleep or die; but we will all be changed in the moment, as quick as an eye can blink. Paul is saying that we get our new bodies. We are glorified. This happens when the Rapture happens. Paul says in Philippians 3, that Christ will change our humble bodies and make them like His when He comes for us. Even if we die before the Rapture and we are dead and are present with the Lord, we get our new bodies when the Rapture happens. Our hope is connected to the Rapture.

LET'S LOOK AT OUR TIMELINE AGAIN.

We know that the Church Age is taking place between these 69 units of seven and the final unit of seven. As I shared earlier, it's kind of like God hit the button to stop the clock for Israel during the Church Age. We call this the Church Age. It's the time between the First and Second Coming of Christ. In this time period, the focus is the Gospel to the Nations. We call it the Church Age. God's hope for believers in the Church Age is different for His hope for Israel, as we've already seen. The hope that believers have in the Church age is that when this time period is over, the Lord Himself will come down from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel. The dead in Christ will rise first. We will meet the Lord in the air and be with Him forever.

This event of being caught up to meet the Lord in the air is not God's future hope for Israel. They will go through the Great Tribulation. Jesus will come back for them at the end. The believers' hope in the Church age is this event that we call the Rapture. This is when we're caught up to meet the Lord in the air. In 1 Thessalonians 4:18, Paul says that we are to comfort each other with these words. I hope that you are comforted when you think about the fact that one day, Jesus will come back for you and me. Until He does, we can trust Him. We can live for Him. We don't even have to be afraid of death. If we die

before He comes back, the dead in Christ will rise first; and we will be the first ones to meet the Lord in the air.