

The Coming of the Lord Jesus. Georgia. November 2008.

As you probably know, I have been asked to focus attention in these meetings particularly on the subject of biblical prophecy – of prophecy in the sense, that is, of the foretelling of future events.

And this evening we shall consider together a little of what the Lord has revealed to us about the next great event marked down on God's calendar, namely that of the coming of our Lord Jesus for us His people.

And we have two – very well known – readings. First, the opening three verses of John 14. **[John 14. 1-3]**

And the second, from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 4, coming in at verse 9 ... now down to verse 13. **[1 Thess. 4. 9, 13-18]**

I hardly need tell you that many godly and well-read students of biblical prophecy differ enormously in their views of what is to happen in the future.

Not that there is any shortage of information in your Bible about the subject – far from it. But, for His own reasons, God has not seen fit to map out in one place any precise and detailed programme of future events. And, as we shall discover during several of our meetings, what teaching scripture does give of this nature is mostly imbedded in very practical settings. It is clear that the Lord's concern lies far more with affecting the way we live in the present than in satisfying our curiosity about what lies in the future.

And, at the outset, I have to confess to you, my brothers and sisters, that *my* greatest problem lies *not* with the interpretation of any given passage – although I *do have* very real problems with knowing exactly what some passages mean ... nor even in fitting all the pieces together into some likely prophetic programme – and I have even bigger problems in doing that ... but, frankly, my *greatest* problem lies, not in *grasping the subject*, but in *letting the subject grasp me*.

For, in my world ... of modern technology – of cars and planes – of computers, mobile phones and PowerPoint projectors ... the expectation that the Lord Jesus, who some 2,000 years ago came into this world and who died at Golgotha ... the hope that this same Lord Jesus is to come again can often seem so unreal. May God help each of us to take it seriously – that it might affect the way we live.

Well, speaking for myself, in trying to fit the little I know into a meaningful picture of future events, I have long accepted the view that our Lord's coming *for us* will *precede* those events which fall in what, for convenience, are often spoken of as Daniel's 70th week and the Great Tribulation – which events are, if I have it right, themselves to be followed by our Lord's Advent as the awesome warrior King to establish His manifested kingdom here on earth.¹

But my views on this don't affect much of what I have to say this evening, because I intend to concentrate on the two passages we have just read – which, as you will have gathered, most certainly have to do with our Lord's return.

And I begin by looking first at our reading from 1 Thessalonians 4.

By way of background, I note that, although the church at Thessalonica was a young church, and that the apostle Paul had spent a relatively short time there, he had taught them quite extensively about prophetic matters. Indeed, in this very letter, he refers to such matters towards the close of each chapter. The Christians there were therefore fairly familiar with much of what the Lord had revealed about future events – and Paul pays them tribute in the closing section of chapter 1 that it was public and widespread knowledge that they had not only turned to God from their idols, to serve Him – 'the living and true God' – but that they were 'waiting' – 'waiting with patient expectation',² for His Son to return from heaven.³

Not that they were alone in this. The same was true of the early church in general.⁴

From what Paul says in our passage, it seems likely that the Thessalonian believers fully expected that the Lord would come again during their lifetime, and that they never imagined that any of their number would die before that happened. But clearly that is just what had happened, and that the remaining saints feared that somehow they – the Christians who had died – would therefore be disadvantaged. And we should bear in mind, from Paul's words in verse 15, 'this we say to you by the word of the Lord', that *as yet* they knew nothing of what the apostle now tells them.⁵

For, although, according to verse 9, the apostle knew that there was no need for him to give them any instructions 'concerning brotherly love' – for they already practised it – he did need to inform them, as he says in verse 13, of God's agenda 'concerning those who have fallen asleep'.⁶

And what a lovely – and wholly biblical way – to speak of Christians who have died ... adopted originally I suspect on account of the similarity in appearance – in the restful appearance – between a sleeping body and a dead body. And I do stress *'body'*, for – according to scripture – both the Old and the New Testaments – it is only the believer's *body* which sleeps⁷... certainly not his soul or his spirit.

'Lest you sorrow ('lest you grieve'), as the rest, who have no hope'.

We must not misunderstand what Paul is saying. Grief over the loss of loved-ones – with the inevitable pain of separation and loneliness – is perfectly consistent with the hope of the Christian. Indeed, the man who wrote these words spoke later, in Philippians 2, of the sorrow into which he would have been plunged had the sickness of Epaphroditus proved terminal.⁸ And perhaps more to the point, we know that the Lord Jesus Himself wept in sympathy with the mourners at the grave of His friend Lazarus.⁹

The problem was that the believers at Thessalonica were sorrowing, not merely over *their* loss, but over the loss which they supposed had been sustained by those who had fallen asleep.

'For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in ('through', 'on account of') Jesus'. And it is important to note that the Christian confidence of which Paul wrote was not the result of human or philosophical speculation, but was based on a rock-solid and historical foundation – namely that the Jesus who had died had also risen again.

And we see, in passing, that though our Lord has *transformed* 'death' for the Christian into 'sleep', *He Himself* experienced the full horror of death *as death*.¹⁰ As the writer to the Hebrews expressed it in verse 9 of his second chapter, He 'tasted death'.

And yet 'He rose again' – His resurrection being spoken of here, I note, as on several occasions by Himself, as His *own* work.¹¹ And His resurrection was the evidence that death really had been conquered. It is, as the apostle Peter made clear in verse 3 of the opening chapter of his first letter, the very guarantee and pledge of the Christian's hope¹² - and, as Paul repeatedly affirmed, it carries with it the assurance of the resurrection to life of all who believe in Jesus.¹³ To take but one example – the apostle's words in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 14 – '*knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus*'.

But in our verse Paul does not refer to the believer's resurrection – for that was not the point at issue at Thessalonica – but rather to our faith that 'if ... Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him (the Lord Jesus) those who sleep in Jesus'.

For my part, I understand the apostle's expression 'bring with Him' to be a reference to the return of the Lord Jesus in the glory of His coming manifested Kingdom ... when, according to verse 13 of the previous chapter, 'our Lord Jesus Christ comes *with* all His saints'¹⁴ – *not* as in our chapter, when He comes *for* all His saints ... when He comes, according to verse 10 of chapter 1 of Paul's Second Epistle, 'to be glorified in His saints and admired in all who believe'.¹⁵

And it seems to me that the believers at Thessalonica feared that somehow those who now 'slept through Jesus' would be deprived of their share in that Kingdom – and that Paul is at pains to assure them that those who die in Christ will certainly *not* miss out in any way – that they will accompany the Lord Jesus when He returns to reign.

Ah, but someone might then say, 'How can God possibly bring them with the Lord Jesus if their bodies are lying asleep in the ground?' Hence verses 15 to 17 ... which explain – on the very *highest* authority – that of the 'word of the Lord' – just how this will be achieved.

'For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming'¹⁶ of the Lord shall by no means (the expression is emphatic: 'shall in no wise'¹⁷) precede those who have fallen asleep'.

The *time* of our Lord's descent from heaven is among those 'secret things' which 'belong to the Lord our God' – which God jealously guards to Himself.¹⁸

And it is clear that even the apostle Paul had no inside information on the subject. For, as we shall see tomorrow evening, the apostle sometimes identifies himself – as he does here – with those who will be *alive* at the coming of the Lord Jesus, and who look forward to having their 'mortal' bodies 'changed'¹⁹ ... and sometimes – as in 1 Corinthians 6 verse 14 – with those who will have fallen asleep, and whose 'corruptible' bodies are to be raised up.²⁰

What Paul knew – and what we know – is that the full enjoyment of 'our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed'.²¹ And remember please that the apostle said that almost two millennia ago.

If I understand my Bible correctly, our Lord's return to reign in glory with His saints will be preceded by a host of spectacular happenings and signs – which shall be witnessed by all then alive.²² But I read of no warning events or special signs before His coming to, in the language of verse 17, 'catch up' His church.

I read several years ago of one young boy who 'was playing in his grandmother's house near a large grandfather clock. Noontime was approaching, and when both hands of the old timepiece reached twelve, the chimes began to ring. As he always liked to do, the boy counted each gong as it sounded. This time, however, something went wrong with the clock's inner mechanism. Instead of stopping at 12, it kept right on chiming ...13, 14, 15, 16 times. The boy couldn't believe his ears! He jumped to his feet and ran into the kitchen, shouting, "Grandma! Grandma! *It's later than it's ever been before!*"²³

And, without knowing it, the young boy expressed a great truth – for it *is* later than it has ever been before. And I suggest that we can properly say no more than that. For we simply do not know when our Lord will come.

But what we do know is that ... **'the Lord Himself will descend from heaven ...'**. And the word 'Himself' stands in the position of emphasis in the Greek text, stressing to us that the Lord Jesus will not commit or delegate this task to any other.

'An angel of Lord' may 'descend (the same word) from heaven' – to roll away the stone from our Lord's sepulchre.²⁴ But it will be no angel who descends from heaven to greet the Lord's completed church!

Yes, the coming of the Lord Jesus may be accompanied by 'the voice of an archangel' – as our verse tells us it shall – but it will be no archangel substitute who descends to meet the Bride of Christ!

And I note that – whereas at His Second Advent (when he comes in power and glory to reign), He will, according to 2 Thessalonians 1 verse 7, be 'revealed from heaven with His mighty angels' – when He comes to take His people home, no mention is made of any angels.

'For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout ...'. With 'a shout' of command, the word is. The actual word occurs only once else in the entire Greek Bible – back in Proverbs chapter 30 verse 27, which reads, 'The locusts have no king, yet at *the word of command* (this word) they march in rank'.²⁵

Interestingly, outside of scripture, the word was used of a command given by a master of a ship to his rowers, by a huntsman to his dogs, by a chariot-driver to his steeds, and by a commander to his troops.²⁶

This shout is not actually *said* to be that of the Lord – simply that it sounds out when the Lord descends. But I suspect it *is* His voice – and I have my eye especially on John 5 verse 28, 'the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves *shall hear His voice* and come forth ...'.

Indeed, it is at least *possible* that His '*shout*' will rouse *the sleeping saints* – just as, according to John 11 verses 43 and 44, His 'loud voice' once roused Lazarus of Bethany from his 'sleep' of death²⁷ ... and that '*the trumpet of God*' – presumably one and the same as 'the last trumpet', which we shall consider, God willing, tomorrow evening – will summon and gather the living saints – just as, according to scripture, trumpets have been – and will yet be – used to gather together the nation of Israel.²⁸

But that is only a suggestion. What we know it is that, according to verses 16 and 17, both the sleeping and the living saints will respond to the Lord's coming. And this in perfect accord with *our Lord's own words* to Martha prior to the raising of her brother; 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live (or, as we have it here, 'the dead in Christ will rise first'); and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die' (or, as we have it here, 'we who are alive and remain shall be caught up').²⁹

'With the voice of an archangel'. We don't read the title 'archangel' anywhere in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament only once again – in Jude 9 – of '*Michael* the archangel'.³⁰ Scripture does not tell us in so many words that there are others who occupy this exalted rank over the heavenly host, but the description of Michael in Daniel 10 verse 13 as '*one of the chief princes*' suggests there may well be. In any case, the emphasis in our verse is on the nature and quality of the voice, rather than on either the identity of the speaker or on what is said.

'And the dead in Christ will rise first'. So that, far from being placed at any disadvantage, *they* shall be raised even before *the living* are changed.

But our passage speaks not only of (i) a **return** (that of the Lord Himself), and of (ii) a **resurrection** ('the dead in Christ shall be raised'), but, in verse 17, also of (iii) a **rapture** ('shall be caught up') and (iv) a **re-union** ('together with them').

'Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them'. That expression 'caught up' translates a word which means properly 'to take something forcefully', and which is used here in the sense 'to catch up'³¹ – as it was both in the case of the ascension of the Lord Jesus³² and in the case of the apostle Paul's being transported to the third heaven.³³

The word often implies – and may well do so here – the use of a sudden force to snatch something or someone away³⁴ – as was true, for example, both of (a) the action of the evil one in our Lord's parable of the Sower and His Seed in Matthew 13, when he 'snatches away' the 'word of the kingdom' which is not understood,³⁵ and (b) the action of the Spirit of the Lord in catching away Philip in Acts 8 from the Ethiopian eunuch on the road to Gaza.³⁶

The Latin Vulgate translation renders this particular word as 'raptus', from which – as you may guess – we get our word English 'rapture'. And many believers therefore use the word 'rapture' as shorthand to describe the coming of the Lord for His church spoken of in this passage.³⁷ I have no problem with this. The fact that, as far as English goes, 'rapture' is not a biblical word doesn't bother me – any more than the fact that neither are words such as 'Trinity', 'sovereign' or 'mission'.

'Caught up *together with them*', Paul wrote, '... therefore comfort one another'. And what a prospect that is! But more exciting *still* is what he says in verse 10 of the next chapter – that whether we then 'wake' (as those then alive), or sleep (then in death), 'we shall live (we shall enter into life in all its fullness) *together with Him*'. Small wonder that Paul adds there too, in verse 11, 'Therefore comfort (or 'encourage') each other'.

'In the clouds' – just as, according to Acts 1, our Lord Himself ascended to heaven in 'a cloud'³⁸ – and just as, indeed, God's two witnesses of the period prior to the Great Tribulation, will 'ascend up to heaven in a cloud'.³⁹

'To meet the Lord' – and both the dead in Christ and the living are to meet the Lord simultaneously. We shall *all* then, in the language of the opening verse of 2 Thessalonians 2, 'be gathered together to Him'. It would be true to say that we 'gather to Him' now⁴⁰ – and we will 'gather to Him' then. In the language of the King James Version of Genesis 49 verse 10, 'unto Him shall the gathering of the people be'.

And we shall meet **'in the air'** – a reference, I take it, to the atmosphere, which, bearing in mind what Paul says in Ephesians 2 of the devil as 'the prince of the authority of the air', may possibly be regarded as enemy territory. In which case, it may not be too fanciful to say that the very choice of our place of meeting – the sphere from which Satan conducts his present operations – will only serve to underline our Lord's glorious triumph over 'the god of this world'.

And what an adventure that will be – 'to meet the Lord' ... and I guess the more so for those who are alive when He comes – who will see Him for the very first time – and who will not, as 'the dead in Christ', have previously been 'with' Him.⁴¹

'And so shall we ever be with the Lord'.

There is, we note, nothing in our passage to indicate where the Lord and His people will go after their meeting – whether, now with them, He continues His descent, or whether, as I believe, now with them, He returns to heaven.

Nor, for that matter, is anything said about any change being made to the bodies, whether of the dead in Christ or of the living believers – but which, as we shall see tomorrow evening, there certainly will be. For our Lord's coming will mean, not only the fulfilment of His *promise*, and the enjoyment of His *presence*, but the exertion of His *power* – a power which will not only to raise the bodies of dead⁴² but will transform the bodies of the living.

But of these matters, Paul says nothing. His concern here is simply to prove how groundless were the worries of the Thessalonians about those who had died. Hence his exhortation, **'Therefore comfort one another with these words'**.⁴³

And Paul's closing words stand in marked contrast to what is written in one of the most pathetic papyrus letters that has come down to us from the following century.

The letter⁴⁴ was written by a woman named Irene, offering her sympathy to bereaved friends. The letter runs: 'Irene to Taonnophris and Philo, good comfort. I am as sorry and weep over the departed one as I wept for Didymas (one of her own immediate family) ... And all things whatsoever were fitting, I have done ... But, nevertheless, against such things one can do nothing. Therefore comfort one another. Fare well'. As the translator of this letter points out, it is clear that Irene, a well-to-do lady, 'experiences the difficulty of those whose business it is to console and *who have no consolation to offer* ... Who could help feeling for the helplessness of this woman ...?'

But, in splendid contrast – and not limited to Irene’s bare, ‘Therefore comfort one another’ – the apostle concludes, ‘Therefore comfort one another *with these words*’. And what tremendous consolation those words convey.

‘And so shall we ever be with the Lord’, Paul wrote – which is, of course, exactly what He – our Lord Jesus – Himself promised in our reading from John 14: ‘that where I am, there you may be also’ – in which both the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ are emphatic.

As you can appreciate, we shan’t be able to study that section in any depth. But the chapter opens with our Lord’s reference to the disciples’ collective ‘heart’ being ‘troubled’.⁴⁵ And there was much to cause them anxiety and alarm at the time. For, as soon as Judas had left the room,⁴⁶ Jesus broke the news to them – not only that He was about to leave them, but that, as He said, ‘Where I go, you cannot follow me now’.⁴⁷

His announcement came as a bombshell, throwing the disciples’ minds into turmoil. For over three years, their whole world had been wrapped up with Him, and they were devastated at the prospect of His imminent departure.

Back in chapter 12, knowing that the hour had come for Him to be glorified through His sufferings, Jesus had said, ‘Now is *my soul* troubled ...’⁴⁸ And in chapter 13, John records how, speaking of the Lord’s betrayal by Judas, ‘He (the Lord) was troubled in spirit’.⁴⁹ It was Jesus who had been troubled in both soul and spirit. It was Jesus who was now facing the agony and anguish of the cross. And you would have thought that now was the time for the disciples to comfort and support Him. But no! They were concerned only with *their own* loss – leaving it for *Him* to comfort *them*.

They were, He told them, to believe in Him – even as they believed in God. That is, from now on, they would need to have the same kind of faith and trust in Him – when He could no longer be seen or touched – as, being Jews, they already had in the God they had never seen or touched.

And then – perhaps with a distant look in His eyes – He spoke to them of **‘My Father’s house’**⁵⁰ – promising them that, at some time, they would indeed be able to join Him there because there would be room and enough for them all. And this ‘because’, by His very ‘going’ – through His death, resurrection and ascension, He would secure a place for them there.⁵¹ And we know that the place which, according to the writer to the Hebrews, He (the Lord Jesus) has ‘*entered for us*’⁵², and which, according to the apostle Peter, is ‘*reserved for us*’⁵³, is ours only because He (the Lord Jesus) first went – by way of His passion and glorification – and in so doing ‘*prepared*’ it ‘*for us*’.

And I note that He spoke of only one house in heaven. It was His Father’s. He knew it well. And He knew it was *big - very big* – and that in His Father’s house there were **‘many dwelling-places’** – ‘many abiding-places’, many living-quarters, if you like.⁵⁴

Back in chapter 2, He had spoken of the Temple in Jerusalem also as His ‘Father’s house’.⁵⁵ And, dating right from the days of Solomon⁵⁶, there had been many ‘chambers’ against the walls of the outer court of each phase of the Temple. And so we read in Nehemiah 13 that Eliashib the priest ‘prepared a room’ for Tobiah, the Ammonite official, ‘in the courts of the house of God’.⁵⁷ But Eliashib, to his cost, had reckoned without good Nehemiah, who, on his return to Jerusalem, promptly threw out all of Tobiah’s belongings.⁵⁸

Our Lord may well have such dwelling-places⁵⁹ in His mind – but, if so, we can rest assured that there will be no Tobiahs in the ‘Father’s house’ in heaven! Nor sellers of oxen, sheep and doves or money-changers for that matter!

But our Lord may also have in mind the resting places which were stationed along key roads in the East, at which a traveller would stop to be refreshed on his journey – and which were known by the very word which the Lord Jesus used here.⁶⁰ In such cases, a messenger would often go in advance to prepare the particular dwelling-place, that the traveller on his arrival would find comfort as well as shelter there. Indeed, we read in Luke 9, when the time was come for Jesus to be received up, that He set His face to go to Jerusalem, and that He ‘sent messengers before His face. And *going*, they entered a village of the Samaritans *to prepare* for Him’⁶¹ – where the Greek words for ‘going’ and ‘prepare’ are exactly the same as we find here in John 14. Although the ‘dwelling-places’ spoken of here will clearly be permanent and not temporary.

Having prepared the ‘abiding-place’, the Eastern messenger would then return – to escort and bring the weary traveller to the place which he – the messenger – had prepared. Possibly with this in mind, the Saviour promised, **‘I will come again’** – but then added something which no Eastern messenger would have ever said, **‘and receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be also’**.⁶² For, ultimately, the believer’s happy hope is not so much to gain admission to some ‘abiding place’ in the Father’s house – wonderful though that will be – as to be with the Lord Jesus – to be ‘where I am’, as He said.⁶³

And we thrill to know that when He returns we shall then not only be *with* Him, but, as we read at the opening of 1 John 3, ‘we shall be *like* Him, for we shall see Him as He is’.⁶⁴ I read in my New Testament of wise men who once

travelled to see him, of an aged Simeon who *waited* to see Him, of rich Zacchaeus who *shinned up a tree* to see Him, of Herod Antipas who *desired* to see Him and of certain Greeks who *requested* to see Him. But ...**PP**... the wonder of it all is that one day *I shall see Him*.

'*With Him*', '*like Him*' and '*see Him*' – what more could anyone ask.

A little over sixty-three years ago, on September 2, 1945, on board USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, General Douglas MacArthur presided over the Japanese surrender, which brought World War II to its close.⁶⁵

Three and a half years earlier, back in March 1942, General MacArthur and his troops had been compelled to leave the island fortress of Corregidor in the Philippines, because three months before that, on the day following the attack at Pearl Harbour, the Japanese had invaded the Philippines. Corregidor was the last island to fall, and, just before it did, MacArthur was told to break through the Japanese blockade and to get to Australia.

When the General arrived at Adelaide on his way to Melbourne,⁶⁶ he found a large crowd waiting for him. He spoke a few words to them, which he had quickly managed to scribble on the back of an envelope: 'The President of America ordered me to proceed from Corregidor to Australia for the purpose, as I understand it, of organising the American offensive against Japan – a primary object of which is the relief of the Philippines. I came through and *I shall return*'. This was the solemn pledge given by Douglas MacArthur to the people of the Philippines in March 1942 ... 'I shall return'.⁶⁷

And some two and a half years later, he did just that.⁶⁸ Landing at the island of Leyte, to the background of gunfire, the General announced, 'People of the Philippines, *I have returned*'.⁶⁹ He had fulfilled his promise, and, following some fierce fighting, the Japanese were defeated and the islands retaken.

But Douglas MacArthur's words remind me of the solemn pledge – of the firm promise – of One who is infinitely greater than any number of 5-Star Generals – of the words of our Lord Jesus Himself, 'I will come again'.

MacArthur's promise, 'I shall return', certainly counted for a lot. He later commented, 'It lit a flame that focused the nation's will. It was scraped on the sand of the beaches, it was daubed on the walls of the houses, it was stamped on the mail, it was whispered in the cloisters of the church. It became the battle-cry of a great underground swell that no Japanese bayonet could still'. Throughout the war, American submarines supplied Filipino guerrillas with cartons of buttons, packets of gum and boxes of matches, all bearing his message, 'I shall return'.⁷⁰ This promise kept their hope alive.⁷¹

May our study this evening – and on coming evenings – serve to help keep ours alive too. 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus'.

Endnotes

¹ That is, the manifested kingdom on earth is not to be established by our evangelism. Indeed, that prospect appears far more remote now than it did a hundred years ago. As I see it, the manifested kingdom will be introduced only by His direct intervention. If it is true that the world is to be gradually converted first – and if the earth is to experience the events foretold in Matthew 24 and Revelation 6-19 – then the return of Christ can in no sense be regarded as a present expectation.

The event outlined in 1 Thessalonians 4 gives every impression of being very different to that spoken of by our Lord Jesus in Matthew 24. True, both events deal with the general subject of our Lord's coming, both refer to the sounding of a trumpet, both refer to a gathering of God's people, and both assume a state of readiness. But then :

(a) Matthew 24 speaks of the sign of the Son of man; in 1 Thessalonians 4 it is 'the Lord Himself'.

(b) Matthew speaks of signs in the heavens, affecting the sun, moon and stars; Thessalonians makes no mention of signs or portends.

(c) Matthew speaks of judgements, warnings of the Abomination of Desolation, and instructions to flee; Thessalonians makes no mention of any of these.

(d) In Matthew, the tribes of the earth mourn; in Thessalonians, there is no mourning.

(e) in Matthew, the angels gather God's elect; in Thessalonians no mention is made of angels gathering the church.

(f) Matthew's passage is explained in Deuteronomy 30.1-6; the Thessalonians' is explained by John 14. 1-3.

(g) Matthew makes no mention of resurrection; Thessalonians does.

(h) In Matthew, it is a blessing to be left behind when others are taken for judgement; in Thessalonians, the blessing is to be 'caught up' (with the rest left for the Tribulation).

² 'The word carries with it the suggestion of "waiting" with patience and confident expectancy', W. E. Vine, 'Expository Dictionary', article 'Wait', 'ἀναμένω'.

³ 1 Thess. 1. 9-10.

⁴ Rom. 8. 23 ... 'as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed', 1 Cor. 1. 7; 'we eagerly await a Saviour from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body', Phil. 3. 19-20 (There are several verbal connections between Phil. 2. 6-8 and 3. 20-21. In chapter 2, we read of the One, who '*being*' (*huparchō*) in the *form* of God, was found in *fashion* as a man, and then *humbled* Himself. At the close of chapter 3, we read of our citizenship '*being*' (*huparchō*) in heaven, and of the Saviour's coming when 'our body of *humiliation*' will be *refashioned* that it might be *conformed* to His body of glory. At our Lord's first coming, He became like us; at His second coming, we shall become like Him!); Tit. 2. 13 (They were not looking for the Tribulation to come first – which would hardly have constituted a 'blessed' hope.); 'he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are [eagerly; same word] waiting for him', Heb. 9. 28.

Every time we break bread, we 'proclaim the Lord's death, until He come', 1 Cor 11. 26. Contrast the Passover; 'you shall keep it as a feast to Lord; throughout your generations you shall keep it as an ordinance for ever', Exod 12. 14, 42. That is, from its institution, the expectation was that the Passover would continue indefinitely. But, from the outset, there was the expectation that a day would come when the Supper would cease. (Note that 1 Corinthians both begins and ends with references to our Lord's coming; 'waiting for the coming', 1 Cor. 1. 7; 'Maranatha' ('our Lord, come'), 1 Cor. 16. 22.)

⁵ Indeed, as far as we know, up to the time of the writing of this epistle nothing earlier had been revealed of the details of our Lord's coming for His people.

⁶ Literally, 'the ones sleeping' – with the sense either of 'those who are lying asleep' or 'those who fall asleep from time to time'.

⁷ That the body alone is in view in this metaphor is evident, from Daniel 12:2, where the physically dead are described as "them that sleep [LXX *katheudō*, as at 5:6] in the dust of the earth," See Acts 13. 36. The "unclothed," or "naked," 2 Corinthians 5:3, 4, state of the believer is not final, for man without the body is not complete.

⁸ Phil. 2. 27.

⁹ John 11. 33–35.

¹⁰ Our Lord is never spoken of as 'sleeping' in death. Although he is said to be 'the firstfruits of them that have fallen asleep', 1 Cor. 15. 20.

¹¹ John 2. 19; 10. 17-18.

¹² 1 Pet. 1. 3.

¹³ 1 Cor. 6. 14; 15. 20; 2 Cor. 4. 14.

¹⁴ 'When our Lord Jesus Christ comes with all (not some) His (not 'the') saints'. This is how JND understands the reference: 'In this passage the coming of Jesus is not presented in the act of our gathering together to Him, when we go to meet Him; but in the act of our coming with Him from the Father's house, after having been in His presence. It is that moment which will shew whether we are unblameable', '*Collected Writings*', volume 27, page 297; and William Kelly, 'the manner in which this is connected with the coming of Christ here is very noticeable. He supposes it to be flowing out of love, and going on in holiness, proceeding unbroken, until the saint finds himself at last in the display of glory; not when Christ comes to take us up, but when God brings us with Him', '*Introductory Lectures on the Epistles of Paul – 1 Thessalonians*'. Also Gerald B. Stanton, '*Kept from the Hour*', J. Dwight

Pentecost, 'Things to Come', and T. B. Baines, 'The Lord's Coming, Israel and the Church', and see too the reference connection in the KJV margin to both 1 Thess. 3. 13 and 4. 14.

As opposed to W. E. Vine, who says of 1 Thess. 3. 13, "at [lit., in] the coming [the parousia] of our Lord Jesus with all His saints". The word "coming" is clearly unsuitable here. It makes the verse appear to indicate the Advent of the Lord with His saints. That will take place at the close of the Parousia; at its commencement He will come for them, and *it is to the circumstances of that intervening period itself that the apostle directs our thought in this passage*. His desire for the converts was that their Christian character might be so developed and perfected in this life that at the Judgment Seat in the Lord's Parousia they might stand clear of every possible charge against them', 'Touching the Coming of the Lord', chapter 5..

¹⁵ The meaning 'is not ... will bring their souls from heaven that they may be reunited with their bodies; for to their souls there is no allusion, nor could their souls be said to be laid asleep through Jesus', John Eadie on 1 Thessalonians 4. 15. But presumably it *could* mean that those who have first met Him in the air then accompany Him on His descent? And so they will be brought 'with Him' by God – in effect as some kind of welcoming committee, brought together prior to the establishing of His kingdom. (But this takes no account of what scripture says of the Tribulation etc.)

¹⁶ Literally, 'parousia'. It seems that, when it is used prophetically, 'parousia' refers to a period beginning with the descent of the Lord from heaven into the air (as in 1 Thessalonians 4. 15), and ending with His revelation and manifestation to the world. The word 'parousia' literally signifies 'a being with', 'a presence'.

'Not infrequently it is so rendered. It thus denotes a state, not an action. We never read of a *parousia to*, always of a *parousia with*. Paul tells the Philippian converts of his confidence that he will be with them "for their progress and joy in the faith, that their glorying may abound in Christ Jesus in him through his presence, his *parousia*, with them again". Further, he exhorts them as they have been obedient during his presence, his *parousia*, so much more in his absence, his *apousia*, to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 1. 26; 2. 12). In a Greek document of almost the same period as that in which the New Testament was written, a person states that attention to her property necessitates her *parousia* in a certain city. These examples suffice to show that, while of course the initial act of arrival is essential to a *parousia*, the word signifies the more or less prolonged period following the arrival', W. E. Vine, 'Touching the Coming of the Lord', chapter 5.

¹⁷ Paul uses the expression only four times outside of Old Testament quotations, and each time for emphasis. See Leon Morris on 1 Thessalonians 4. 15 in 'The New London Commentary'.

¹⁸ Cf. Acts 1. 7.

¹⁹ In the epistle to the Philippians, written probably about 10 years later, where His advancing years (see Philemon 9) and the threatening nature of his circumstances brought before his mind increasingly the possibility that he might die before our Lord's coming, he still spoke of 'heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour', Phil. 3. 20. And even in the pastoral epistles, while using language which reveals that he anticipated his speedy execution, he still speaks of 'looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ', Titus 2. 13.

²⁰ Calvin ingeniously suggests that, although Paul knew by 'a special revelation that Christ would come at a somewhat later date', he yet here speaks *as though* he would be among the living 'to arouse the Thessalonians to wait for it, and to keep all the godly in suspense'!

²¹ Rom. 13. 11.

²² Matthew 24. 14-31; Luke 21. 24-31. In contrast to his teaching concerning the coming of the Lord for His saints, Paul taught that certain events must precede the Day of the Lord. 'That Day will not be', he says, 'except the falling away [lit., the apostasy] come first, and the Man of Sin be revealed, the Son of Perdition, he who opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God', 2 Thess. 2. 3-5.

²³ Our Daily Bread, August 26, 1996.

²⁴ Matt 28. 2.

²⁵ 'The locusts have no king, and yet march orderly at one command', Brenton's translation (but the verse is not in the printed Bagster edition).

²⁶ See John Eadie and Liddell Scott for the references: by a master of a ship to his rowers (Aeschylus and Euripides), by a huntsman to his dogs (Xenophon), by a chariot-driver to his steeds (Phaedrus), and by a commander to his troops (Thucydides).

²⁷ John 11. 11-15.

²⁸ See Exod 19. 13; Num. 10. 8-10; and, at the Second Advent, Matt. 24. 31.

²⁹ John 11. 25-26. W. E. Vine writes, 'The words of the Lord correspond to those of the apostle, and the meaning of the earlier utterance is made clear by the latter. "He that believeth on me, though he die [lit., even if he were to die] yet shall he live", stand over against "the dead in Christ shall rise first". "Whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die", is explained by, "We that are alive that are left unto the presence [marg.] of the Lord", in 'Touching the Coming of the Lord', chapter 3.

³⁰ 'Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"', Jude 9.

³¹ TDNT, volume I, page 472.

³² Rev. 12. 5.

³³ 2 Cor. 12. 2, 4.

³⁴ See also its use in the sense of 'seize' in John 6. 15; 10. 12, 28, 29; Jude 23.

³⁵ Matt. 13. 19.

³⁶ Acts 8. 39.

³⁷ The English language uses the word 'rapture' with two different meanings; (i) of ecstatic delight, and (ii) of transporting someone from one place to another. Both of these meanings derive from the Latin 'raptus', meaning 'to be carried away'.

³⁸ Acts 1. 9-10.

³⁹ Rev. 11. 12.

⁴⁰ Matt. 18. 20.

⁴¹ Phil. 1. 23.

⁴² 1 Cor. 6. 14; Phil. 3. 21.

⁴³ And so, the coming of the Lord is not only :

- **a living hope**, 1 Pet. 1. 3;
- **a blessed hope**, Titus 2. 13;
- **a good hope**, 2 Thess. 2. 17;
- **a firm hope**, Heb. 6. 19; (Seneca, Rome's leading intellectual figure, tutor of Nero, and contemporary of Paul once defined hope as 'an uncertain good'. [http://www.preceptaustin.org/god's_word_of_hope.htm].) But the hope set before us functions as an anchor for our souls to prevent us from drifting away.)
- **a purifying hope**, 1 John 3. 3; ('When he appears, we shall be like him', 1 John 3. 2 – He will see to that. Meanwhile 'everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as he is pure', v. 3 – we must see to that. If we are going to be like Him forever, we must strive to be pure and holy like Him now! This is *not* an optional extra for the Christian – it is the bounden duty of every single believer. Indeed, John switches at this point from the corporate, collective language of verses 1 and 2 – 'we are God's children'; 'we shall be like him'; 'we shall see him'; and so on – to urge each of us as individuals to purify ourselves.)
- **an encouraging hope**, Heb. 10. 25; and
- **a stimulating hope**, 1 Cor. 15. 58;

but

- **a comforting hope**, 1 Thess. 4. 13-18.

⁴⁴ The full text of the letter reads, 'Irene to Taonnophris and Philo, good comfort. I am as sorry and weep over the departed one as I wept for Didymas. And all things whatsoever were fitting, I have done, and all mine, Epaphroditus and Thermouthion and Philion and Apollonius and Plantas. But, nevertheless, against such things one can do nothing. Therefore comfort one another. Fare well. 28 October'. Translation : Adolf Diesmann, 'Light from the Ancient East', page 176. Papyrus number P.CtYBR inv. 32 (Also known as P.Oxy [Oxyrhynchus]. 115.) in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Papyrus Collection, Yale University.

⁴⁵ 'Your (*plural*) heart'; ie He is now speaking – not to Peter only, as at the end of chapter 13, but to them all. The fact that He repeats the words, 'Let not your heart be troubled' in verse 27 suggests that everything sandwiched between is aimed at comforting and bringing peace to their troubled hearts.

⁴⁶ John 13. 30.

⁴⁷ John 13. 36. In verse 33, 'Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you', He was referring back to John 7. 33-34 and John 8. 21. The background to both lay in attempts to 'arrest/lay hands on' Him. But both attempts failed – for 'His hour was not yet come', John 7.30; 8. 20 (indeed, in one sense, He "arrested" the officers of the Jews!, John 7. 32, 45-46). But now 'His hour was come', John 13.1. In the past they had 'sought' Him to arrest Him, John 7. 30; in the future they 'will seek' Him in desperation and despair, when they call on their Messiah to deliver them. But then they shall not find Him, John 7. 34. But our Lord does not add this when speaking to His disciples in John 13. 33! In all three passages, He emphasises, "Where **I** am/go, **you** cannot come'. But the tone in chapter 13 is very different to that in chapters 7 and 8. Then He said, 'I go and you shall seek me and you shall die in your sins; where I go you cannot come', John 8. 21; now that He goes that he might prepare a place for them. He forewarned the Jews of absolute, final and eternal separation from Him; now He speaks to His disciples of only a temporary separation – leading quickly on to give them His promise of a subsequent and glad reunion with Him.

I note He began, 'Little children', 13.33. Term of intimacy/affection/endearment. In effect, 'my dear children'. Only time He use it. made big impression on one apostle at least; John enjoyed description and later adopted it, using it x7 in epistles. Note that Lord's use of term followed exit of Judas into night, 30. Had received sop/morsel, part of Passover meal, 26. Then left "immediately", 30. Was present at Passover to which entitled as Jew; but not at Supper because not true believer. Only now that Judas gone does Lord use the term of intimacy. He was always genuine - never insincere.

⁴⁸ John 12. 27.

⁴⁹ John 13. 21.

⁵⁰ Compare, "My Father's" business, Luke 2. 49; kingdom, Matt.26. 29; will, John 6. 40; name, 5. 43; face, Matt 18. 10; and hand, John10. 29. that is, seven things in all.

⁵¹ 'I go to prepare' must mean either (i) that He prepares the place when He reaches the Father's house (i.e. for 2000 years or more!, or, far more likely, (ii) that by His very going through death, resurrection and ascension He does so. 'Be fair', He says in effect, 'would I have spoken of taking you to a place unless there was room for all'.

He was familiar with it; knew dimensions and size well because He had left it. They could rest assured that room enough and more.

⁵² Heb. 6. 20.

⁵³ 1 Pet. 1. 4; contrast, 'the heavens and earth which are now, reserved for fire, against the day of judgement', 2 Pet. 3. 7.

⁵⁴ The English translation goes back to William Tyndale – based on the Latin, 'mansiones'. In Tyndale's day it simply meant a dwelling. Possibly we need revise idea. Heaven not some plush neighbourhood filled with many mansions, where each of us will occupy his or her own big house. The Jews taught that, in the world to come, every righteous one shall have an abode for himself'. But our Lord did not actually promise us one each.

⁵⁵ John 2. 16.

⁵⁶ 1 Kings 6. 5, 6, 10.

⁵⁷ The second temple. Neh. 13. 7.

⁵⁸ Neh. 13. 8.

⁵⁹ The word is related to that which is translated 'abide', and which occurs fourteen times up to John 15. 16. But the actual word is only found elsewhere in verse 23, 'If any man love me, let him keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him'. That is, one day we will make our abode with the Father and the Son in heaven; but now the Father and the Son come and make their abode with us on earth.

⁶⁰ See C. K. Barrett, 'John', page 381, and William Temple, 'Readings in St. John's Gospel', pages 218-219.

⁶¹ Luke 9. 52.

⁶² Compare, 'Father, I desire that they also whom you gave me may be with me where I am ...', John 17. 24.

⁶³ 'Where I am' – not 'where I will be'. For terms used of the cross, and the use of past or present tense for future events, see R. H. Lightfoot, 'John', page 266.

Yes, it is thrilling for us to know that, when we reach God's heavenly abode, it will not be as some unknown vagabond or beggar who can give no good account of himself, but as a much-loved child whose room has been made ready for him, and whose coming is awaited with eager expectation. But our hope lies in a Person and not in a place.

In John 14, the Lord Jesus spoke, for the first time of His return in person for 'His own that are in the world'. He had spoken previously of resurrection in response to His voice, and of His coming in the glories of heaven to put His enemies to confusion, John 6. 39; Matt. 16. 27; 24. 30 etc. But now, He addresses Himself to the comfort of disciples who would soon know the desolating sorrow of bereavement – hence the word 'orphans'.

Not before had He used the first personal pronoun when He spoke of His return. In the wider circle of His public ministry, He usually spoke of the coming of the Son of man.

It is the apostle John who reports, not only the Lord's words in John 14 but in John 21; 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you'. It was perfectly natural therefore that John would look for His coming – hence 'Come, Lord Jesus', Rev. 22. 20. And this after he had been told of future events on earth, of tremendous catastrophes.

⁶⁴ 1 John 3. 2.

⁶⁵ His last remarks as the war officially ended were simple: 'These proceedings are closed'. See the video of the event at ...

<http://link.history.com/services/link/bcpid1681694255/bclid1716440957/bctid1670024879>

⁶⁶ But see ... <http://ohdannyboy.blogspot.co.uk/2008/04/story-of-i-shall-return-general-douglas.html>

⁶⁷ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/macarthur/filmmore/reference/primary/macspeech02.html>

⁶⁸ On 20 October 1944.

⁶⁹ <http://www.defense.gov/home/features/Leyte/> and

http://www.leyte.org.ph/leyte_landing/leyte_landing_celeb-new.htm

⁷⁰ For pictures of Matchbook and Pack of Cigarettes, see (a little before half-way through) ...

<http://www.psywarrior.com/PSYOPOrgWW2Pac.html>

⁷¹ Grateful to MacArthur, the Philippine government in Manilla directed their armies to begin a tradition of calling out his name at every parade roll-call. Every company designated an officer to respond, 'Present in spirit'. It was a symbolic gesture to inspire dedication and courage in the men present. But for us there is no symbolic gesture; our Lord really is present by His Spirit. 'I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you', John 14. 18.