In light of the challenges we are facing in our world today I believe the Lord wants me to remind you of the GOOD PLANS that He has for His people.

All of us have been impacted by the Coronavirus in one way or another, and it has much of our world living in fear. Even some of God’s children.

* The enemy uses fear and false teachers to divide and conquer God’s children. Trying to get them to doubt & disobey God’s Word, and sow hatred, discord and distrust. That can’t happen, however, if God’s people stay focused on Him, rather than fear.

If we don’t take a step back and realize what our adversary is up to, in Matthew 24:24 Jesus said’ “even the very elect of God can be led astray”.

So rather than wasting God’s money on ammunition to brush up sharpshooting skills to protect your frosted fakes, spaghetti O’s and toilet paper (the physical/temporary things of earth)…

Jesus, knowing full well that trouble and persecution were awaiting His followers… told them this, in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:25-33

* Don’t worry about your life.
* Don’t worry about tomorrow.
* Don’t worry about your food and clothes.

But instead, “seek first God’s Kingdom, and everything you need will be provided”. Everything will work out if you just get the right priorities in place. But if you choose to focus on your temporary kingdom, you will live in a constant state of fear, worry and anxiety..

Philippians 4:6

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

I’m not trying to be unsympathetic to what the 24 hour news is telling us, just remember to look back on the media’s history of keeping the world pulled in all different directions, polarizing & paralyzing them thru fear, negativity & worry…

Are they will going to stop? Probably not… not even if we choose to stop watching it…

Remember… We… God’s people… are not called to worry or be anxious…

We are called to see such people as an opportunity to introduce them to Jesus, who can take their fear, worry & anxiety away.

Proverbs 28:1 – We are as bold as lions. We do not fear. We do not get moved off center.

We fear (respect) only God… because we have received His peace offering (Jesus the Christ).

And if God be for us, then who can be against us… Romans 8

The message today is in response to someone who wrote in and asked me to address the “origin of the rapture”.

The best answer that I can give is… God! That settles it! Now lets pray and go home.

Depending on the translation of the Bible you use, the word “Rapture” may not even appear there.

But let me assure you… the Rapture is just as real as the myriad of other things that we know are real, yet do not appear in your Bible.

We know the Old Testament was written in Hebrew & some Aramaic, and the New Testament was written in Greek.

The greek word that is used for this eschatological (future) concept of Rapture… is the word: Harpazo (seize, catch away, pluck or take)

According to my Strong’s Concordance, it is used 17 times in the N.T.

Jesus used it in the Parable of the Robber – Matthew 24:42-44

When someone sneeks in and takes your stuff at night, that’s a Harpazo.

Sheep being snatched away in John 10 are “Harpazo’d” – wolves “Harpozo” another persons sheep.

In the book of Jude V23, Christians are instructed to snatch the lost (Harpazoing) them from the flames of hell… (Thereby depopulating hell)

But the use of the word that we’re looking at today is people being “Harpazo’d” by God. Caught away, snatched up/taking His people.

So where does the word “Rapture” come from? It is rooted in the Latin Vulgate Bible.

If you’ve been in the church a while, you probably know that by the end of the 4th century, the use of the Greek language was dying out… so the Bible was translated into the language of the day, which was Latin.

The Greek word “Harpazo” was then translated to the Latin word “Rapio”.

Rapio has the same meaning as Harpazo, nothing changed. Rapio is where we get our english word Rapture.

The problem for some people today, is in the modern english definition of the word Rapture; Bliss, Ecstasy, extreme joy.

The 1829 Noah Webster dictionary, which I like to use, refers to both the Bible’s use of Harpazo or Rapio as the sudden transporting or catching people away… as well as the emotional concept of the word.

My emotions were down here… but now my emotions have been suddenly caught up, raised up and now I feel bliss, Ecstasy & extreme joy, when my favorite song came on.

The modern Bible translators chose not to use the word “RAPTURE”, and instead chose to use phrases that define “RAPTURE”, such as caught up, taken away, gathered up, snatched away…

But the Bible also uses the same concept of rapture without using the word Harpazo – John 14:1-3 is a popular one.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am.

The concept appears numerous times in the New Testament without Harpazo being used.… The GOSPEL (Good News)

* God sent His Son to die for us.
* God raised His Son and He has ascended (was caught up) into heaven.
* And He will come back for His faithful people.

If there is no Rapture, and Jesus isn’t coming back for you, that wouldn’t be very good news would it?!

Our Scripture focus for today (which is Good News) is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

This is the most extensive, detailed explanation of the Harpazoing of the Church in the Scriptures.

The context here is that the church that Paul had planted in Thessalonica had become concerned, because their loved ones were passing away and they thought they may have missed the Rapture. So Paul wrote:

V13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.

Meaning that our loved ones and brothers and sisters in Christ will pass away, but God gives us BLESSED ASSURANCE that we who are in Christ will see them again. Therefore we have HOPE that the world without Christ does not have.

14For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus, those who have fallen asleep (died) in him. Our hope is that because Jesus died and was resurrected, so too will those who lived for Christ.

15According to the Lord’s Word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

So who is he talking about? Those living for Christ and still alive when the RAPTURE takes place… we will not precede (go before) those who have died in Christ. I see it as their reward… They deserve to go first because they had to experience death.

16For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel (and who is he? Michael – Greek word Arche’ the one in charge) and with the trumpet call of God, the dead in Christ will rise first. 17After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up (Harpazo) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18Therefore encourage one another with these words.

So what do we know about the rapture? It’s going to be LOUD, not some silent secret event.

This passage answers the heresy that’s out there about the resurrection

* V14 Jesus is going to bring with Him those who have fallen asleep
* V16 Says the dead in Christ will rise first! So which is it?

Are they rising up or are they coming down?

To get the answer…

We have to know that the Scripture tells us that God made Adam from the dust (physical)

and He breathed the breath of life (Spirit) into him. (Spiritual)

We are both physical and spiritual beings.

There are some groups that believe in “soul sleep” – 7th Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witness as well as some evangelical groups.

They believe that when you die, you go un conscious. Then at the Trumpet Call of God, you raise up. But that’s not what 1 Thess 4 says is it?

V14 tells us God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep (died) in him.

I’m thinking… wait a minute… we just did a service for Bro. Dave Sumner last weekend… His body (or what’s left of it after cremation) is here with us physically...

But what happened to Bro. Dave spiritually? To remove any confusion about where Bro. Dave, Mary Sebright, Jan Bowser, Jimmy Bracken and others are, let’s turn to second Corinthians 5

V1 - For we know that if the earthly tent (tabernacle – this bag of bones that the Holy Spirit and) we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. So if I die physically someday, this tent will destroyed by decay or flames, but it’s okay… God has another one waiting… an infinitely better body! So good I won’t be able to stand myself!

2Meanwhile we groan (can I get an amen?), longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling,3because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. 4For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed (most folks aren’t looking forward to the day of your death – that’s someone else’s job…) but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit (small “s” or big “S”?) as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

How do we get the Holy Spirit? Acts 2:38 Repent! Turn away from sin and turn to God… (seeking first the Kingdom of Heaven), be baptized, and you will be filled with the Holy Spirit.

6Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. (Physically, yes… – even though we spend much time with the Lord Spiritually)

7For we live by faith, not by sight. 8We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be (underline this next phrase in your Bible…) away from the body and at home with the Lord. That’s where Dave is…

Now, with that in mind I know that when I die I will be in the presence of God.

The problem is that you’re going to know that my body is still here somewhere.

Where ever they put peoples ashes that don’t want to be put in a container and sent home.

Because I don’t want one of my cats to knock me over and then have my wife vacuum me up.

Or worse yet, sweep me up with whatever else happened to be on the floor and put it all back in my container…

Leave it to me to gain weight after being cremated.

Let’s move on to Philippians chapter 1:21…

My point was that a separation occurs at death… body down here, spirit/soul up there.

And since that is true, Philippians 1:21 makes perfect sense. Paul testifies… “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Which means beliefs like; No RAPTURE, soul sleep and purgatory make absolutely no sense from a Biblical perspective. There is “no gain” or benefit in remaining on the earth, “soul sleeping” or going to “purgatory”.

If you wonder how people get others to believe those things, you can be sure that the Scripture (in the context it was given) is not involved.

Paul continues in V22-25 “If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far (amen?!); 24but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.” Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith.

Again, none of this jives with the “no RAPTURE”, “soul sleep” or “purgatory” belief. God’s Word is true!

With that in mind (back to 1 Thess 4) all of our dearly departed Christian loved ones are still physically with us on earth today in some form...But where are they spiritually? With the Lord!

Now, according to the Scripture, what’s comes next makes total sense!

The Bible says Jesus is bringing them down with Him… and with the Trumpet Call of God their (physical bodies) will rise first.

And they meet up together in the air, according to 1 Corinthians 15 with a brand new kind of immortal body.

The perishable body is set aside and the imperishable body is put on. The transformation occurs in a flash!

So the first thing that happens at the rapture is a resurrection of those who have died (fallen asleep) ahead of us.

But what about us?

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

So we will have to go through some kind of “immediate resurrection” during the rapture! But we’re not dead yet! So how’s that going to work?

The Trumpet Call of God, the voice of the archangel is heard and we have to suddenly become like our dearly departed loved ones that just got a brand new immortal body.

It’s the only way we can live with God forever!

1 Corinthians 15 (a parallel passage), which also does not use our word Harpazo, but gives us a clear picture of what is going to take place.

V42 with the resurrection of the dead.The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory (the body God intended for us all along); it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44it is sown a natural body (with all of it’s natural sinful desires), it is raised a spiritual body (that doesn’t mean Casper the friendly ghost, translucent or see through… it means the new body will desire God and the things of God & the will of God only).

Paul continues in V44… If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. 46The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man (new you) is of heaven. (You won’t be prone to the same sin of disobedience) 48As was the earthly man (Adam & Eve), so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. 49And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man (Jesus).

(The point is that just like Jesus came back and showed Himself after the resurrection that He could eat fish, and sit there and talk and say touch me and feel my wounds, so it’s going to be with our spiritual body. Beating in sync with the priorities of heaven!)

50I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.51Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep (euphemism for death),but we will all be changed— (we have to be, there’ll be no sin, sorrow, or burdens to bear in heaven. You will never have to live in fear about what someone may be thinking or what their motives might be toward you, ever again!)

52in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, (it’ll happen on the fly!) at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.54When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

So do you believe in the RAPTURE?

* It’s going to be Loud!
* Resurrection of all of your departed Christian friends and loved ones.
* The living believers instantaneous resurrection (transformation) but there is one more thing…

1 Thess 4:16 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 (He’s bringing their spirits with Him). 17After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up (Harpazo) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Will our meeting the Lord happen on the ground? No! In the air! And if you have a fear of heights like I do, that might kill us!

Jesus isn’t coming back (at this time) to land on the ground. That will happen at the Second Coming… The Millennial Reign, after the 7 year time of Great Tribulation… After God has poured out His wrath upon sin. When Jesus comes back with the saints to rule and reign upon the earth for 1000 years.

Next time I preach on July 12, the day of our 4th of July picnic, we’ll explore more deeply at the different views on when the RAPTURE will occur. If we’re still here!

My prayer today is that you believe God’s Word and the COMING RAPTURE. And that you live lives that are ready… looking forward to it…

Regardless of your belief on the RAPTURE, it is not an issue that should divide God’s family, because it does not call into question/change the method/name by which all men must be saved (Jesus).