

# That Blessed Hope

by Arno Clemens Gaebelein

*Arno Clemens Gaebelein preaches about the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, a revelation exclusively found in the New Testament. While Old Testament Saints knew of the resurrection of the dead, they did not know of the resurrection from among the dead, a unique aspect of 'that blessed hope.' The Apostle Paul received a special revelation about the manner of Christ's coming for His Saints, providing the full revelation of 'that blessed hope' in 1 Thessalonians, emphasizing the comfort, purifying power, incentive to service, sustaining strength, and comforting assurance it brings to believers.*

## Description

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## Transcript

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Own unto Himself" - heading: "IV" points: - "The Contrast Between the Promise of 'That Blessed Hope' and the Promises of Jesus' Visible Return" - "No Signs or Tribulation Mentioned, Only the Assurance of Jesus' Personal Coming" - heading: "V" points: - "The Full Revelation of 'That Blessed Hope' is Given Through the Apostle Paul" - "The Manner of Jesus' Coming is Revealed: The Lord Himself Will Descend from Heaven" faq: - q: "What is 'that blessed hope'?" a: "'That blessed hope' is the promise of Jesus' personal coming for His own, where He will receive them unto Himself and take them to the place where He is." - q: "Who is 'that blessed hope' given to?" a: "'That blessed hope' is given to those who know Jesus as their Savior and Lord, who have believed on Him and are His own." - q: "What is the manner of Jesus' coming for His saints?" a: "The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first, then the living will be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air." - q: "What will happen to believers when Jesus comes?" a: "Believers will be changed, their mortal bodies will be fashioned like unto Jesus' glorious body, and they will be caught up together with the resurrected saints in clouds to meet the Lord in the air." - q: "Will believers recognize their loved ones who have gone before?" a: "Yes, believers will surely see the faces of their loved ones again and all the saints of God on that blessed day when this great event takes place." quotes: - "'Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself that where I am ye may be also.'" - "'For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.'" - "'The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with an assembling shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we, the living, who remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.'" applicationPoints: - "Believers must wait daily for the coming of the Lord and the fulfillment of 'that blessed hope'." - "The change of the believer's body will be 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye', and will be fashioned like unto Jesus' glorious body." - "Believers will be caught up together with the resurrected saints in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and will surely see the faces of their loved ones again." keywords: - "That Blessed Hope" - "Jesus' Personal Coming" - "The Lord's Return" - "The Rapture" - "The Resurrection of the Dead" - "The Change of the Believer's Body" - "The Meeting of Believers in the Air" - "The Glory of God and Jesus Christ" ---

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the glory of our great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," Tit. ii:13.

"That blessed hope" of which the Apostle writes is an exclusively New Testament revelation. The appearing of the glory of our great God and our Savior Jesus Christ is fully revealed in the Old Testament prophetic Word. The Prophets had visions of the day of the Lord, a day in which the Lord will be manifested in power and glory; a day which will bring glory and peace when the Lord is enthroned as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Spirit of God has shown through the prophets what the appearing, the visible manifestation of the Lord will mean, for the people Israel, for the nations and for groaning creation. But nowhere do we find "that blessed hope" made known by the prophets. The Jewish Saints knew nothing of it as it is revealed to the church of God. True they had now and then a glimpse of the future. One of the greatest sufferers was Job. His darkest night was illuminated by the assurance of hope when he uttered his great testimony: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth. And if after my skin this body shall be destroyed, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job xix:25-27). But this is not "that blessed hope" the Lord has given to us His people.

Old Testament Saints knew of the resurrection of the dead. They knew nothing of a resurrection from among the dead. Yet Enoch and Elijah were taken to glory without dying. No prophet knew the typical meaning of their experience as we know it through "that blessed hope."

#### For the First Time

"That blessed hope" is for the first time mentioned by our Lord. But where in His earthly life did He give it to His disciples? It is not found in the records of the three first Gospels, generally called the synoptics. In these records He spoke often of His Return. He promised a Second Coming of Himself in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He revealed what should take place before His return. In His prophetic Olivet discourse (Matt. xxiv-xxv) He gave the signs of His Coming, the preceding great tribulation, the physical signs accompanying His visible manifestation, the regathering of His elect people Israel by the angels. He revealed how some would then be taken in judgment and others left on the earth to enter the Kingdom (Matt. xxiv:40-41). He also spoke in parables of how the conditions in Christendom would be dealt with by Him. And finally He gave a prophecy concerning the judgment of the living nations in the day of His appearing. But nowhere in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke did He speak of "that blessed hope."

It was in the upper room discourse that He spoke of it the first time. His eleven disciples were gathered about Him. Judas had gone out into the night to betray Him. For him of whom the Lord said it would have been better had he never been born, there was no blessed hope. The Lord had announced His imminent departure from them. He would leave them. When Peter said "I will lay down my life for thy sake" (John xiii:30), the omniscient One told him, "the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice." How sorrowful this little company must have been! Despair was probably on all their faces. Their hearts were greatly troubled.

Then His beloved voice broke the silence and uttered the never to be forgotten words, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself that where I am ye may be also" (John xiv:1-3). In these words "that blessed hope" is mentioned for the first time in the Bible.

#### What It Is

Only those who belonged to Him heard this promise. It is therefore a promise not given to Israel, or to the world, but only for those who know Him as their Savior and Lord, who have believed on Him and are His own. The promise is twofold. He would come again and receive them unto Himself; and that He would take them to the place where He is. And this is "that blessed hope." His coming for His own to be with Him in the Father's house to occupy the mansions He has prepared by His atoning work.

The contrast of this promise of His Coming for His disciples with the promises of His visible return as given in the synoptics is striking. He does not say a word about any signs. He does not mention the great tribulation. Nor has He anything to say about judgment. He only gives the assurance that He, in person, will come again and then receive them unto Himself. They were not to look for certain signs and events as predicted in Daniel's prophecy, or wait for the great tribulation and the manifestation of the man of sin. His promise told them to wait for Himself.

#### His Prayer

A little while later after He had given this promise of His Coming for them they heard Him pray. This prayer is found in the seventeenth chapter of John. What a prayer it is! As they listened to His voice addressing the Father they had new glimpses of His great love wherewith He loved them. He prayed for their sanctification, for their preservation and finally for their glorification. He made a demand of the Father which confirmed the promise He had previously given to them. He prayed, "Father, I will that they, whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given Me, for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John xvii:24). In these words He asks the Father to do what He had promised His disciples. His own are to be with Him where He is, to behold His glory.

#### An Unfulfilled Promise and an Unanswered Prayer

The promise of "that blessed hope" given so long ago is still unfulfilled; the prayer He prayed is not yet answered. Some say that when our Lord said "I will come again and receive you unto myself" He meant the death of the believer. This is positively wrong. When the believer dies the Lord does not come to the individual believer, but the believer goes to be with the Lord. "Absent from the body present with the Lord." When the believer dies his body is put into the ground, while the disembodied part goes straight into His presence. But the body is also redeemed and must be fashioned like unto His glorious body. The disciples died and generations upon generations of believers passed away and the promise is still unfulfilled and His prayer not yet answered.

#### The Full Revelation

The disciples, though they knew the promise of "that blessed hope" had no knowledge whatever how the Lord would come again and receive them unto Himself. He did not reveal the manner of His Coming when He spoke to them. The Lord singled out the Apostle Paul to give to him the special revelation as to the manner of His Coming for His Saints and how "that blessed hope" would some day be fulfilled. The Apostle Paul is the instrument through whom the Lord was pleased to give the highest revelation in the Word of God, so that he could say that it was given to him "to fulfil (complete) the Word of God." To him the full glory of the church, the body of Christ, was made known, and through this chosen vessel, who called himself less than the least of all the Saints, the full revelation of "that blessed hope" is given.

The first Epistle he wrote was the Epistle to the Thessalonians. The great revelation of the blessed hope is found in the first Epistle. "But we do not wish you to be ignorant concerning them that are fallen asleep, to the end that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. For this we say to you in the Word of the Lord, that we, the living, who remain to the coming of the Lord, are in no way to anticipate those who have fallen asleep: for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with an assembling shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. iv:13-18,--corrected translation). These words, so unique and precious, give the full revelation about "the blessed hope." Some of the Thessalonian believers had died and those who were left behind feared that their departed ones had lost their share in the coming glorious meeting with the Lord. On their account they sorrowed like those who have no hope. And so the Lord gave to the Apostle this special revelation to quiet their fears and to enlighten them as to the details of the coming of the Lord for all His Saints, those who had fallen asleep, and those who live when He fulfills His promise. The little church of Thessalonica with these sorrowing Saints was made the recipient of this great and comforting message which is for the

whole body of Christ as well.

Let us examine it. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus." Here is first the blessed fact that "Jesus died." Of the Saints it is said that they fell asleep; but never is it said that Jesus slept, when He gave His life on the cross. He tasted death, the death in all its unfathomable meaning as the judgment upon sin. For the saints the physical death is but sleep.[1] And He who died rose again; as certainly as He died and rose again, so surely shall all believers rise. God will bring all those who have fallen asleep through Jesus with Him, that is with the Lord when He comes in the day of His glorious manifestation. It does not mean the receiving of them by the Lord, nor does it mean that He brings their disembodied spirits with Him to be united to their bodies from the graves, but it means that those who have fallen asleep will God bring with His Son when He comes with all His saints; they will all be in that glorified company. When the Lord comes back from glory all the departed saints will be with Him. This is what the Thessalonians needed to know first of all. Before we follow this blessed revelation in its unfolding we call attention to the phrase "fallen asleep through (not in) Jesus;" it may also be rendered by "those who were put to sleep by Jesus." His saints in life and death are in His hands. When saints put their bodies aside, it is because their Lord has willed it so. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. cxvi:15). When our loved ones leave us, may we think of their departure as being "put to sleep by Jesus."

But blessed as this answer to their question is, it produced another difficulty. Hearing that the saints who had fallen asleep would come with the Lord on the day of His glorious manifestation, they would ask, "How is it possible that they can come with Him?" Are they coming as disembodied spirits? What about their bodies in the graves? How shall they come with Him? To answer these questions the special revelation "by the Word of the Lord" is given, by which they learned, and we also, how they would all be with Him so as to come with Him at His appearing. "For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord, that we, the living, who remain unto the coming of the Lord, are in no wise to anticipate those who have fallen asleep." He tells them that when the Lord comes for His saints, those who have fallen asleep will not have an inferior place, and that, we, the living, who remain to the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. When Paul wrote these words and said "We, the living, who remain," he certainly considered himself as included in that class. The two companies who will meet the Lord when He comes, those who have fallen asleep and those who are living, are mentioned here for the first time. How the living saints will not precede those who have departed and the order in which the coming of the Lord for His saints will be executed is next made known in this wonderful revelation.

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with an assembling shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then, we, the living, who remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." This is the full revelation of the blessed hope in its manner of fulfilment. Nothing like it is found anywhere in the Old Testament Scriptures. In writing later to the Corinthians Paul mentioned it again: "Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. xv:51-52).

The Lord Himself will descend from heaven. He is now at the right hand of God in glory, crowned with honor and glory. There He exercises His Priesthood and advocacy in behalf of His people, by which He keeps, sustains and restores them. When the last member has been added to the church, which is His body, and that body is to be with Him, who is the head, He will leave the place at the right hand and

descend from heaven. He will not descend to the earth, for, as we read later, the meeting-place for Him and His saints is the air and not the earth. When He comes with His saints in His visible manifestation, He will descend to the earth. When He comes for His Saints He comes with a shout. It denotes His supreme authority. The Greek word is "Kelusma," which means literally "a shout of command," used in classical Greek for the hero's shout to his followers in battle, the commanding voice to gather together. He ascended with a shout (Ps. lxxvii:5), and with the victor's shout He returns. The shout may be the single word "Come!" "Come and see" He spoke to the disciples who followed Him and inquired for His dwelling place. Before Lazarus' tomb He spoke with a loud voice, "Come forth." John, in the isle of Patmos, after the throne messages to the churches had been given, saw a door opened in heaven and the voice said "Come up hither" (Rev. iv:1). "Come" is the royal word of grace, and grace will do its supreme work when He comes for His own. But there will also be the voice of the archangel (Michael) and the trump of God. The archangel is the leader of the angelic hosts. As He was seen of angels (1 Tim. iii:16) when He ascended into the highest heaven, so will the archangel be connected with His descent out of heaven. All heaven will be in commotion when the heirs of glory, sinners saved by grace, are about to be brought with glorified bodies into the Father's house. Some teach that the voice of the archangel may be employed to summon the heavenly hosts and marshal the innumerable company of the redeemed, for "They shall gather His elect together from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew xxiv:30-31). But this is incorrect. The elect in Matthew xxiv are not the church, but Israel. Dispersed Israel will be regathered and angels will be used in this work. Furthermore the angels will do this gathering after the great tribulation and after the visible manifestation of the Lord with His saints. The coming of the Lord for His saints takes place before the great tribulation.

The trump of God is also mentioned. This trumpet has nothing to do with the judgment trumpets of Revelation, nor with the Jewish feast of trumpets. Some teach that the trumpet is the last trumpet of Revelation. But note the trumpet here is the trumpet of God; in Revelation the last trumpet is blown by an angel. It is a symbolical term and like the shout stands for the gathering together. In Numbers x:4 we read, "And if they blow with one trumpet, then the princes, the heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee." The shout and the trump of God will gather the fellow-heirs of Christ. "The dead in Christ shall rise first." This is the resurrection from among all the dead of those who believed on Christ, the righteous, dead. All saints of all ages, Old and New Testament saints, are included. This statement of the resurrection of the dead in Christ first disposes completely of the unscriptural view of a general resurrection. As we know from Rev. xx:5 the rest of the dead (the wicked dead) will be raised up later. He comes in person to open the graves of all who belong to Him and manifests His authority over death which He has conquered. The dead in Christ will hear the shout first and experience His quickening power; they shall be raised incorruptible. What power will then be manifested! "Then we, the living, who remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." All believers who live on earth when the Lord comes will hear that commanding, gathering shout. It does not include those who only profess to be Christians and are nominal church-members, nor are any excluded who really are the Lord's. The question, "Who will be caught up into glory?" is answered elsewhere in these studies. But see 1 Cor. xv:23 for an answer. The change will be "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. xv:52). Then this mortal will put on immortality. It will be that "clothed upon" of which the apostle wrote to the Corinthians: "For in this tabernacle we groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed (death) but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. v:4). Then our body of humiliation will be fashioned like unto His own glorious body. It is the blessed, glorious hope, not death and the grave, but the coming of the Lord, when we shall be changed. And it is our imminent hope; believers must wait daily for it and some blessed day the shout will surely come.

When He descends from heaven with the shout and the dead in Christ are raised and we are changed, then "we shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air." It will be the blessed time of reunion with the loved ones who have gone before. What joy and comfort it must have brought to the sorrowing Thessalonians when they read these blessed words for the first time! And they are still the words of comfort and hope to all His people, when they stand at the open graves of loved ones who fell asleep as believers. Often the question is asked, "Shall we not alone meet our loved ones but also recognize them?" Here is the answer: "Together with them" implies both reunion and recognition. These words would indeed mean nothing did they not mean recognition. We shall surely see the faces of our loved ones again and all the saints of God on that blessed day when this great event takes place. The clouds will be heaven's chariots to take the heirs of God and the joint-heirs of the Lord Jesus Christ into His own presence. As He ascended so His redeemed ones will be taken up. Caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; all laws of gravitation are set aside, for it is the power of God, the same power which raised up the Lord Jesus from the dead and seated Him in glory, which will be displayed in behalf of His saints (Eph. i:19-23). Surely this is a divine and a wonderful revelation. "How foolish it must sound to our learned scientists. But, beloved, I would want nothing but that one sentence, 'Caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air,' to prove the divinity of Christianity. Its very boldness is assurance of its truth. No speculation, no argument, no reasoning; but a bare authoritative statement startling in its boldness. Not a syllable of Scripture on which to build, and yet when spoken, in perfect harmony with all Scripture. How absolutely impossible for any man to have conceived that the Lord's saints should be caught up to meet Him in the air. Were it not true its very boldness and apparent foolishness would be its refutation. And what would be the character of mind that could invent such a thought? What depths of wickedness! What cruelty! What callousness! The spring from which such a statement, if false, could rise must be corrupt indeed. But how different in fact! What severe righteousness! What depths of holiness! What elevated morality! What warmth of tender affection! What clear reasoning! Every word that he has written testifies that he has not attempted to deceive. Paul was no deceiver, and it is equally impossible for him to have been deceived." [2]

And the blessedness "to meet the Lord in the air"! We shall see Him then as He is and gaze for the first time upon the face of the Beloved, that face of glory, which was once marred and smitten on account of our sins. And seeing Him as He is we shall be like Him. How long will be the meeting in the air? It has been said that the stay in that meeting place will be but momentary and that the Lord will at once resume His descent to the earth. We know from other Scriptures that this cannot be. Between the coming of the Lord for His saints and with His saints there is an interval of at least seven years before the visible coming of the Lord and His saints with Him. The judgment of the saints, by which their works and labors become manifest must take place. There is also to be the presentation of the church in glory (Ephes. v:27; Jude verse 24). Furthermore the marriage of the Lamb takes place not in the meeting place in the air, but in heaven (Rev. xix:1-10). He will take His saints into the Father's house that they may behold His glory (John xvii:22). But what will it mean, "So shall we be forever with the Lord!"

#### Its Power and Blessedness

Such then is "that blessed hope," blessed indeed, and an imminent hope. It is a hope which if really held in the heart will shape the life and conduct of the believer, and fill, we make bold to say, every need he has in the wilderness down here.

1. That blessed hope will keep the person of the Lord Jesus Christ constantly before the heart. If we really look for Him, wait for Him, pray and long for His Coming, to see Him face to face, He will ever be fresh

before our hearts. This hope will keep us in closest touch and fellowship with Him as nothing else. Oh! the blessedness of knowing we shall see Him--see Him in all His glory! Each day ought to be begun with this thought, "I may meet Him today!" Each day should have for its last thought the blessed anticipation that the coming morning may find us in His presence.

2. The blessed hope is a purifying hope. "He that has this hope set upon Him purifieth himself even as He is pure" (1 John iii:3). It is the power for a consecrated and separated life. He prayed in His high-priestly prayer, "They are not of the world as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy Truth, Thy Word is truth" (John xvii:16, 17). He has redeemed us from the curse, from the guilt of our sins and from this present evil age. We are saints, no longer of this world, though still in the world. With this comes the responsibility to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age. If a child of God lives a worldly, carnal life it is a denial of the power of the Gospel. If a believer in that blessed hope lives an unholy life it is an evidence that he has never known in his heart what this hope is. It is a hope which teaches us to walk in the light as He is in the light. No believer who knows that blessed hope and waits for its fulfilment can go in the ways of the world to enjoy its hollow pleasures. It is a separating, purifying hope.

3. "That blessed hope" is furthermore a powerful incentive to service for God. One of the charges brought against this most precious doctrine is that it paralyses missionary work and all other activities. The very opposite is the case. It stimulates true service for God as nothing else does. Look at that great model servant, the Apostle Paul. What a witness he gives of his untiring, whole hearted service and the sufferings he endured in connection with it. Read 1 Thessalonians ii and 2 Corinthians xi:24-33. He had seen the Lord in glory and he knew that His glory belonged to him and that in the day of Christ he would see Him and receive the reward from His hands. This was the secret of his zeal for the Gospel; this gave him joy to endure. Like Moses he "had respect unto the recompense of the reward." He knew before the judgment seat of Christ he, and with him all the Saints, shall appear to receive the reward for faithful service. He looked upon those for whom he toiled, who were led to Christ by his testimony and nourished by his ministry as his glory and joy in the coming presence of the Lord. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His Coming? For ye are our glory and joy" (1 Thess. ii:19). The most successful evangelists and missionaries have been and are believers in that blessed hope. If we believe that He may come at any time, we shall certainly lose no time to do the work into which His grace has called us.

4. It is a sustaining hope. It sustains in suffering and in sorrow. David wrote: "The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing; thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness" (Ps. xli:3). It is the blessed hope of imminent glory which in sickness and pain gives strength, "yea songs in the night" will come from our lips if that blessed hope is ever first before our souls. And then it sustains the believer in conflict and keeps him faithful in the days of declension and apostasy.

5. It is a comforting hope. "Comfort one another with these words" the apostle wrote after he gave the great message. It is the comfort when our loved ones leave us. When we stand at the grave of the departed ones, who fell asleep in the Lord, we know that the day is coming when that grave opens and they come forth and we shall be united with them "caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air."

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