“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: and then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, KJV]

Many of us are familiar with this verse, and many of us desire to be caught up into the air. But how many of us actually knows what that means?

Keep in mind that Paul who wrote this verse [1 Thessalonians 4:17] is the same one who wrote Ephesians 2:2:

“Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:” [KJV]

Obviously, the power of the air in this verse does not refer to the physical air. And similarly, “caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” also does not refer to the physical air. Meaning, to think, or believe, that we will fly into the physical air IS WRONG. But there is a sweet truth hidden in that verse which we all as children of God deserve to know. We trust God, in His mercy, to open this truth to us as we read on. Amen.

Let us now take a careful look at what verse 17 says to pick out three main points.

- First, it tells us that we who are alive, and remain in faith, at the coming of Christ, will be caught up.
- The next point to note is that this caught up experience will take place in the clouds. As such, it is only people in the clouds that will be caught up.
- Then finally, it tells us that those caught up in the clouds will go to meet the Lord in the air. Meaning, the caught up experience will move us from the clouds to the air, and we shall remain in the air with the Lord forever.

When we sit back to consider these, we may begin to suspect that it is not the physical clouds and air that is being referred to. If it were physical, then it means this verse is saying that we and the Lord are going to be floating in the physical air forever. But that doesn’t sound quite right. It is therefore, again, not correct to think that the clouds and air in this verse are literal as the popular doctrine of Rapture preaches.

We may then ask: if the clouds and air are not literal, then what do they represent? Well, we thank God for mercifully granting us some insight into what they mean. We will begin with the clouds, after which we will discuss the air.
The Clouds

To understand what the clouds represents, or to understand what it means to be in the clouds, we can look for another passage in the bible where we are told of someone entering into the clouds.

One passage we can consider is Exodus 24:12-18. It reads:

“12 And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to Me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them. 13 And Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God. 14 And he said unto the elders, Tarry ye here for us, until we come again unto you: and, behold, Aaron and Hur are with you: if any man have any matters to do, let him come unto them. 15 And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. 16 And the glory of the LORD abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day He called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. 17 And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. 18 And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.” [KJV]

From this passage, we see that the cloud was formed at the top of the mountain, and it was a visible show of God’s presence. We also see that in order to enter this cloud, Moses had to climb up the mountain. It was as he climbed the mountain that he entered into the cloud, into God’s presence. God’s instruction to him, in verse 12, was that he should come up and remain there, so that he will receive His law. Moses faithfully remained there, at the top of the mountain, in the clouds, in the presence of God, until he received the law of God written on stone tables. This is a good example of how we should live—faithful and obedient.

Unlike Moses who received the law on stone tables, we receive the law in our hearts and minds. Hebrews 10:16 says:

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” [KJV]

Just as Moses had to remain in the clouds to receive God’s law on stone tables, so also we must remain “in the clouds” [in God’s presence] to receive God’s law in our hearts and in our minds. God was quite deliberate in His instruction to Moses about remaining in His presence. In Exodus 24:12, He said: “… Come up to Me into the mount, and be there …”.

As He was deliberate with Moses in the Old Testament, so He is deliberate with us in the New Testament. He requires us to remain in His presence; whether during our quiet time, or as we go about our daily activities, no matter what or where, He wants us to always be in His presence; this is so that He can put His laws in our hearts, and write it in our minds. Putting His laws in our hearts means that His laws become our conscience, and writing them in our minds means that His laws become the foundation of all our reasoning. It is people that remain in His presence, in the clouds, and allow Him to do this to them, that will be caught up to meet Him in the air.
Just as Moses had to climb up the mount Sinai in order to enter into the clouds, so also we have to climb a mountain in order to enter the clouds. However, we are not going to climb a physical mountain like Moses did. Our climbing is a symbolic process. The way we do this symbolic climbing is by drawing away from the noise of our daily activities so that we can fellowship with God. For example, if we think of Moses, we’ll observe that as he was climbing the mountain, he was going farther and farther away from the noise of the people’s activities, and was drawing closer to God, until he was alone with God at the top of the mount. So also, we can climb upwards to God by drawing away from the cares of this world, and focusing our attention on God until we are alone with Him in our hearts – at this point of being alone with God in our hearts, all wandering thoughts, and desires, are silenced. God wants us to remain in this condition at all times. In Exodus 24:12, He told Moses: “…Come up to Me into the mount, and be there …”. So also, He wants us to remain alone with Him in our hearts, even in during our daily activities.

Paul is an example of someone who symbolically climbed up to God. In Philippians 3:14 he said:

“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.” [NKJV]

As such, we see that God is calling us upwards to obtain a prize. And we also see that this upward calling is in Christ Jesus. Meaning, God is calling us to follow the path of our Lord Jesus till we become like Him. As we follow this path, we are to drop our earthly lifestyle and move up to live a heavenly lifestyle. Colossians 3:2 says:

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” [KJV]

This means that, even though we are in this world, and we have to go to work, go to school, and do other necessary things, we must not love those things more than God. Our true desire should always be for the hope [the prize] that God has promised us; and we should always create time to read about this hope, meditate on it, and share it with people, because it is real. And beyond just knowing and talking about it, we should live a life of preparedness so that we can receive this hope.

Rather than rigorously pursue a career here, like the people of the world will do, or seek after fulfilment by doing earthly things, we should seek fulfillment by doing the will of God. God is faithful; if He sees that we desire Him more than other things, He will bless us with those other things. In Matthew 3:31-33 He said:

“31 … do not worry, saying, ‘what shall we eat?’ or ‘what shall we drink?’ or ‘what shall we wear?’ 32 For after these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.” (NKJV)

Also, Psalm 37:4-5 says:

“4 Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.” (NKJV)
And finally, 2 Corinthians 9:8 says:

“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:” [KJV]

So we see that God prefers us to set our affection and devotion on Him and His business, putting Him first in all things. As for our needs, He is faithful; He will provide for us, and bless the work of our hands so that we do not lack any good thing. Such is the type of life lived by people who are climbing upwards to God [people who want to remain always in His cloud]. A life of total dependence on God for daily guidance and instruction. A life of receiving God’s laws, not just as head knowledge, but as practical life experiences engraved into our nature. A life that is not distracted with the cares of this world, nor the pride of life, nor the deceitfulness of riches, but is focused on God at all times, just as Moses was when He was on the mountain [in the clouds].

Remember, as Paul said, there is a prize for those who will agree to come up to God by living this kind of God-centered life. This prize is putting on the divine glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, and joining Him to rule the world spiritually. Isaiah 57:15 says:

“For thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose Name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” [KJV]

This prize is to dwell in a high and holy level of life and divinity with God, and from this level rule this world [and all creation] spiritually. It is this prize that is symbolized as being caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

We will now move on by God’s grace to consider what the air represents so we can better appreciate the hope in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

The Air

To understand what the air represents, we can begin by noting that air in motion is called wind. This is an important thing to note because in the scriptures wind is usually used to represent the move/activities of spirits over people: it may be the move of the Holy Spirit, or it could be the move of unclean spirits.

For example, in regards to the Holy Spirit, John 3:8 says:

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” [NKJV]

This passage is telling us that when you observe a person on whom the Holy Spirit has laboured, that person will be as unpredictable as the wind, because the Holy Spirit will be the one leading him where he should go, and telling him what he should do at all times. We therefore see that the wind, in this case, is used to refer to the move of the Holy Spirit on a person.
An example of a scripture where the wind refers to the move of unclean spirits is Daniel 7:2. It reads:

"Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another." [KJV]

In this passage, the sea refers to all humanity that has no relationship with God; in other words, the world. Isaiah 57:20 says: "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."; and Revelation 17:15 says: "Then he said to me, The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.". The four winds, on the other hand, refer to the activities of unclean spirits over all the world, and we know this because we are told that four beasts came up from the sea after these winds blew over them, and these four beasts represent four kingdoms all of which were pagan.

We have therefore seen that the wind can be used to represent the activity of spirits, whether the Holy Spirit, or unclean spirits. But just for the sake of reasoning, we may still wonder why wind is used to represent the move, or activity, of a spirit. The reason is that wind is invisible to the eyes, but has the ability to visibly move things around. Its activity can only be known by observing the things it is moving. That is essentially how a spirit operates. We cannot see a spirit with our physical eyes, but we can discern the spirit's activity by observing the person the spirit is influencing.

Now that we have some understanding of how wind is used symbolically, we can begin to understand how air is used symbolically. Remember that we noted that when air is moving it is called wind. Therefore, if wind represents the move of a spirit, then air should represent either a spirit, or the spiritual realm. As it turns out, air actually represents the spiritual realm, where spirits operate in. But not just any spiritual realm. It particularly refers to the spiritual realm over the earth, not including other spiritual realms like paradise. This is because, physically speaking, air is only present around the earth. But beyond the clouds, in space, there is no air. So we know that the air [when used symbolically] only refers to the spiritual realm of the earth, and it is from this spiritual realm that spirits can influence the world.

Ephesians 2:2 is an example of a scripture where air is used symbolically to refer to the spiritual realm of the earth. From verse 1, it reads:

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.” [NKJV]

In this passage, Paul refers to satan as the prince of the power of the air. The word prince means chief, or first in rank, while power of the air refers to the principalities and powers that influence the world from “the air”. It is these principalities and powers in the air that are mentioned in Ephesians 6:12 which reads:
“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places” [NKJV]

These are the spirits that operate in the air, the spiritual realm over the earth, and as such, they are collectively referred to as the power of the air, with satan as the chief over these spirits. That’s why Paul calls him the prince of the power of the air. Although we should note that God never gave satan this position. Rather, he stole it from Adam to whom God appointed power over all living things in Genesis 1:28. That is to say, the original prince of the power of the air was Adam and his wife Eve.

Now that we have some understanding of what the air represents, and we have seen an example of how it is used symbolically, we can return to consider what Paul was saying in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. It reads:

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” [KJV]

With everything we have discussed so far, we understand that the cloud represents the presence of God that we are supposed to remain in daily in order to receive the laws of God in our hearts and in our minds. We have also understood that the air represents the spiritual realm over the earth – the realm from which the world can be influenced spiritually. And we have seen that currently, there are principalities and powers of darkness operating in this realm, with an agenda of turning this world into satan’s kingdom, by promoting wickedness, immorality and rebellion against God through various means.

Knowing these, when Paul says we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, he means that we will join the Lord in this spiritual realm over the earth [after these principalities and powers have been cast out – Revelation 12:7-9]. While there, we will not be idle. Instead, He will organize us into a government under His Kingship, and assign us as godly principals over different cities, with a mission to turn this world into God’s kingdom by promoting righteousness, peace and joy among men. Then, our Lord Jesus shall not be alone as the Holy Spirit. His wind over all humanity will then be also propagated through us, his brethren, whom the Father will establish as holy spirits. Isaiah 32:1 has said it:

“Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment.” [KJV]

The King is our Lord Jesus. The princes are we His brethren who shall be caught up to meet Him in the air. And this will be God’s government over the world beginning from the 1000 years till eternity, with a mission to accomplish our Lord’s prayer:

“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven …” [Matthew 6:9-10, KJV]

But in other for us to join the Lord in doing this, Paul says that our catching up will take place in the clouds. This means that for us to be caught up, we must remain in the clouds [in God’s presence] at all times, and while in
His presence, we must allow Him to put His laws in our hearts, and carve it permanently in our minds – just as Moses remained in the clouds and received God’s law on stone tables. Only those who allow Him to do this to them will join Him in the air to rule the world spiritually.

Finally, we should mention that at the instance when we are being caught up, we will change from our current natural bodies and put on a spiritual body. As Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15:44:

“… There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” (KJV)

It is this spiritual body that we will put on when we are caught up. It is a heavenly body, and it is immortal, meaning, it cannot die. It is with this body that we will join the Lord in the air to rule the world spiritually. Because as Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:50 “… flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God …”. Meaning, we cannot with this natural body join the Lord in the spiritual realm to rule the world spiritually. We will therefore change, by the mercies of our God, from this natural body to the immortal spiritual body at that instance we are caught up.

But remember that it is those who remain in the clouds and receive the laws of God worked into their nature that will take part in this “caught up” experience. May the Lord strengthen us to faithfully and obediently remain in His cloud daily.

Amen.

If we have any questions, we may kindly forward them to torontohousefellowship@gmail.com, and, by God’s grace, a timely response will be sent back to us.

Amen.