

**AN UNDERSTANDING OF ‘*PAROUSIA*’
IN 1 THESSALONIANS 4:15-17
and
IT’S IMPLICATIONS FOR THE E.F.K.S UTUALII
PARISH**

A Research Paper Presented to the
Faculty of Malua Theological College

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Theology

By
Francisco Fatu

August 2016

CONSENT FORM FOR THE RETENTION AND USE OF THE RESEARCH PAPER

I, Francisco Fatu

agree that this thesis/research paper be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Malua Librarian for the care, loan and reproduction of the thesis/research paper*.

Signature: _____ Date: _____ (month and year)

*Subject to the policies of the Malua Theological College Library

Abstract

This research studies the use of the term *parousia* in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 and other occurrences in the same letter and also Matthew 24. The aim is to attain knowledge about Paul's understanding of when Jesus' second coming is to take place. Thus, Paul's understandings that the *parousia* is to take place while he is alive is related to the relocation of the EFKS Utualii church building, hall, and the pastor's dwelling inland. The relocation endeavour is the result of sea erosion. However, some members of the Utualii parish speak about the relocation as a sign of Jesus' second coming.

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP OF RESEARCH PAPER

I, Francisco Fatu

hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Malua Theological College or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Malua Theological College or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

DEDICATION

To my wife Olive Fatu, my two daughters Ponāivao F. Fatu and Merissa F. Fatu, and my beloved son Faaiuasomalua Parousia J. L. Fatu, I thank you and I love you all.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to give thanksgiving and praises to God for his guidance and protection in all things during my search to complete this work. I would also like to offer my utmost gratitude to Rev. Principal, Maafala Limā, the faculty, and the student body and families of Malua Theological College. Without whose support the training and learning of this student in these four years would have been that much more difficult. Especially to Rev. Vice Principal Alesana Eteuati, my supervisor and advisor in the preparation of this work, your insight, guidance, and overall encouragement have made this project that much more special. Special thanks to Rev. Faraimo and Sarona Tiitii, for their confidence and support as well as the entire congregations of the EFKS Utualii, your prayers and encouragement have been crucial in my search to complete my education. Lastly, my utmost thanks to my family here and abroad, who have offered their support to the endeavours of these four years, I love you all and will always cherish your support.

Table of Contents

CONSENT FORM FOR THE RETENTION AND USE OF THE RESEARCH PAPER	2
Abstract	3
DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP OF RESEARCH PAPER.....	4
DEDICATION	5
Acknowledgements	6
Table of Contents	7
Introduction	8
Chapter 1	10
<i>PAROUSIA</i> IN 1 THESSALONIANS 4:15-17 AND OTHER SELECTED TEXTS.....	10
1. Methodology	10
1.1 History <i>in</i> the text	11
1.1.1 <i>Parousia</i> : A word study	12
1.1.2 Literary Context	12
1.1.3 Text	13
1.2 History <i>of</i> the text	15
1.2.1 Author	15
1.2.2 Date	16
1.2.3 Setting	17
1.3.1 Other use of <i>parousia</i> in the First Letter to the Thessalonians	17
1.3.2 Use of <i>parousia</i> in Matthew's Gospel	18
1.4 Summary	19
Chapter 2	21
THE UTUALII PARISH VIEW POINTS ABOUT <i>PAROUSIA</i>.....	21
2. Historical situation: The Environmental Impact and the Re-establishment of the Church Building Inland.....	21
2.1 The Utualii Parish response through interviews	22
2.1.1 Age group of 65 years and over	22
2.1.2 The Age Group of 40 and above	24
2.1.3 The Junior Youth	25
2.2 Summary	26
Chapter 3	27
CONCLUSION	27
Bibliography	29

Introduction

This research paper attempts to understand the interpretation of παρουσία,¹ a transliteration of a Greek word translated ‘coming’² when it is used specifically to refer to Jesus’ second coming,³ the apostle Paul would have meant it to be when he uses it in his first letter to the Thessalonians 4:15-17. The interest is whether the exact time of the parousia is clearly revealed there and in other occurrences in the same letter. The importance of understanding whether Paul’s interpretation of when the parousia takes place is then related to the events that have resulted in the decision of the Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS) Utualii church to relocate the church building, the pastor’s house, and the hall inland.⁴

It is widely accepted that Paul understands Jesus’ return to happen soon.⁵ The period for the event to happen is alluded to by Paul as I will demonstrate in chapter one. The exact time, nevertheless, is not explicit.⁶ In addition, it is obvious that Paul, like some of his Jewish and Christian contemporaries who have referred to Christ’s *parousia*,⁷ has combined the language of possible nearness with a discussion of events which would occur at the time of Jesus’ return.

The methodology being used in this study is the historical critical method. The paper employs the two dimensions of the historical critical method to study 1 Thess. 4:15-17. The first dimension is history in the text. In this aspect, it focuses on the text and its literary features. The aim is to attain through the study of words and phrases the author Paul has used, names of characters and the plot of the text what might likely have taken place in the past. The second dimension is history of the text. This dimension includes the study of authorship, where, when, and why a text has been written.

¹ It is transliterated in English as *parousia* and the paper will use this English transliteration throughout.

² The word *parousia* is also translated as ‘advent’.

³ In this research, the term *parousia* is used to refer to the (second) coming of Jesus, Christ, and the Lord interchangeably. I am aware also of the fact that the term is associated with the coming of the Son of Man as in the Gospels. It also refers to the coming of just anyone as in 2 Thess. 2:9 which refers to the coming of the ‘lawless one’.

⁴ At the time of this research, the pastor’s house and the hall have been the relocated. The church building is about to be shifted.

⁵ Ernest Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries, reprint 1986 (London: A & C Black, 1986), p. 349.

⁶ Scholars have rightly pointed out that Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians and elsewhere show a shift from the imminent return to a distant time. Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950) p. 49; Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), p. 123; C. H. Dodd, *New Testament Studies*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953), p. 115. However, the issue about the exact time of Christ’s *parousia* is still not revealed explicitly there.

⁷ For instances are Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, and 39. Other instances that reflect the ‘coming’ of the Lord but use different Greek words are Mark 14:62, Mk. 9:1, Mk:13:30-33; Matt. 26:64, 16:27; Lk. 9:26.

The paper is divided into three chapters. The first one focuses on the study of the text and the term ‘parousia’ in particular. It begins with a fuller discussion of the methodology and then applies the methodology to exegete 1 Thess. 4:15-17. The second chapter concentrates on the understandings or beliefs about *parousia* of the selected members of the EFKS Utualii parish in relation to the relocation of their church building and the pastor’s house inland. To obtain these members views, interviews and personal conversations with the author have been conducted. The third chapter compares and contrasts Paul’s understandings of *parousia* in his Thessalonians letters and points of view expressed by the Utualii parish members.

The paper concludes that the intention of Paul in 1 Thess. 4:15-17 is clear. The period of Jesus’ *parousia* is to take place while the apostle is alive. The exact time, nevertheless, is not spelled out clearly. Thus, Paul leaves the reader in a situation where he or she should not worry about the exact time of such an event. What is important is the fact that they know about Jesus’ *parousia*. Therefore, Paul encourages the Thessalonian believers to be faithful and to work hard in whatever opportunities to spread God’s word made known in Jesus’ life and ministry. It is the same message for the EFKS Utualii parish.

Chapter 1

PAROUSIA IN 1 THESSALONIANS 4:15-17

AND OTHER SELECTED TEXTS

This chapter focuses on the discussion of Paul's understanding of *parousia*⁸ as it is used in 1 Thess. 4:15-17. It includes as well a study of other selected appearances of the term in the same letter and in the Gospel of Matthew.⁹ This section underscores the supposition that Paul understands the *parousia* to happen while he is alive but the exact time is unknown.

The chapter begins with a further discussion of the historical critical method I have used to exegete 1 Thess. 4:15-17. The next section delineates the methodology's history in the text and history of the text. It then surveys other appearances of *parousia* in 1 Thess. 2:19, 3:13 and 5:23 and Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, and 39. The last section is a summary.

1. Methodology:

John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay state that the historical critical reading of a passage assumes that it is historical.¹⁰ That is to say, the words used to form a passage, names of people, and places within a passage can possibly reveal to a reader what might have happened at the time the passage is said to be written. This aspect of the historical critical reading is vital to this study. It sheds light on the historical situation of the Thessalonian Christians that has resulted in the use and the understanding of *parousia* in its imminent notion.

According to Hayes and Holladay, historical criticism contains two dimensions: history in the text and history of the text. The former dimension, history in the text, analyzes a text as a window through which we can examine what might have happened at a particular time in the past. It considers important the words therein because the terms used refer to what the text itself tells about history of persons, events, social conditions, or even ideas. In this sense, we may understand what the text says, we can draw conclusions about political, social,

⁸ I am aware of the fact that *parousia* is part of eschatology which also includes the Day of the Lord and its nuances both in the New Testament and the Old Testament. However, I will not include a discussion on eschatology due to the constraint of words allowed for the paper. My focus is primarily to understand whether Paul does indicate a time the *parousia* is to occur when he uses that particular term.

⁹ Matthew is the only Gospel that uses the term *parousia*.

¹⁰ John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 53.

or religious conditions of the period during which the text was produced.¹¹ Hayes and Holladay point out that in order to attain valuable background information about the past to enlighten a study of a biblical text one must use established reliable sources such as Bible dictionaries and encyclopaedias.¹²

It is also vital to compare a text or term with other forms of writings from around a particular time. Hayes and Holladay write: “Other writings of antiquity may reflect a similar outlook, derive from roughly the same period, discuss the same topic, or provide valuable background information.”¹³

The latter dimension, history *of* the text, considers the history behind the text. Hayes and Holladay calls it the “external history of a passage”.¹⁴ This is where the plot of the text originates from. It examines the author’s background. Who is producing the story and what is his or her intention in developing it. It connects with the situation of the targeted audience about their social, physical and spiritual life. In other words, the author’s purpose in writing the story is to give a relevant message to a particular audience. Thus, the background of the first letter to the Thessalonians surveys the how, when, why, and where it was written.

1.1 History *in* the text:

Firstly, the main text 1 Thess. 4:15-17 states:

15.Τουτο γάρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας· 16 ὅτι αὐτός ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον, 17 ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἁρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα.¹⁵

15 For this we tell you as a message from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall by no means have precedence over those who have fallen asleep. 16 Because the Lord himself will descend from heaven, with a command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then who are alive, who are left, will be snatched up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid., p. 53.

¹² Ibid., p. 56.

¹³ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁵ Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th edition, eds: Kurt Aland and others (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1999), 536.

¹⁶ The English translations used in this paper are mine unless otherwise indicated.

1.1.1 *Parousia*: A word study

The word *parousia* occurs in the New Testament twenty-four times, twenty times in the Epistles¹⁷ and four times in Matthew 24. In the letters of Paul, *parousia* occurs eleven times,¹⁸ three times in 2 Thess. 2, and six times in the Catholic Epistles.¹⁹ In the Pauline letters, the term is always part of a prepositional phrase except in 2 Cor. 10:10.²⁰ *Parousia* is used primarily by Paul in the Thessalonian letters to describe the second coming of Christ, as recorded in 1 Thess. 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, 5:23 and in 2 Thess. 2:1. It is significant that the word is largely confined to the first letter to the Thessalonians.

The term is derived from its Greek use where it always indicates a ceremonial arrival of a King or Ruler with honours or of a god to help people in need.²¹ The basic meaning of the word is derived from the Greek verb παρειμι, translated ‘to be present’. Thus, παρουσία means presence in the sense of the “arrival as the onset of presence”.²² In this sense, when Paul talks to the Thessalonian Christians about the *parousia*, they might have understood it firstly as the second coming of the Lord. Secondly, they understand that the *parousia* is associated with the splendour of such a grand visit as in 1 Thess. 4:16-17. These are parodies of the true glory of God being revealed as Bruce Malina has rightly stated.²³

1.1.2 Literary context:

In the history in the text dimension, the literary context of a passage is important. In other words, the location of a selected text within the whole letter is helpful in determining what

¹⁷ In the Epistles, the word *parousia* appears five times in the 1&2 letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:23; 16:17; 2 Cor. 7:6, 7; 10: 10). The word appears two times in the letter to the Philippians (Phil. 1:26; 2:12). It appears 7 times in the 1&2 letters to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1, 8, 9). It also appears 2 times in the letter of James (Jam. 5:7, 8), 3 times in the second letter of Peter (2 Pet. 1:16; 3:4, 12), and appear once in the first letter of John (1 Jo. 2:28).

¹⁸ In Paul Authentic Letters, the word *parousia* occurs 5 times in the 1&2 letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:23; 16:17; 2 Cor. 7:6, 7; 10: 10). The word appears two times in the letter to the Philippians (Phil. 1:26; 2:12), and appears 4 times in the first letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23).

¹⁹ In the Catholic Epistles, the word *parousia* appears 2 times in the letter of James (Jam. 5:7, 8), it appears 3 times in the second letter of Peter (2 Pet. 1:16; 3:4, 12), and appear once in the first letter of John (1 Jo. 2:28).

²⁰ Walter Radl, “παρουσία,” in the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3. Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), p. 43.

²¹ Abraham Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians: Translated with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, Vol. 33 (New York: Double Day, 2000), p. 270.

²² Albrecht Oepke, “Parousia,” in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. V. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 859.

²³ Bruce Malina, “Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51, 1 (1989): 1-31.

issues are being discussed and addressed. Thus, 1 Thess. 4:15-17 is situated within 1 Thess. 4:13-18, which entails an extensive discussion of *parousia*. Verse 13 begins with a phrase depicting the recipient's knowledge about the subject being introduced, those who have died. This is illustrated by the use of the Greek term ἀδελφοί²⁴ ('brethren'). 'Those who have died' as the subject, is also exemplified by the Greek word περί²⁵ ('about'). The subject about 'those who have died' connects with the *parousia* in subsequent verses.

In addition, the use of the Greek word ἐλπίδα²⁶ ('hope') in verse 13 is encouraging for the Thessalonians. For Paul, hope is the essential theme for this community. It also provides the perspective upon which the understanding of *parousia* is to be learnt. In other words, Paul is trying to tell the Christian believers in Thessalonica that there is hope for them at Christ's *parousia*, especially for the believers who have fallen asleep of whom the living members are worried about. It is also the hope the apostle is living with. Malherbe notes that:

The subject of the pericope (Christians who have died) and Paul's intention of writing (that his readers not grieve) are stated in verse 13. Paul seeks to accomplish his goal in two ways. First in verse 14, he adduces his and his reader's belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus, from which he draws the inference that God through Jesus will gather all Christians who had died. He then strengthens this explanation that he calls a word of the Lord. He applies this message from the Lord to the immediate situation; a fear of some of his readers that those alive at the coming of the Lord will in some way have an advantage over those who will have died by then. (vv. 15-17). He concludes with an exhortation that they comfort each other (v. 18) which thus form an inclusion to the pericope that began with a concern for his readers' grief (v. 13).²⁷

The discussion is rounded up in verse 17 with a confident statement about the believers and 'those who have died' being with the Lord. It is followed in verse 18 with Paul's message to encourage the Thessalonian believers to share his understanding about Jesus' *parousia* among them.

1.1.3 Text:

1 Thess. 4:15-17 continues the discussion with Paul drawing the attention of the Thessalonians to the message he brings from the Lord to them. It begins with the Greek word τοῦτο²⁸ ('this') in verse 15. It signals that Paul will now provide information on how Jesus' *parousia* will come about. It anticipates also the explanation regarding the relation of the

²⁴ The word is a noun, vocative, masculine, plural. According to Duff, vocative is used when addressing people and masculine plural refers to many males only. It is translated as brethren. However, the same term is translated in the NRSV to include female. Thus, we have brothers and sisters.

²⁵ The word is a genitive preposition, translated 'about'.

²⁶ The word is a noun, neuter, masculine, plural translated 'hope'.

²⁷ Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, p. 261.

²⁸ The word is a pronoun, nominative, neuter, singular meaning 'this'.

living and the dead Christians²⁹ to one another and to the coming of Christ from heaven. The conjunction γάρ ('for') of verse 15 indicates to the Thessalonians and the readers that verse 14 contain the climax, hope, which explains what follows.³⁰ Furthermore, the following phrase, ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ('message from the Lord') shows that Paul is not quoting the word of the Lord but he applies it to the situation at hand.

The next phrase of vs. 15, ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου, ('we who are alive who are left until the coming of the Lord') shows the way Paul understood the *parousia* to happen. The pronoun ἡμεῖς ('we'), modified by the Greek participle ζῶντες ('who are alive') and περιλειπόμενοι ('who are left'), is compared to τοὺς κοιμηθέντας ('those who have fallen asleep'). That is, those who are alive and the ones who have fallen asleep are participants of the *parousia*. The understanding derived at from this phrase is that the *parousia* is to happen while the current members of the Thessalonian church are alive. Moreover, the temporal timing is established by εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν, ('until the coming of the Lord').

Paul's focus is not merely confined to the explanations of the *parousia*. He alludes to his being part of the time the *parousia* is to take place. The initial one is the use of the first person pronoun ὑμῖν ('we') in verse 15. It indicates that Paul includes himself with those who will still be alive at the *parousia*.³¹ The second allusion is the use of the present participles ζῶντες ('who are alive') and περιλειπόμενοι ('who are left') indicate foremost the Thessalonian believers. Moreover, the terms indicate that Paul is a member of the lot 'who are alive' and their existence is eschatological. In other words, they exist at the onset of the *parousia*.³² Charles Wanamaker highlights that one important feature of Paul's understanding of the *parousia*, at least at the time he wrote 1 Thess., becomes evident in 1 Thess. 4:15b. Paul believes that he and many of his contemporaries would still be alive at the time of the Lord's coming.³³ In discussing the development of Paul's thought about *parousia*,

²⁹ I am aware of the fact that believers have not been known as Christians at the time of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. However, I will use the two terms interchangeably because believers then were later called Christians.

³⁰ James Everett Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), p. 270.

³¹ Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, p. 47.

³² Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, p. 47. He points out that Paul could have used the indefinite third person had he not wished to include himself among those who would probably survive to the *parousia*.

³³ Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, p. 123. The debate about Paul's understanding of *parousia* to have happened in his time has not been one sided. Many have come out to defend the sayings of the Apostle Paul in light of the criticism that he was wrong.

I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, NCBC (London: Marshal Morgan and Scott, 1983), p. 127ff. Marshall has pointed out in his discussion that the Patristic commentators struggled with the problem that

Albert Schweitzer states that: “From his first letter to his last, Paul’s thought is always dominated by the expectation of the immediate return of Jesus.”³⁴

Dodd, however, does not believe Paul is part of those who will be alive at that time.³⁵ Ben Witherington argues that Paul has not clearly indicated that the *parousia* of the Son of Man would definitely come within his lifetime or within a generation. Rather, Witherington suggests that because Paul does entertain the possibility that the end might come soon, the warning given to his audience to be prepared, to stay awake, and to keep watch confirms that.³⁶

Verses 16 and 17 explain in details how the *parousia* is to take place. These are details of a grand visit hinted to earlier. The Lord is to descend from heaven and those who have fallen will rise first. The ones who are alive, including the apostle Paul, will be taken up with the ones fallen and will meet the Lord in the air. As I have discussed above, it seems clear that Paul has understood the events of verses 16 & 17 to happen while he and the Thessalonians believers are still alive.

1.2 History of the Text

This dimension of Historical Criticism is used to shed light on the context in which the first letter to the Thessalonians is believed to have been produced. It surveys the authorship, the date, and the setting of the letter.

1.2.1 Author

There is a general consensus that First Thessalonians is believed to be written by the Apostle Paul on his first visit to Corinth. The consensus is supported by looking at Paul’s sayings. First, in 1 Thess. 3:1-6 Ernest Best states that Paul has indicated clearly that when he has been in Athens he sent Timothy to Thessalonica to bring him news of what is

Paul would have been proven wrong in 1 Thess. 4:15 if his words were taken literally. John Chrysostom holds that Paul is not speaking of himself, but of those who would be alive at the *parousia*, Oecumenius explains that Paul is speaking of living souls. Theophylact thinks that Paul is not talking of himself but that by adding those who are alive, who are left, he signifies by his own passion all those who would be live to the end.

³⁴ Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, Translated by W. Montgomery (New York: Holt and Co, 1931), p. 52.

³⁵ Dodd, *New Testament Studies*, p. 115; see also Cullman, *Christ and Time*, p. 59.

³⁶ Ben Witherington, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 156.

happening in Thessalonica.³⁷ Second, Acts 18:5 mentions that Timothy and Silas rejoin Paul in Corinth. This then is the time of Timothy's return to Paul and the letter is sent out after this return to Corinth.³⁸ Jeffrey Weima states that Paul is the author of the book despite mentioning of Silas and Timothy as co-senders.³⁹ He also believes that Paul writes this letter after Timothy informs the apostle not only about good report of the young church but also about some concerns when he returns from his visit to Thessalonica.⁴⁰ I agree with Jeffrey Weima's argument about the authorship of the letter because if Timothy has not informed the apostle about the good report and some concerns of the Thessalonians church, the apostle would not have sent any letter to the church anyway.

1.2.2 Date

Paul and his companions, Silas and Timothy, establish the first Christian church in the city of Thessalonica around A.D. 49.⁴¹ They, then, leave immediately because their lives have been threatened. After the return of Timothy from Thessalonica as mentioned above with good news about the growth of the believers there, Paul dispatches his first letter around A.D. 50.⁴² First Thessalonians is widely accepted to be Paul's earliest letter.⁴³ This point is important to this study because in his first epistle he understands the *parousia* to occur shortly.⁴⁴ In his later letters, as in the second one to the Thessalonians, the Corinthian letters, and the one to the Romans, Paul's understanding tends to change.⁴⁵

Jeffrey Weima states that Paul writes this letter from Corinth to comfort and teach the church about Christ's return. His relationship with the church in Thessalonica began during

³⁷ Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, p. 7; also William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), p. 19.

³⁸ Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, p. 7.

³⁹ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "1 and 2 Thessalonians," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), p. 405.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

⁴¹ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 532; also Archibald M. Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament*, 3rd revised edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 142.

⁴² Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament*, 143. A. N. Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 149. Wilson suggests that A.D. 50 would be too early so he sets the date at A.D. 51. I support Hunter.

⁴³ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 533; also Christopher Rowland, "Parousia," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 4. Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, Brian K. Blount, Joel B. Green and others (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), p. 384.

⁴⁴ In his later letters, Paul's understanding of *parousia* tends to change although that is not the focus of my research.

⁴⁵ Cullman, *Christ and Time*, p. 59. Cullman points out that whereas in 1 Thess. 4:15 Paul has said that he would still be living when Christ returned, in his later epistles like 2 Cor. 5:1ff, Paul affirms that the *parousia* would occur after his death.

the middle of his second missionary journey. He also mentions that Paul has begun his evangelistic activity in the local synagogue.⁴⁶ L. J. Kreitzer mentions that the reason the Thessalonian Letters have been written are Paul's response to serious questions raised by the congregation about the death of their relatives prior to the expected *parousia* of the Lord.⁴⁷ So from these points raised by scholars, I contend that the selected date of the letter is relevant if we take into consideration the time Paul and his companions have planted the seed of the gospel in the Thessalonians church, and also to compare it with the time the apostle has written his first letter to the Thessalonians.

1.2.3 Setting

The city of Thessalonica is believed to have been founded by King Cassander around 315 B.C.⁴⁸ The King names this city after Thessalonica his wife, the half-sister of Alexander the Great. This location is important because of its two main land routes: the Appian way and the Egnatian way which are the main land routes for both commerce and military movement in Roman times. Therefore, it is believed that this is why Paul's journey and his mission to the church in Thessalonica have been convenient because of these main land routes.

In Thessalonica, the faith of the believers' need to be nurtured because of a misunderstanding in the church concerning Christ's *parousia*. Some of the Thessalonian Christians believe that Christ would return soon. This caused an uncertainty regarding what would happen with their loved ones who have died.⁴⁹ Their friends and relatives are worried about their status when Christ returns. Providing a resolution to this question is believed to be Paul's main purpose in the letters to the Thessalonians.⁵⁰ It is not just to wait for this event but to reassure the Thessalonian Christians about what the *parousia* means for them and their loved ones. In doing so, he has to explain to them the *parousia*. There is no need to be anxious about Jesus coming because he will have the dead and the ones alive with him. Therefore, Paul's message is to discourage the Thessalonians Christians from anxiety. In addition, Paul's writing as a pastor is to counsel and to encourage them to be steadfast in their faith.⁵¹ They

⁴⁶ Weima, "1 and 2 Thessalonians," p. 405.

⁴⁷ L. J. Kreitzer, "Eschatology," in the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 255.

⁴⁸ Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament*, 142.

⁴⁹ Wilson, Paul, 149.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵¹ Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, p. 180.

must continue to uphold their faith and to continue spreading the Good News because the *parousia* is taking place soon.

1.3.1 Other use of *parousia* in the First Letter to the Thessalonians:

As I have mentioned earlier, *parousia* also appears in 1 Thess. 2:19, 3:13, and 5:23. In 2:19 Paul states: “For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?”⁵² Paul is not describing *parousia* and the events associated with it in this verse as in 1 Thess. 4:15-17. However, he understands the *parousia* to occur while the current Thessalonian believers are alive. This is expressed in the rhetoric he has used. The hope of Paul and his co-workers is that the Thessalonians would remain faithful to the Gospel they have shared with them at first when the *parousia* occurs. That would be the base of their joy because the believers affirm that Paul has done the work he has been sent to do. The crown of boasting expresses the victory of the Thessalonian believers against Satan.⁵³ At the same time, it is a victory of Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

In 1 Thess. 3:13, Paul again does not discuss details of the *parousia*. Instead he encourages the Thessalonians to maintain the love that would unite them. The love of God that has been bestowed to Paul and his co workers through Jesus via their call to be apostles. It is the same love Paul and his fellow workers have shared with the Thessalonians. If they are able to maintain that then surely they are blameless when the *parousia* takes place. Moreover, a similar message is conveyed in 1 Thess. 5:23, the last appearance of *parousia* in the first letter. At the conclusion of Paul’s teachings about *parousia*, he offers a benedictory prayer for the Thessalonian believers. He prays that the Thessalonians would maintain their holiness and blameless when the *parousia* takes place. He states clearly in the subsequent verse, the final verse of the benediction, that “the one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.”⁵⁴ In other words, the last appearance of the term clearly indicates that it will happen and it will happen shortly.

1.3.2 Use of *parousia* in Matthew’s Gospel

Matthew is the only Gospel that use the term *parousia*. According to D. C. Allison, Matthew’s consistent use of the term in chapter 24 to refer to Jesus’ *parousia* implies that the

⁵² “1 Thessalonians 2:19,” in *The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 218. The italic is mine.

⁵³ Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 128. Best recommends that the term crown is best defined as a symbol of victory rather than a symbol of royalty.

⁵⁴ “1 Thessalonians 5:24,” 220.

coming is to happen soon.⁵⁵ In Matthew 24:3, R. T. France states that this verse indicates all about the future, with the emphasis on God's judgment. This is indicated by the questions asked by the disciples. The questions included the two futuristic aspects: the future prediction of the temple's destruction, and Jesus' "*parousia* at the end of age".⁵⁶

France also shows in Matthew 24: 27 the distinction between the events during the siege and the future *parousia*. The real *parousia*, when it comes, will not like the claims of the impostors during the siege. The mention of the *parousia* in v. 27 has used the image of lightning to portray both its unmistakable nature and its suddenness. He also states in verses 37-39 that, if the exact time of the *parousia* is unknown, then the people will also be caught unaware. The burglar illustrates not only that the time of the *parousia* is unknown, but more specifically that it will be "a time you do not expect".⁵⁷ So to sum up Matthew 24 and its use of *parousia*, the message is for the disciples to get prepared at any time and work hard in God's ministry they have been called to participate in no matter what would happen to the *parousia*. The important factor is to work hard and stay awake at all time.

Stanley Hauerwas states that the responsibilities of the disciples is to stay awake and to be ready exactly because they do not and cannot know the day and hour of the triumph of the Son of Man. Disciples are not in the game of prediction. Rather, they are called to be ready and to be prepared.⁵⁸ I. H. Marshall states that the future coming of the Son of Man will be unexpected and catastrophic for those who are not ready for him.⁵⁹ T. J. Geddert shows that Matthew's so-called apocalyptic discourse in Matthew 24 is closely parallels to Mark 13. So, the overall message of Matthew 24 is that since no one knows when the end will come, watchfulness is required at every moment.⁶⁰

1.4 Summary

In summary, I have demonstrated from the use of history in the text dimension that Paul's understandings of *parousia* in 1 Thess. 4:15-17 indicates clearly that the period for it

⁵⁵ D. C. Allison Jr., "Eschatology," in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 208.

⁵⁶ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), pp. 889-890.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 940.

⁵⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible, eds. R. R. Reno, Robert W. Jenson and others (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), p. 206.

⁵⁹ I. Howard Marshall, "Son of Man," in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 777.

⁶⁰ T. J. Geddert, "Apocalyptic Teaching," in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 23.

to happen is within his life time. Firstly, Paul's use of ὑμῖν ('we') in verse 15 includes himself together with the Thessalonians at the time of the *parousia* when Jesus returns to bring those who are dead and the ones alive to be with him. The next indication of the time frame from verse 15 is the use of the present participles ζῶντες ('who are alive') and περιλειπόμενοι ('who are left'). They signify foremost the Thessalonian believers. However, as I have shown above, the terms also point toward Paul who is a member of the lot 'who are alive' and their existence is eschatological. Therefore the period for the *parousia* to occur in Paul's thinking is while he is alive. The exact time to happen cannot be spelled out explicitly.

In the history of the text dimension, it shows that the discussion of *parousia* arises because of the concern of the Thessalonian believers about their loved ones who have died. In addressing that concern, Paul informs them that those who have died and the ones alive at that time will be with Jesus at the second coming. He also includes himself with them. Moreover, he encourages the Christians in Thessalonica to uphold their faith. This notion is evident in 1 Thess. 4:15-17 and other use of the term *parousia* in the same letter. It is important for Paul that when the event takes place, the Thessalonian Christians have maintained their holiness and are blameless.

Chapter 2

THE UTUALII PARISH VIEW POINTS ABOUT *PAROUSIA*

This chapter investigates the understanding about *parousia* of selected members of the E.F.K.S Utualii parish. The method been used includes interviews of members who represent various age groups. The aim is to find out if there is a connection between the urgency of moving inland and the *parousia*.

2. Historical Situation: The Environmental Impact and the Re-establishment of the Church Building Inland

About ten years ago, the E.F.K.S Utualii members have begun to observe the rapid erosion of the land upon which the church building, the pastor's house, and the hall have been situated due to sea waves hammering the land. The erosion, in my opinion, is mainly due to the impact of the rising sea level which is the wide effect of global warming. The parish realizes then that it is urgent to relocate its premises to a safe place. From that time onwards, I begin to hear members of the parish associating the sea erosion with the coming of the Lord. The pastor, Rev. Faraimo Tiitii, and members of the parish agree on a motion to seek an assistance of the EFKS for a piece of land from the latter's owned land on the south side of the road. The EFKS in its Fonotele of 2014 donates a parcel of land, about four acres, inland for the Utualii parish. In the meantime, the pastor's house and the hall have been relocated to the new site. The church building will follow suit.

As mentioned earlier, it is about this time that the church members have begun to talk about the end of the world. The change of the environmental becomes the fear factor which challenges the faith of the church members. They begin to worry not only for themselves and their future but also about their relatives who are already dead as well. Moreover, there is an on-going tension between members of the church because of the rising belief that Jesus' return is near. The church members refer to the imminence of this event and they relate it to the end of the world. The question that cause them anxiety is that if these environmental changes could be the sign of the end to come, what are they going to do when Jesus' return? Is there hope for them?

2.1 The Utualii Parish response through interviews

This part of the research is vital because it focuses on the opinions and the beliefs of the Utualii parish members and their understanding of *parousia*.⁶¹

2.1.1 Age Group of 65 years and over

In an interview with Satuala Lefale,⁶² one of the oldest ladies of the Utualii parish, I pose to her a question about Jesus' second coming. Firstly, she does not understand the term *parousia* I have used. Instead, she understands when I use the interpretation 'Jesus second coming'.⁶³ Lefale believes that Jesus has already come. The proof for her of his coming is that Jesus has spent time with his disciples in his ministry. He also has died, been buried and resurrected on the third day. He rises again from death and has sent the Holy Spirit. Now, he stays with his Father in heaven. She believes that it is the only coming of Jesus Christ in this world.

I have asked her whether she believes that Jesus Christ will come back again, and she is not so sure. But she has indicated that she wishes to learn more. In addition, she connects the issue being discussed with the millennium.⁶⁴ She says that many people think that the millennium is to bring the end of the world, but nothing happen at all. Therefore, she concludes our interview by saying that if Jesus is to come again that will be good. However, for now have faith and believe in God. Those are the most necessary factors for anyone. When I put to her a question about the imminent of the second coming in 1 Thess. 4:15-17 and the relocation of church premises, Lefale believes the latter has nothing to do with the former or vice versa.

In another interview with Matiu Lemalie, one of the oldest men of the Utualii parish,⁶⁵ he states that the second coming of Jesus is not something that we should strive to know. God alone knows whether Jesus does come back or not. He believes that the death and the resurrection of Jesus save us when this world comes to its end. He says he is not sure if there is life after this one, but all he knows is that people who are already dead and those who

⁶¹ The members of the EFKS Utualii parish, with the exception of the pastor, do not know the term *parousia* when I use it in the interview. But when I translate it to mean the coming of Jesus they understand it as the return of Jesus to destroy evil in the world. I translate it in Samoa as toe afio mai o Iesu, po'o lona afio faalua mai.

⁶² Satuala Lefale, Personal Interview, 15th October 2015.

⁶³ Since the interview with Lefale, I refrain from using the term *parousia*. Instead, I use its interpretation of 'second coming'.

⁶⁴ A period of one thousand years.

⁶⁵ Matiu Lemalie, Personal Interview, 15th October 2015.

are still alive will all stand before God to be judged. He also points out that we, as servants of the Lord, are to be watchful and to be alert because we never know God's plan.

I put to him a question about Paul's understanding of the nearness of the second coming of Jesus reflected in 1 Thess. 4:15-17 and the relocation of the church buildings inland. Lemalie believes that the two are related. However, he insisted that the sea erosion is not to be viewed as a sign of Jesus' return. The relocation is due to safety and it is also good because when Jesus comes again, Utualii people have a place to welcome Jesus.

In an interview with Osa Pasia,⁶⁶ one of the Utualii parish *a'oa'o fesoasoani*,⁶⁷ he says that he agrees that the second coming of Jesus Christ is near but he does not know the exact time. He also believes that the second coming of Jesus Christ is also the time of the end of the world. It is the time of God's judgement between the good and the bad people, the dead and the living, the sinners and those who do the will of God. He also believes that there is life after death or what he called the everlasting life for those who truly believe in God. When I put to him a question about the coming of Jesus reflected in Paul's words in 1 Thess. 4:15-17 and the relocation of the church premises inland because of the loss of land, he states that it is a wise move. Moreover, if Jesus does come again, at least the relocation effort by the church is done. In addition, he also gives his words of encouragement that we must work hard in whatever work that God have chosen us to do

In an interview with Puao Lafoa'i,⁶⁸ another old female member of the Utualii parish, she states that the second coming of Jesus Christ is one of the most important issues to talk about. It is because she wants to know the exact time when Jesus Christ will come back again and carry those who truly believed in him to his kingdom. Lafoa'i says that she has heard many preachers from the charismatic churches that the world is going to end soon. These preachers said that we must now repent and be born again because the kingdom of God is near and the second coming of Jesus Christ is also near. She said that this is very annoying because she believes that only God knows about the second coming of Jesus Christ.

I ask Lafoa'i of her opinion on Paul's discussion in 1 Thess. 4:15-17 and the relocation of the church buildings. To her, Paul is right. The second coming marks the end of the evil world but the time is not important for the faithful people. The work of the Utualii pastor and the congregation is important because of the land problem. It is a sign of faithful

⁶⁶ Osa Pasia, Personal Interview, 15th October 2015.

⁶⁷ An E.F.K.S term for a lay preacher.

⁶⁸ Puao Lafoa'i, Personal Interview, 22nd October 2015.

people who await the return of their Lord without sitting around doing nothing. She goes on to say that we must be patient, not to give up the work we are supposed to do now and that is to relocate church premises inland.

2.1.2 The Age Group of 40 and above

According to some of the interviews with these members of my church, they all believe in the Scripture where it informs us that Jesus is coming back again. He will come back, they say. The problem, however, is that they do not know the exact time of Jesus' coming. For them, to believe and to have faith in God is important.

In an interview with Rev. Faraimo Tiitii,⁶⁹ the pastor of the Utualii parish, he says that the issue about the second coming of Jesus Christ is one of the factors that had caused fear to most of the Christians. It seems to be a warning for us to repent from our sins and wrongdoings. At the meantime, the effort to relocate the church premises inland is mainly due to the erosion of the current land. It can also be taken as preparation for the time of the *parousia*. In that way, whether Jesus returns tomorrow or whatever time God wills at least we, as a parish, are holding on to the faith. The hope in God requires us to spread the message of salvation to all people. In our discussion of the nearness of the second coming in 1 Thess. 4:15-17 and the relocation of the church buildings, Tiitii agrees with Paul. The former points out that he sided with Paul on the fact that as a servant of the Lord he also would like the second coming to take place while he is alive as much as Paul would have liked it to happen in his time. However, it should not blind the Utualii parish from what they are supposed to do.

One of the *a'oa'o fesoasoani*, Toiaimanu Paa, believes that the second coming of Jesus Christ is something that we, as Christians, need to be focussed on. We do not need to worry about the time if we firmly believe and trust in God.⁷⁰ He rounds off the interview by confirming that the relocation of church premises is an act of hope well acted upon. When the *parousia* takes place we are ready to receive Jesus.

In an interview with another member of this age group, Karoline Kasiano, she says after I ask her about Paul's understanding of the nearness of the coming of the Lord and the relocation of the church buildings, that moving our church inland for her could be a sign of the end because climate changes show that the end is coming near. However, she believes

⁶⁹ Faraimo Tiitii, Personal Interview, 5th December 2015.

⁷⁰ Toiaimanu Paa, Personal Interview, 5th December 2015.

that “only God knows the exact time of the end of the world” but for us we should stay at where we are now. Have faith and believe in God.⁷¹

One member of this age group, Leasuasu Seisi, states that we must prepare for the second coming of Jesus because it is near as Paul has indicated in the passage I put to him. Seisi’s opinion is based on a lot of changes in our environment which shows that the end is near. We must be watchful and be prepared.⁷²

2.1.3 The Junior Youth

In the interviews with members of the junior youth, I let them talk first about their general knowledge of Jesus’ second coming before I ask them about their opinion on Paul’s understanding of the nearness of the event in 1 Thess. 4:15-17. One of them, Papa Mauga, says that the second coming of Jesus Christ is something that we do not know the time and day. But, his encouragement to the youths based on Paul’s teachings, is to repent and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. He believes that this is the only way we have eternal life.⁷³ To relocate inland is not a sign of the *parousia*, but it is a good move so that when it happens all the church buildings are safe.

Aliitasi Niutao, the other member of our junior youth consulted, have asserted that people of the church are anxious because of climate changes and that is why she was happy when our church are about to move inland. When I ask her whether she thinks that these changes are signs of the second coming of Jesus Christ, she is not so sure because she believes that no one knows the will of God. All we can do is trust God and have faith in Him.⁷⁴

“Work hard and believed in God”, these are words of encouragement of one member of the youth, Kasia Brown. She agrees with Paul that the second coming of Jesus Christ is near and she believes that the climate changes are signs of the end. “Moving our church inland to me could be a sign of the end”, she concludes.⁷⁵

The last member of the youth interviewed, Vastfoseta Aofia, believes that moving of our church inland shows that the Utualii church members have little faith. The old church building is still safe and strong enough for the next twenty years. He believes that the second

⁷¹ Karoline Kasiano, Personal Interview, 5th December 2015.

⁷² Leasuasu Seisi, Personal Interview, 22nd January 2016.

⁷³ Papa Mauga, Personal Interview, 25th January 2016. 25

⁷⁴ Aliitasi Niutao, Personal Interview, 25th January 2016.

⁷⁵ Kasia Brown, Personal Interview, 25th January 2016.

coming of Jesus Christ is something that we have heard ages ago, so what we must do is to have faith in God.⁷⁶

2.2 Summary

This section ends with a summation that the understanding of *parousia* being expressed by members of the Utualii parish varies. It is obvious that the old members understand *parousia* but are not anxious about the time. Thus, the relocation of the church premises inland because of sea erosion is not a sign of the *parousia*. However, the age group of 40 above and the younger members do associate the two.

⁷⁶ Vastfoseta Aofia, Personal Interview, 25th January 2016.

Chapter 3

CONCLUSION:

This paper concludes that Paul's understandings about the second coming of Jesus when he uses the term *parousia* is that it is to take place while he is alive. It is soon. In other words, it is happening within Paul's life time. From Paul's understanding of *parousia* in his Thessalonian letters, he declare that he will be with the Thessalonian believers at the time of Jesus' *parousia*. Consequently, there is hope for the Thessalonian believers to keep their faith alive and discourage their feelings of anxiety about those who are already dead of their community. For Paul, the exact time of the *parousia* is not important whether it will come today, tomorrow or it will come after a long time.

However, it is important for the Thessalonian believers to know that Jesus' *parousia* is just around the corner, although Paul does not clearly indicate the exact time when the *parousia* will happen. The point that the apostle is trying to emphasize here, is for the Thessalonians believers to know and believe that Jesus will come back again to meet with those who are still alive and those who are already dead. Yet, the *parousia* is an event that they should be aware of and need to take into their consideration. The key note that Paul is trying to elaborate here is that, the Thessalonian believers should remain in their faith in whatever opportunities that God has given them in order to strengthen and spread God's word that Jesus bring in his ministry. Therefore, there is no need to worry about Jesus' *parousia*, but to work hard and to put more effort in serving God's ministry is what they should have emphasize. Yet, the important point here is that Paul is trying to tell the Thessalonian believers that, it is better for him if the *parousia* comes but they are still uphold in their faith and are working hard in serving God's ministry than they just wait with fear and anxiety without doing any work in God's ministry.

In the EFKS Utualii parish, the church members express the varieties of their opinions about the second coming of Jesus Christ. To some of them, especially the old members of the church, Jesus' *parousia* is not important, as they already know that Jesus death and resurrection is their way to eternal life. This is how the old people think, nothing to worry about because Jesus is already save us through his death and resurrection. They believed that the relocation of the Church premises inland because of sea erosion is not a sign of the *parousia*. This is because the old members of the Utualii parish believed that only God knows everything. They said that we are already in God's salvation to eternal life through the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But, for Christ' *parousia* they believed that only God

knows about it. However, some members agree with Paul especially the age group 40 years old and below, that Jesus' *parousia* is near, signify by the relocation of the church building, pastor's house and the hall in the new area inland. It is an event that makes them fear and keeps them more anxiety of what they might be doing when the event comes. So in other words, this shows that they do not really understand the meaning of *parousia*. Paul has reminded us that Christ's *parousia* is not an event that we anticipate with fear and anxiety. Otherwise we easily ignore the work we should be doing. It is a must for the Utualii parish members, to stand up and keep on doing their work. Work hard in serving God's ministry without expecting a reward is something that they should be focus on. If they do so, they would have no problem when Christ returns. But a member of the Utualii parish believes that moving of the church inland shows that the Utualii church members have little faith. He is right in his own opinion because he believes that faith in God is the most crucial act that any members should be aware of. This is exactly what is happening to the Thessalonians believers when their relatives are dead. However, Paul reminded them to stay firm in their faith in God. Likewise the Utualii parish members, they should hold on to their faith in God to get rid of fear and anxiety. The rising of the sea-level becomes a fear factor and a sign of the end for some members. But if they focus themselves on God's ministry they should never worry because they know that God is their hope.

The impression here is that, the church members of the Utualii parish should not worry themselves about Jesus' *parousia* in whatever time it happens. But, it is important to let their faith to be strong enough in order to continue and complete their new project about the relocation of their church premises inland. The understanding of the *parousia* according to Paul shows that there is hope for the Thessalonians believers. I believe that members of the Utualii parish should let their faith in God as their hope for their endeavours. Whatever happens in the future but at least they still hold on to their faith in God.

It is my intention to recommend the EFKS Utualii to keep their heads up and strive to do the work that God has given to them in order to complete. It is not for the pastor and his wife's glory or for anyone's glory but for God's ministry. Work hard to the best they can and strive with faithful to God in order for them to be successful with their work and future plans for the completion of the church building relocation. I encourage them to be faithful and work hard with one heart, one mind and one soul in facing whatever struggles and problems of God's work that they are planning to do.

Bibliography

- “1 Thessalonians 2:19.” In *The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- “1 Thessalonians 5:24.” In *The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Adams, Edward. “The Coming of the Son of Man in Mark’s Gospel.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 56, 2 (2005): 39-61.
- Allison Jr., D. C. “Eschatology.” In the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall. pp. 206-209. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- Beasley-Murray, G. R. *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986.
- Best, Ernest. *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*. Black’s New Testament Commentaries. Reprint 1986. London: A & C Black, 1986.
- Blaising, Graig A. “The Day of the Lord and Rapture.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169, (2012): 259-270.
- Bruce, Frederick. F. *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. WBC. Waco, TX: Word, 1982.
- Canoy, Robert W. “Teaching Eschatology and Ethics in the Thessalonian Letters.” *Teaching Eschatology and Ethics Review and Expositor* 96 (1999): 249-261.
- Carson, D. A. and Douglas J. Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Second edition. Vol. 4. Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, Brian K. Blount, Joel B. Green and others. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.
- Chapa, Juan. “Is First Thessalonians a Letter of Consolation?” *New Testament Studies* 40, 1 (1994): 150-160.
- Cullman, Oscar. *Christ and Time*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950.
- Dodd, Charles H. *New Testament Studies*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953.
- Dyrness, William and Karrkkainen Veli-Malti. *Global Dictionary of Theology*. Nothingham: Intervarsity Press, 2008.
- Frame, James Everett. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*. ICC. Edinburgh: Clark, 1988.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.

- Geddert, T. J. "Apocalyptic Teaching." In the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, pp. 17-26. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- Gieschen, Charles A. "Christ's Coming and the Church's Mission in 1 Thessalonians." *Concordia Theological Seminary* 76 (2012): 37-55.
- Graves, Mike. "Preaching from the Thessalonian Letters." *Preaching from the Thessalonian Letters Review and Expositor* 96 (1999): 233-247.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *Matthew*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Edited by R. R. Reno, Robert W. Jenson and others. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006.
- Hayes, John H. and Carl R. Holladay. *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*. 3rd edition. Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.
- Hendriksen, William and Simon J. Kistemaker. *Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995.
- Hunter, Archibald M. *Introducing the New Testament*. Third revised edition. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1997.
- Kreitzer, L. J. "Eschatology." In the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. pp. 253-269. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Ladd, Eldon George. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974.
- Luedeman, Gerd. *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Malherbe, Abraham. *The Letters to the Thessalonians: Translated with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*. Anchor Bible. Vol. 33. New York: Double Day, 2000.
- Malina, Bruce. "Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51, 1 (1989): 1-31.
- Marshall, I. Howard. "Son of Man." In the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, pp. 775-781. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. NCBC. London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1983.
- Meeks, Wayne A. *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*.

- London: Yale University Press, 1983.
- Moore, A. L. *The Parousia in the New Testament*. Leiden: Brill, 1966.
- Nestle-Aland. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 27th Edition. Edited by Kurt Aland and others. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1999.
- Oepke, Albrecht. "Parousia." In the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. V. pp. 858-871. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975.
- Pace, David W. *The Rediscovery of Jesus Eschatological Discourse*. Sheffield: JSCOT Press, 1984.
- Radl, Walter. "παρουσία." *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Horst Balz and Schneider. Vol. 3. pp. 43-44. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994.
- Rowland, Christopher. "Parousia." *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. 4. Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld and others. Vol. 4. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009.
- Plevnik, Joseph. *Paul and the Parousia: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*. Massachusetts: Peabody, 1997.
- Schweitzer, Albert. *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*. New York: Holt and Co, 1931.
- Still, Todd D. "Eschatology in the Thessalonian Letters." *Eschatology in Thessalonian Letters Review and Expositor* 96 (1999): 195-210.
- Wanamaker, Charles A. *Epistles to the Thessalonians*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990.
- Weima, Jeffrey A. D. "1 and 2 Thessalonians." *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.
- Wilson, A. N. *The Mind of the Apostle*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.
- Witherington III, Ben. *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

Personal Interviews

- Aofia, Vastfoseta. Personal Interview, 25th January 2016.
- Brown, Kasia. Personal Interview, 25th January, 2016.
- Kasiano, Karoline. Personal Interview, 5th December, 2015.

Lafoai, Puao. Personal Interview, 22nd October, 2015.

Lefale, Satuala. Personal Interview, 15th October, 2015.

Lemalie, Matiu. Personal Interview, 15th October, 2015.

Mauga, Papa. Personal Interview, 25th January, 2016.

Niutao, Aliitasi. Personal Interview, 25th January, 2016.

Paa, Toiainanu. Personal Interview, 5th December, 2015.

Pasia, Osa. Personal Interview, 15th October 2015.

Seisi, Leasusu. Personal Interview, 22nd January, 2016.

Tiitii, Faraimo. Personal Interview, 5th December 2016.