

June

20

TRUE LIVING

Jesus died for us so that, whether we are alive or not at the second coming, we may live together with Him.

THE WORD

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ²for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

⁴But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of

salvation as a helmet. ⁹For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

KEY VERSE ¹¹**Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.**

ENGAGE THE WORD

DEAD IN CHRIST

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The concerns of the original audience and the modern readers are very different when approaching this passage. The original readers were Greeks who grew up with a rather vague idea of the afterlife. Their own writers said hope was for the living and the dead had no hope. This idea that death ended everything took a while to overcome. What was going to happen to these dead Christians? Were they going to miss the Day of the Lord?

Paul uses strong language in 4:15, “by a word of the Lord,”¹ to reassure the Thessalonian church that the dead in Christ would not be forgotten. This is not Paul’s opinion, but directly from the Lord. When the Day of the Lord (the second coming of Christ) is announced, the dead in Christ will be resurrected first and then the living will join them in welcoming the Lord. Paul, in 4:14, says before the Word of the Lord is evoked, “God will bring with Him by means of Jesus the ones who sleep.”² Indicating that just as Jesus died and was raised by God, so would the dead in Christ.

The modern Christian reader takes for granted that the dead in Christ have the hope of resurrection. What intrigues them is what the Day of the Lord will look like. As we interpret this section for the modern audience, we must first realize that this was not the question Paul was answering. We should keep in mind that Paul uses common ceremonial events for when an emperor would enter a city in his description of the coming of the Lord (see “Did You Know?”). The Greek term translated “meet” was the term used in this arrival ceremony. Because the Lord was not coming from

Did You Know?

Paul is describing, in chapter 4, the typical way a king would be welcomed into an ancient city. When the king was approaching the city, a trumpet would sound indicating his approach, the people would drop everything, go out to meet the king on his way to the city, welcoming and cheering him while walking with his entourage back into the city where speeches were made and gifts exchanged. The reference to meeting Christ “in the air” means that we will meet Christ on His way down to earth from heaven and usher Him back to earth. This is how the ancient readers would have understood this passage and the way the church understood this passage down through the ages.

another earthly city, but from heaven, the natural meeting place would be the sky.

What Paul wants us to understand from this passage is that the dead in Christ have not been forgotten and in fact hold a very special place in God’s heart. They will be resurrected before Jesus comes back and Jesus will bring them with Him. We don’t need to worry about being left out, because according to 4:17 we will always be with the Lord—no matter if we are dead or alive.

NOT SURPRISED

1 Thessalonians 5:1-5

This teaching that no one but God the Father knows when the Lord will return is found in Matthew 24 and Luke 12. Peace was a major issue for the occupying Romans. The city leaders in Thessalonica, though self-governing, had pledged an oath to Rome to preserve the peace on penalty of removal from office, exile, or death. Before the Roman empire, traveling was dangerous and people were often beaten and robbed. Although bandits still roamed the highways of the empire, the presence of the Roman army discouraged them.

The Romans could not imagine anyone coming to disrupt their lives in an instant. But Paul says that their destruction would come suddenly, they would not see it coming and no one would escape. This is because they live in darkness, do not understand the gospel, and do not see the future. But Christians live in the light, they know what is real, and do not live in the illusion of Roman “peace and safety.” Therefore the coming of the Lord will not surprise them.

BE AWAKE! WE BELONG TO THE DAY!

1 Thessalonians 5:6-11

Living in darkness means being unaware of the reality of the gospel. Those in darkness are asleep and drunk—totally not in a position to be aware when

Think About It

From time to time we hear of people who say that they know when Jesus Christ will return. But in 1 Thessalonians, Paul echoes the words of Jesus (Matthew 24:36-44; Luke 12:35-40) saying that no one knows when Jesus will come back. In Matthew 24:36, Jesus tells His followers that no one knows the hour, not even the angels or the Son, only the Father. 2 Peter 3:8-10 repeats Jesus' words.

Christ returns. But Christians are awake and Paul encourages them to be sober and to put on the armor of God. We have our faith and God's love to protect our hearts and our motives, and we have the helmet of salvation hope to protect our minds.

We were not created to endure God's wrath, rather to experience God's salvation. Jesus died and was resurrected so that whether we are dead or alive, we all live with Christ! Paul is reassuring the Thessalonian church that the dead in Christ are not forgotten, but are actually a part of the church.

Whatever the timing of the return of Jesus, whether we are alive at His returning or are among those who are "asleep in him" (1 Thessalonians 4:14), we may have the confidence that we will live with Him forever. And, lest we forget the depth of this hope, Paul says, "Therefore encourage one another" (4:18), reminding us to continue to build each other up. The church is made stronger when we realize that the dead in Christ are as precious to God as the living and that we will all be together again at the coming of Christ.

REFLECT Take time to think about the second coming of Christ. Reflect on your thoughts and feelings.

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