

Beloved in the Lord,

It has been said that the difficulty in bereavement, that is, the separation sorrow that comes when we bury a loved one, for us as Christians, is to find the union between faith and emotion. How will we go on without the one we love? must be met with "my help comes in the name of the Lord." The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away is met with, "I know that my redeemer lives" (Job 1;19:25). Sorrow is met with song and passion with praise. Grief for the death of a loved is deep, and the deeper the one lost was loved, the more profound the hurt. It is not always easily expressed either for seeking to be stoic and strong Christians; we sometimes are not sure what we to do. The Gospel is such a comfort for in those quiet times when grief becomes private because we confess that the Lord, who sees in private, blesses us there as well. When that time of comfort comes, there is that overwhelming sense of knowing it is well with our souls. That comes from knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Word, and therefore knowledge generated and applied unto faith by the Spirit. For that reason, Scripture is so essential that we read the Words of the Lord and find hope and comfort.

Still, we wonder about the well-being of the dead. What happens to them? Where do they go? What is it like where they are, and will we ever see them again? In their short-lived existence as a church, the Thessalonians had become confused and wondered about these matters also. They knew that Jesus was coming and understood something of the resurrection when Jesus would come again; however, they were confused. What of those who died before Jesus came? What happens to them? Where are they now? And the most challenging question, that is the question of pain, did they miss out?

Pastors Paul, Silas and Timothy now seek to comfort this church. The confusion about Jesus' return had caused some problems. Now he brings the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who died, rose from the grave, and will return. Paul goes on to teach us that when Jesus returns, the dead in Christ will rise, and those still alive will be raptured. Paul brings clarity to the confusion so that the Thessalonians might be immediately comforted. In the future, they and we might be comforted concerning those who die in Christ. I bring God's Word under the theme:

***Paul Comforts the Church through Hope of the Resurrection of the Dead:
The Resurrected Lord, Soul and Body***

The Resurrected Lord: Knowledge! Paul writes, "I don't want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep." I do not want you to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. Paul will not leave them in ignorance to do so would leave them anxious, unsure, and confused. It would leave them without hope in their grieving. Recall that Paul had been there for a short time. Recall that the church there has been in existence some 4-5 weeks. And now they were confronted with the fact that some had died in the Lord, that is, some of their congregation had died. The question was being asked, "What happens to them?" What were they to make of all of this? How were they to bring faith and emotion together when the knowledge was lacking or at least, confused. Paul will make up the lack and clear up any confusion. He is the shepherd of that flock, and under the Great Shepherd, who watches over that flock, will feed the lambs.

The sheep of Christ are not like other men, nor are they to grieve so. Again recall that the Thessalonians were, for the most part, converted Greek proselytes from Judaism or paganism. The Greek pagan religions of the day paid more outward attention to death, that is, the ceremonies and the funeral circumstances. Greek Philosophers had done some thinking about these things and declared the body to be the soul's prison. The soul released from the body was a ghost that was essentially like the body it had been released from and after the death of the body, lived in the Netherworld's shadows called Hades. But in the main, there was not much hope for the body in such religions; thus, death, which is the separation of the body from the soul, was permanent.

But what of Jesus resurrected body? What of the promise of the same? Was that only for those who were living at the time of His return? Paul writes that Jesus says no. Paul, Timothy and Silas do not want to leave the Christians in ignorance. They are addressed as a family; brothers and sisters. Our affection and love for you compel us to tell you more. We do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep.

What does that mean to fall asleep? Some say it refers to soul sleep. Yet Paul wrote to the Philippians that to live is Christ and to die is gain and that to go to Christ would be a far better thing. Paul does not write that it would be

better to die and sleep a while and suddenly wake up. Christ said to the believing criminal on the cross, "Truly, amen, I tell you this day you will be with me in paradise" (Phil. 1:23; Lk 23:43). The meaning here is not soul sleep as some teach. You see, when Jesus referred to the daughter of Jairus as only sleeping or in the same way of Lazarus, his reference was to the body at rest. That was the Old Testament way of speaking of the dead, who slept, in the tomb, with their fathers. And here, too, when Paul uses such language, he is not using a euphemistic term for death, that is, nice words to make the brutal reality more palatable but is speaking in Christian terminology of the body at rest from its work. The body is dead, asleep. But sleep is not permanent; one wakes up. The body dead will stay dead, but there will be a glorious awakening of the body. Do not be ignorant now! Do not grieve without hope now. Something amazing is going to happen.

Paul, how do we know? Jesus inspired Paul. Paul calls them and us to be comforted and look to Jesus. Jesus' death is not referred to as sleep. He died. He suffered death as the justified and the justifier of many. Interestingly, Paul speaks of the death of Christ but the sleep of those who die in Christ. Christ suffered death so that others might experience the body's death as sleep from which one awakes. There are no euphemisms for his death. There is no couching it. He died there in the awful blackness and terrible loneliness of the cross. He suffered hells deep agony. He died after He was cursed for our sin and forsaken for our iniquity. They nailed him to the tree and watched him and listened to Him die. No, you were not there when they crucified our Lord, but you know it. They knew it too! He died there on the cross. To embarrassed to leave Him on the cross over the Sabbath— heaven forbid they might forsake the Sabbath— they took the dead and laid Him in a tomb. Look at Jesus. He died!

Look to Jesus! He is alive. His body did not stay dead. He gave up His Spirit, and in three days, the Spirit returned to that body, and that body was changed. It was a resurrected and glorified body. Soul and body union and harmony were brought back to the mediator and thus for our mediation. Eternally now, Jesus is man and God, and as man resurrected soul joined to the resurrected body, true God and true man.

See the creed? We believe! We believe that Jesus died. Note the use of the name Jesus there, the saviour, Joshua, Yahweh saves! We believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus all those who have fallen asleep in Him! Paul will not leave us ignorant now, and these words, more than only alleviating our confusion, inspire us to great hope. But we must move on.

The Resurrected Soul: Yes, God will bring with Jesus the resurrected one those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. If we have died with Him so we will be raised with Him. It is a far better thing to go to be with Christ, Paul wrote to the Philippians. Yes, this day, Jesus said to the criminal, you will be with me in paradise. While on this earth, the saints who were alive in Him that is Jesus die in Him and are raised as souls immediately with Him. That is why the dead will come with Jesus, and their bodies will be joined to their souls. Their bodies will rise first to meet their souls coming with Jesus because those souls were resurrected with Jesus. If death is the separation of the soul from the body—more death is the separation of a man from God. In Christ, man is joined to God. As the Spirit comes upon us, we are forever unified with the resurrected one. The body sleeps, but we go to be with Jesus! Death was not the end of everything, nor was death some ghostlike existence in Hades. Death for the Christian is the translation unto a new life. But, there is, as we said, a temporary nature to it. Eternal death, damnation, is undone by Jesus' death and resurrection. Death, that is, body separated from the soul, is undone when Jesus comes again, bringing the resurrected dead with Him.

What a wonder that will be! We read that it will be visible, and it will be audible. He will come with a command. The Word there is used of military command or the command of the farmer to his oxen. The dead bodies of the saints will be reunited with the souls by order of God. Added to that will be the shout of the archangel. Only one archangel is mentioned in Scripture that being Michael. We do not know much about these angels. But when Christ comes, we will hear the command and the shout, and all will know that the Lord is coming.

The trumpet of God will sound. Moses was commanded by the LORD to make two silver trumpets for the gathering of Israel. The trumpet blast was to be sounded before the battle, for the LORD promised that such would ensure that He would bring the victory. Yes, the Lord is coming with the dead with the sound of the trumpet. The dead will be gathered, and the final assault and defeat of Satan and His hosts will be ensured. Yes, the dead and the resurrected alive will meet in the air! Ephesians 2:2 tells us of Satan, the prince of the air! Jesus will win the victory.

Yes, the dead will rise first joined to those souls already with Jesus brought by God at the great and final coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The Resurrection of the Body The dead will rise first. After that, those who are alive will be caught up! It will be astonishing! What will that be like? To see those resurrected bodies soaring to meet Jesus? What will it be like for those who do not know the Lord and were not prepared! What will it be like! Then those who are on the earth will be raised and caught up with Christ on the clouds. The words there caught up to speak about people who run to meet a dignitary: a command, a shout and a trumpet. The King of glory is coming. The King is coming! And He calls and changes His own so that they can meet Him and share that glory. He went up alone, and a cloud covered Him! But now the revelation of the Lord is made known. Christ is King, and every knee will bow, and He is bringing His saints with Him. The dead resurrected first, and those alive changed. We think of those marvellous words to the Corinthians who were outright rejecting the resurrection. Then Paul writes: ***Listen, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will all be changed!*** (I Cor. 15:51-52).

It is so compelling and may be frustrating. We are given enough for comfort, but perhaps our curiosity is not satisfied. What will those bodies be like? What will we able to do? But these questions create in us the desire to know and experience. That is why Paul writes to us. It is the "we" of hope and expectation. He knows that he might die before Christ comes. Look at chapter five. No one knows the day. But he lives in hope- not like the rest of men but in the hope of the great glory that waits of all us who live in Christ and will live with Him forever.

Yes, body to soul and man to God in Christ. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God! Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid! Sing to the Lord, for He has done glorious things. Let this be made know to all the world! We will be with Him forever because we are already with Him. We who die in Him will we not be raised in Him? We who baptized into the death of Christ; how shall we not be raised with Him? The return, the resurrection and the rapture. Amazing love! How can it be! What glorious hope!

That is the point of the text. Paul is not talking about some left behind rapture. He is not saying there will be a rapture before or after a tribulation. At the end of time, when Christ returns, He will take the souls in heaven, unite them with their resurrected bodies, we on the earth will all be changed (I Corinthians 15), and we will live on the new world with God forever.

Yes, comfort one another with these words. Don't be ignorant, be informed. Know the Gospel and know Jesus Christ. Great is the faithfulness of the Father; how precious is the blood of the lamb. How great are His resurrection and the wonderful the glory that awaits us.

Conclusion There is enough there to sustain us when faith must meet emotion. That kind of hope borne of faith in Christ Jesus brings a new emotion: comfort for the future and hope for those who die in the Lord. The body sown perishable will be raised imperishable. That body resting from its work and sin will be awakened, and those who are in Christ, live through Christ and come with Christ will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen!