
Those Who Have Died

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

When is Jesus coming? I don't know. No one knows. But I do know this, He is coming.

Not everyone knows this! Illustrate with Aechompong's response upon hearing, for the first time, of the coming of Jesus again.

The coming of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians:

As evidence of our salvation by the Lord (1:9-10)

⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Because of our service for the Lord (2:19-20)

¹⁷ But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

For our standing before the Lord (3:11-13)

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

In our sorrow over those dying in the Lord (4:13-18)

Our text for our talk.

Well, they had a big question. Since the Lord is coming, then what about those who have died? To us this might seem like a question a Christian would never ask. But imagine if we did not have this text. This paragraph is the clearest teaching on what will actually happen when Christ comes.

What They did not Know**(v.13)**

Let's back up a bit in the text so that we catch why verse 13 is a contrast.

⁹ Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰ for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

The Precepts for our Waiting (v. 9-13)

Brotherly love is mark believers. They had done it well. They had no need of further instruction in it only further progress in it. And while they are waiting and loving one another they are to live the kind of lives that commend Christianity to unbelievers.

The Problem of Ignorance

So, they were well taught about loving one another and living in the world. But, they were not so informed about this topic. We must value being informed Christians about truth. There is no virtue in spiritual ignorance. And there is great danger in it.

The Perplexity of the Saints

For these saints, their ignorance of the details surrounding the return of Christ left them grieving like the world. The unbeliever has no hope beyond eternity. We grieve, upon the passing of Christians, in the glorious hope of seeing them once again.

The Details of His Coming (v.14-17)

¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Basis - The Resurrection of Christ (v.14)

The return of Christ is constantly connected with His resurrection and ascension. The resurrection is the beginning of the eschatological reality of the Kingdom. The force of the sentence is simply this, "You believe that Christ was raised, then there will be a return and resurrection for those who have died in Christ."

Description - The Return of Christ (v.15-17)

When Christ returns:

He will descend from heaven.

Acts 1:9-11 ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Matthew 24:26-27 So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

He will be accompanied by a shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet.

Matthew 24:29-31 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The dead in Christ will be raised first. And those who are alive will be caught up so that together we will meet Christ in the air.

1 Corinthians 15:35-57 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in

glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This reunion with Christ and the church will be eternally unbroken.

Matthew 25:31–34 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

These are the facts of this passage connected with what we have already seen in Jesus' teaching in Matthew. There is a clear consistency across the texts. What a glorious day it will be when Jesus our dear Lord from heaven comes, lifts all, dead and alive alike, out of their mortality and grants them their glorious body. Then the kingdom will be brought to fullness and we will rule and reign with Him forever.

What We Must Do

(v.18)

¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

"*Comfort one another with these words.*" Notice how Paul uses these doctrinal truths. This leads me to the following observations.

Our primary need in emotional distress? Truth. Doctrine is what meets our needs, feeds our souls, renews our minds, builds up our faith, comforts us in sorrow, encourages us in discouragement.

Our responsibility is to use the truth with one another. We are not just there to listen, not just there to "feel with you". We are to be for one another with *truth*.

It is *these words* which encourage us.

Reflect and Respond

Live in the light of truth...

Hope and long for the Lord's coming...

Reflect much on the glory of that day...

Comfort one another with these words of truth...