

## The Return of the King: Lesson 1

### 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

When we come to this passage of scripture the Thessalonians had questions about **believers** who had died before Christ came back. What would happen to them? Some believers in Thessalonica had died and the Greek culture that they lived in taught that once you died there was **no future**, and you would never see your loved ones again. When Christ came back, since they had died, they would not see Christ, be a part of the millennium or eternity with Christ. They were simply out of existence. The apostle Paul in this passage tells them and us about believers who have **passed away** and those who will be **alive** when Christ comes back.

#### Verse 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.*

Paul points out two things we need to remember:

1. Those who fall asleep - the word Paul uses for *death* he uses three times in this passage. Also, this same Greek word is most often used in the New Testament to refer to the **death** of the believer (Matthew 27:52, 28:13; John 11:11-12; Acts 7:60, 13:36; 1 Corinthians 15:6, 15:51). When a person dies, their body goes to **sleep** (it stops working). Your existence does not end. In other words, your physical body goes to sleep (stops functioning) but your spirit **continues** to exist.

Paul then contrasts two groups of people; **believers** and **unbelievers**. Paul is not telling believers not to grieve. What Paul is saying is we who are believers need to remember that for those believers who we have lost, **death** is not the final word. They are with Jesus and we will see them again!

Let's take a second and look at what scripture teaches about believers when they die. The Bible teaches there is no such thing as "soul sleep" which is the false teaching that at **death** the souls of the dead are in a state of unconscious existence. Instead of that false teaching, the Bible states that the believer will be **with** the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23). Paul makes it very clear that when we die we are in Christ's presence. Christ's own words on the cross to the thief who repented (Luke 23:43) show believers go to be with the Lord when they die.

## Verse 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.*

Paul says some very important things in this verse. Let's take it phrase by phrase.

- For if we believe Jesus died - Paul is saying since Jesus died on the cross and we believe He did, these are the consequences; His death **satisfied** God's righteousness and justice by paying the full penalty for believers' sin (2 Peter 2:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
- and rose again - Christ's resurrection shows that God the Father **accepted** His sacrifice. Christ's resurrection proves that He conquered death and sin.
- even so - Paul, with these words, links our resurrection with Christ's (John 14:19). Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection then us (1 Corinthians 1:15:23, 6:14; 2 Corinthians 4:14).
- God will bring with Him - Paul is telling us two things. First, (and we have already talked about this), Paul tells us that the spirit of a believer is **with** Christ and **will** come with Him. Second, at the rapture, God will bring all believers alive and those who have died **back** to heaven.

## 2. Believers' hopes are anchored in God's promises

## Verse 15

*For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, Or by the word of the Lord that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.*

Paul first makes it clear that what he is saying is from the Lord and is for the **church**. In this verse, there is a keyword we need to see and the people back in that time would say WOW!

Coming - The word in Greek is *parousia* - A term that was used to describe the coming of a **deity** or an **official** visit of a king or queen to a city. For example, if the Caesar of the day would visit a town, the people would say we are in the presence of the emperor.

Paul is not telling us **when** this event will occur. He is telling us one day we will be in His presence and in fact, those believers who have fallen asleep are already there, their faith has become sight.

It would appear that the Thessalonians thought that only the living would be **involved** to meet the Lord in His royal and triumphal parousia. So Paul makes it very clear that the dead in Christ will not be **excluded** from the celebration.

All believers will be in His presence.

## Verse 16-17

*For the Lord himself will descend 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.*

Back in the day, the parousia - as we have seen was the arrival of a deity or the official visit of a king or sovereign to a city. This visit was a great event with great **celebration**. The apostle Paul now tells the Thessalonians and us about the parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ and the order of the event.

- **The Lord Himself** - He will not send the angels to do this. He comes Himself to get us.
- **Cry of command** - The command probably comes from the Lord. It has a **military** ring to it like a commander calling his troops to fall in. This command is our Lord ordering the dead in Christ to rise.
- **The voice of the Archangel** - In the Bible, only one Archangel is mentioned by name and that is **Michael** (Jude 9). We do not know if there are more archangels. Anyway, this archangel will lend his voice to the parousia of the Lord.
- **The trumpet of God** - Back in the day, the trumpet was not primarily a musical instrument. More it was used in **military events**, funerals, and some religious events. In the Old Testament, the trumpet was used to **gather** God's people and this seems to be what it is referring to - the gathering of God's people.
- **And the dead in Christ will rise first** - Christ brings back those believers who have died and their spirit and body are **reunited**. Paul is telling them and us that those who have gone before us are not forgotten nor are second-class Christians. No, they are the **first** to have glorified bodies. This will only be for those who are believers.
- **Caught up** - This word is used in other places and refers to taking someone by **force** or **violence** (Matthew 13:19; John 6:15; John 10:12), or this word is used to catch someone away to a celestial place (2 Corinthians 12:2, 4; Revelation 12:5). Also, when this word is used, only some people are caught away.
  - The Thessalonians would understand what Paul was telling them. **Believers** and only believers would be taken.
- **The clouds** - are not referring to atmospheric clouds. Clouds in scripture are associated with God's **appearances** (Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 24:30; Luke 21:27; Revelation 1:7, 14:14-16). The clouds refer to God's glory. Believers will meet in God's glory and it will be a great **reunion**. Then we will all be with the Lord.

Believers will be with their Lord.

## Verse 18

*Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

We are to comfort each other with this great truth that death does not have the **final word** for a believer. In fact, it is the start of a great journey with our Lord.