

For the Christian, every day is a Saturday. We live our lives between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Philip Yancey, in his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, explains: "Good Friday and Easter Sunday have earned names on the calendar. Yet in a real sense, we live on Saturday, the day with no name. What the disciples experienced in small scale—three days in grief over one man who had died on a cross—we now live through on a cosmic scale. Human history grinds on between the time of promise and fulfillment...It's Saturday on planet Earth. Will Sunday ever come?"

Sunday is that "someday" when Jesus returns just as He promised. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again** and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Jn. 14:2-3. If the prophets could be trusted to foretell His first advent, how much more can we trust Jesus to foretell His second advent?

A promise is a powerful thing. A promise enables us to reach out into an uncertain future and lay hold of something certain. 1 Thes. 4:13-18 provides us with some promises we can hold onto as we live out our lives between Good Friday and Easter. I have used this passage more than any other at funerals and memorial services. I want to encourage you to own this passage in case you are ever asked to address a group of grieving friends or relatives. Just remember the 5 "Rs".

**The promise of rest** – Paul refers to those who are "asleep" in vv. 13, 14, and 15. He's not afraid of the word "dead" or "death." In v. 16 he refers to "the dead in Christ." But in this context, he uses sleep because sleep implies rest. Those who fall asleep in Jesus find rest for our souls.

We all get tired, tired of working, tired of trying, tired of failing, tired of being powerless, tired of being tired. Not just physically tired but emotionally and spiritually. But God is a bigger savior than we are sinners. "God's capacity to forgive is greater than our capacity to sin; while our sin reaches far, God's grace reaches farther." Tullian Tchividjian. Jesus promised a permanent rest. No more pain, no more tears, no more clocks, no more fears. Some day we will be home. Veta - next to Jn. 14, she wrote in the margin, "Home Sweet Home."

There is a second promise in v. 14...**the promise of resurrection**. Paul's motivation for these instructions is stated in v. 13, "we do not want you to be uninformed." One of the greatest mysteries known to man is what happens after a person dies. How could we possibly know? I mean, no one has ever died and come back to tell about it have they? Well actually, someone has. The resurrection of Jesus proves that death can be defeated and we can live forever. Our future hope is anchored to a past event. If Christ is not risen then our faith is in vain and we have no hope. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." John 11:25-26. When a friend or loved one dies, we grieve "but not as those who have no hope."

Notice in your worship guide I have put in parentheses a third promise, "**the promise of reward**." It is not in this passage but elsewhere Paul says, "we must all appear before the bema, the judgment seat of Christ." There we will receive our reward.

**The promise of return...vv. 15-16**. We don't know when He will return. In 1 Pe. 4:7, Peter says, "the end is near." He says that no because Jesus would come in his lifetime but because the next event on God's prophetic calendar is for the church to be gathered to Christ.

The second coming of Christ could come at any time. Paul makes that clear in the next chapter, "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." (5:2).

This "blessed hope" of His return has burned brightly in the hearts of believers in every generation. It is both a promise and a warning. In His parables, Jesus used the picture of a landowner who goes on a journey leaving his most valuable possessions in the hands of his servants. Then the owner returns without notice and the servants give an account for how they used their time and resources. Those who invested wisely were rewarded. Those who ignored the return of the Master had hell to pay.

We need more "parousiastic" Christians. "Parousia" is the word translated "coming." There is a big difference in being an enthusiastic Christian and a parousiastic one. Enthusiastic Christians are satisfied with salvation. Parousiastic Christians know they are saved to serve and some day will give an accounting to the Master when He returns.

Parousiastic Christians share Paul's perspective. At the end of his life said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." 2 Tim. 4:7-8. The parousia is not merely a source of comfort or reassurance in the face of death; it is to have a transforming effect on the way we live—our values, priorities and pursuits. That's why he closes this passage with, "Therefore, encourage one another with these words." The word can be translated "comfort" or "exhort." These words are both a comforting reminder and a call to arms, a pat on the back and a kick in the pants.

**The promise of reunion** (17) – This verse describes what we refer to as "the rapture." The word "rapture" is not used in the Bible. It is a Latin word used to translate the idea of being snatched away (harpazo in Gr.). We will be transported into the presence of the Lord along with all the other departed saints "in the clouds." Clouds are a regular feature of the revelation of God's divine glory. "And so (or "thus") we shall always be with the Lord." What does "thus" refer to? It is an adverb that connects two things; being in the presence of the Lord forever and being with "them" forever. Who are they? Those who have died in Christ. The day is coming when we will all be gathered together in the place Jesus said he would prepare for us. What a day that will be. Do you think about it? Do you long for it? Maybe the most important question of all, "Does it change the way you live?"

In Richard Adams' book, *Watership Down*, he describes a group of wild rabbits having a conversation with some of their members who are getting fatter and fatter. The wild rabbits forage for their food taking great risks to eat from the farmers gardens. But the fat rabbits hardly ever go out and yet they are putting on weight. When they are asked about this they explain that all they have to do is go outside their warren and there is a pan with tasty pellets on it. The wild rabbits instinctively sense danger. This doesn't feel right to them. In fact, one by one the big fat rabbits begin to disappear. The leader of the rabbits warns the big fat fluffy rabbit that there is danger in the neighborhood and to be careful. The big, fat rabbit then issues this classic line that could describe the mindset of many American Christians, "We don't think about it. We just eat pellets."