

I Thessalonians

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1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

- As we have said, after Paul met Jesus on the Damascus Road, he lived his life in an “eschatological state of emergency”, meaning that he woke up every morning believing that it may very well be the last day, THE DAY, the day of Christ’s return. He evidently made this a cornerstone of his preaching and teaching. As he was starting the Thessalonian church this was clearly the case, but he wasn’t able to finish his teaching, so there were a lot of questions left hanging.
- Some of the questions regarding the Second Coming seemed to along the lines of: Do I need to quit my job? Do I need to sell my house? And what about those who have already died? What happens to those who die before Christ returns? Are they truly saved? In this section Paul seeks to answer such questions.
- This passage is read at Christian funerals nearly as much as the 23rd Psalm and John 14:1-6. The reason is that here the Word plainly says that we are not to “grieve as do the rest who have no hope.” Hope is one of the three key trademarks of the Christian. “Faith, Hope, and Love, these three...” says 1 Corinthians 13:13. As followers of Jesus Christ we are to have hope in every circumstance, even as we walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, for Christ has overcome sin and death.
- For the Greek pagans in Paul’s time and most of the people of our time, death is a time of grim despair and nihilistic resignation. From the great Greek poet Aeschylus to the Roman writer Catullus, so much was written of the bleak hopelessness of death. I think this is why there is a growing trend in our own culture of doing away with funeral services altogether. As our culture grows more and more secular/neo-pagan, the question that is asked is “what’s the point?”. If you believe there is nothing after one dies, no soul or spirit that lives on, then what is there to celebrate? Why stir up memories that only turns up the volume on the grief? “Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio. A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy...Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? You flashes of merriment that were wont to set the tables on a roar? Not one now...”

- Paul here gives us one of the true cornerstones of the Christian faith. Even if someone has died, if they lived their life in Christ then they are still in Christ, even in death, and they are neither forgotten nor forsaken by Christ, for they will certainly rise with and live with Christ. This truth gives us all we need to know about our relationship with Christ. It is a relationship that transcends time, that transcends every circumstance, even death itself. Nothing can break our relationship with Christ, because nothing can ever snatch us out of His hand. Because Christ lived, and died, and rose again, so too shall we who are in relationship with Him live, die, and rise again.
- Romans 8:38-39 – “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.”
- Finally, Paul attempts to paint a picture to describe the indescribable, the return of Jesus Christ to the world. At The Second Coming, Christ will descend from Heaven to earth. At His command there will be a shout from the archangel and the blast of a trumpet and this will awaken the dead. Then the dead who are in Christ will rise first and be alive again and as they are rising, those who alive in Christ will join them, rising with them into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Just as hundreds saw Christ ascend, so too now will they ascend along with the multitudes who have come to be in Christ down through the generations. And we all shall forever be with Lord.
- We are to take comfort in this and because we live out Christ’s command to love one another, we are to comfort one another with this truth: Whether in life or in death, the relational bond we have with Christ can never be broken. We are His in life or death and in the end we will live with Him forever. With a Christian funeral it is never goodbye, just seen you soon.