

1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians

## "The Comfort of His Coming Part 2"

(1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:13-18)

**The Text:** <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words. (ESV)

**Revelation: We have God's Truth (4:13, 15a):** A great unknown that has puzzled mankind forever is the afterlife. What is beyond death? Many men have tried to determine what life would be like beyond the grave and can only speculate. For the Thessalonians Paul solved the problem by stating two things: (1) I don't want you to be uninformed and (2) my revelation comes from the Lord. Paul received special revelation from the Lord regarding the resurrection and the return of Christ (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:51-54). How he received this we are not told, but in Galatians Paul speaks of a period of time, a few years, after his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, where in Arabia, he sought and received revelation from the Lord. He could have received it then, or at some other time. What Paul taught agreed with what Jesus taught (John 5:24-29; 11:21-27). God's revelation to Paul is based on the historical fact of Christ's resurrection. Since our Savior has conquered death, we need not fear death or the future (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5:12ff). *The authority of God's word gives us the assurance and comfort we need.*

**Return: Christ is Coming Again (4:14-15):** The return of Christ has been emphasized up to this point in the letter. In 1<sup>st</sup> Thess 1:9-10 he related the Lord's return to Salvation. In 1<sup>st</sup> Thess 2:19-20 he related the Lord's return to Service. In 1<sup>st</sup> Thess 3:11-13 he related the Lord's return to Stability. Now, in 1<sup>st</sup> Thess 4:13-18 he relates the Lord's return to Sorrow. Paul establishes that Jesus died (v14). It is because Jesus died that we need not fear death. Then he refers to believers who have died as being "asleep (v13, 14 &15)." Paul did not say that the soul went to sleep at death. It is not the soul that sleeps but the body. Rather, Paul made it clear that the soul of the believer went to be with the Lord (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:8). Jesus cannot bring them with him when he returns unless they are with him now. Some particulars about the Return of Christ: We know NOT when the Lord's return will be, but we see that Paul expected to be alive at his return (i.e., "we who are alive," in v15 & v17). This is referred to as the imminent return of Christ. It could happen at any time. It will occur in the twinkling of an eye (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:52). Jesus will return in the air which is where we will meet him (v17).

**Resurrection: The Christian Dead Will Rise (4:15-16):** What does the Bible say about Resurrection? Paul preached the resurrection to the Athenians and they mocked him (Acts 17:32). Jesus taught the resurrection (Matthew 22:23-33). The Old Testament taught the resurrection (Job 14:13-15, 19:23-27, Psalm 16:9-11, Daniel 12:2). The fact that Jesus rose from the dead proves that there is a resurrection. Resurrection is NOT reconstruction. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:35ff, Paul likened the resurrection of the human body to a full-grown plant as compared to its seed. The dead body is the seed that is planted in the ground. The full-grown plant is the resurrected body. New Testament Scripture teaches that there are two resurrections (John 5:28-29, Revelation 20:1-6). When Jesus returns in the air (v17) that is part of the first. The first resurrection is for believers. The second resurrection is for unbelievers. The Doctrine of Resurrection assures us that death is NOT the end. The grave is not the end. The body goes to sleep but the soul goes to be with the Lord. When the Lord returns, he will bring the souls of believers who have died with him. He will raise the body in glory. He will unite the glorified body and the spirit into one being to share his glory forever.

**Rapture: Living Believers Caught Up (4:17):** The term "Rapture" means "to be caught up." The Greek word is "arpazw" (harpazo) and it means to "be caught up" or "to snatch away." In Acts 8:39 it is used to describe Phillip being carried away after baptizing the Ethiopian Eunuch. In John 6:15, after feeding the 5K, Jesus perceived that they were going to take him by force (i.e., to seize by force) and make him King. Paul used it in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:1-4 to describe himself being moved to a new place when he was caught up into heaven. It is used in Acts 23:10 when Paul needed to be rescued by Soldiers when he was before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem suggesting that the church will be taken before the time of the Great Tribulation.

**Three terms: (1) resurrection, (2) transformation, (3) translation:** A resurrection is the reuniting of a person's immaterial (i.e., soul/spirit) and material parts which were separated at death. Those believers that have died will undergo a resurrection at the rapture (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:14-16). A transformation describes the parallel experience of living believers at the time of the rapture (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:17a). It simply indicates that a 'change' has taken place. Walvoord describes it this way, "After a long discussion on the subject of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul declared in verses 51-53 the grand exception to the normal sequence of death and resurrection. *"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."* Living Christians will experience an immediate transformation from their present bodies to a body suited for heaven." Finally, biblical translation refers to the movement of an individual from one state or condition to another. This word describes the experience of both the resurrected (i.e., dead) and the transformed (i.e., living) saints at the time of the Rapture. Jesus will take his church to be where he is (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 17b).

**Reunion: Christians Forever with the Lord (4:17-18):** At the Rapture, those who are alive will meet the Lord in the air, we shall see him as he is and become like him (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:1-2). We will have glorified bodies. Jesus had prayed that we might one day see his glory and share in it (John 17:22-24). We not only will meet their Lord Jesus, but we will be reunited with our believing friends and loved ones who have died. We will be "Together with them" when we meet Jesus, never to be separated again. No wonder Paul tells us to encourage one another with these words.

**Calvary Bible Church and the Thessalonian Letters:** The Constitution of CBC refers to 1<sup>st</sup> Thess 4:13-18 in support of its Statement of Doctrinal Beliefs as recorded in Article III, Statement of Doctrinal Beliefs N, The Second Advent of Christ, and O.2, The Eternal State.

**Next Week:** "Don't Walk in Your Sleep (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:1-11)"