

STUDY NUMBER NINE - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Are You Afraid of Death?

Key Verse 4:13: "Now we are not wishing you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are falling asleep, in order that you may not be mourning, even as also the rest who are having no hope."

TEXT:

v.13 Now we are not wishing you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are falling asleep, in order that you may not be mourning, even as also the rest who are having no hope.

v.14 For since we are believing that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.

v.15 For this we are saying to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are living, we who are left behind for the coming of the Lord, we shall by no means precede those who fell asleep.

v.16 Because the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the call of the trumpet sounded by God's command; and the dead in Christ shall be raised first.

v.17 Then we who are living, who are left behind, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

v.18 So keep on encouraging one another with these words.

INTRODUCTION:

(The Christian Salt & Light Company by Haddon W. Robinson)

As one old country man said, "If I knew where I was to die, I'd stay away from the place."
p. 111

(We Live Too Short and Die Too Long by Walter M. Bortz, II)

Mark Twain, in Letters from the Earth, wrote, "Man seems to be a rickety poor sort of a thing. He is always undergoing repairs. A machine that was as unreliable as he would have no market."
p. 3

I've even seen a coffee mug which reads:

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
Freeze me.

p. 34

Woody Allen said, "Death is nature's way of telling you to slow down."
p. 42

Dying is not popular. It has never caught on.
That's understandable; its bad for the complexion.
It also upsets your daily routine and leaves
you with too much time on your hands.

George Burns

When we are familiar with death
we accept each week, each day, as a gift.
Only if we are able thus to accept life--
bit by bit--does it become precious.

Albert Schweitzer

p. 241

I want to die in full stride, hopefully pursuing rather than being pursued. The American Indian found it dishonorable to die in bed, and we must not forget that death was Patrick

Henry's second choice.
p. 242

We have no comfort zone with death. Our alienation from our own terminus pretends that our death is somebody else's job to preside over--like Woody Allen's fabulous quote, "I am not afraid of dying--I just don't want to be there when it happens." p. 245

(Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life
by Barbara Johnson)

Perhaps you have heard of the funeral director who signed all his letters, "Eventually yours."
p. 113

(Think Big: Unleashing Your Potential for Excellence
by Ben Carson, M.D. with Cecil Murphey)

Life is ever a series of partings.*

*Great Expectations, Charles Dickens
p. 93

Isn't it strange
That princes and kings,
And clowns that caper
In sawdust rings,
And common people
Like you and me
Are builders for eternity?

Each is given a bag of tools,
A shapeless mass,
A book of rules;
And each must make--
Ere life is flown--
A stumbling block
Or a steppingstone.

--R. L. Sharpe

p. 95

A NEW LOCATION

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

--Philippians 1:21

A bank in Binghamton, New York, had some flowers sent to a competitor who had recently moved into a new building. There was a mixup at the flower shop, and the card sent with the arrangement read, "With our deepest sympathy."

The florist, who was greatly embarrassed, apologized. But he was even more embarrassed when he realized that the card intended for the bank was attached to a floral arrangement sent to a funeral home in honor of a deceased person. That card read, "Congratulations on your new location!"

A sentiment like that is appropriate for Christians, because they move to a wonderful new location when they die. They go to be with Christ, and the sorrows and heartaches of this earthly existence are past forever. Near the end of his life, Paul said that to be with Christ is "far better" than to remain on earth (Phil. 1:23).

What comfort this brings to those who are left behind! Yes, separation is painful, but as Christians we do not grieve as those who have no hope. Rather, we can rejoice, even with tear-filled eyes, because our loved ones have taken up a new residence in heaven.

To every believer who dies, therefore, it would be appropriate to say, "Congratulations on your new location!"

--R.W.D.

Someday my earthly house will fall--
I cannot tell how soon 'twill be;
But this I know--my All in All
Has now a place in heaven for me.

--Crosby

DON'T DRIVE YOUR STAKES TOO DEEP--
WE'RE MOVING IN THE MORNING.

(From Our Daily Bread, May 25)

(A Pretty Good Person: What It Takes to Live with Courage, Gratitude and Integrity by Lewis B. Smedes)

I wish, however, to narrow the question to our own private fears of our own private dying. Why are we afraid? Why does it take courage even to think about our death? Three reasons come to mind.

We fear death because we lose so much by dying. We lose the people we love, our wives and husbands, our children, our friends. We lose our work, our games, our art, all the things we do that gave us gladness. We cannot take them with us into the dark, dark night.

We fear death because somewhere beyond the dark night of dying there is a divine light that may expose us for what we really are; and we fear that Someone may see that we are not as good as we pretend to be.

We fear death because it is a dark door into a darker unknown. Or a vast bottom under a vast abyss. We may have a strong faith that it is good to go and be with the Lord in that unexplored place. But even faith does not remove the fearsome darkness of the passage.
p. 37

A GREAT AND GRAND REUNION

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up
together with them. 1 Thessalonians 4:17

Evangelist D. L. Moody loved to tell about the brave fishermen who ventured far out upon the Adriatic Sea. Toward evening their wives would go down to the seashore to await the joyous reunion with their husbands. Standing there, they would sing the first verse of a beautiful hymn; then they'd stop to listen till they'd hear the second verse, carried by the wind across the waves, sung by those courageous men. With wishful thinking and on a sentimental note, Moody would continue, "Perhaps if we'd listen, we too might hear--in this storm-tossed world of ours--some sound, some whisper borne from loved ones afar." Of course, Moody knew that Christians who die are "present with the Lord"

(2 Cor. 5:8). Yet, as he contemplated being united with them someday, he said he could almost hear the echo of their voices "breaking in music upon the sands of time."

Most of us have dear ones in Glory. And, I like to think that even as we long to see them, they are eagerly awaiting that day when we'll all be together again. No doubt Fanny Crosby had this in mind when she wrote: "O the friends that now are waiting/ In the cloudless realms of day,/ Who are calling me to follow/ Where their steps have led the way;/ I shall see them, I shall know them,/ I shall hear their song of love,/ And we'll all sing hallelujah/ In our Father's house above."

As we think of our loved ones on that Heavenly Shore, let's rejoice! One of these days, whether we pass through death's valley or meet them in the air, we're going to have **a great and grand reunion.** --R.W.D.

O how sweet 'twill be to meet them--
All the ransomed host above;
Sweeter still to see the Savior,
Praise Him for redeeming love.

--Peterson

THOT: Death cannot sever what the cross unites.--Bosch

(From Our Daily Bread, Jan 8)

When you were born, you cried
and the world rejoiced. Live your
life in such a manner that when
you die, the world will cry and
you will rejoice.

Old Indian Saying

John 14:1-3

Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 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. And 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.

Mrs. Esther Hooey tells us:

It is a mistake to look on death as a dread summons. Instead we should look on it as a door or gate through which we enter into the beautiful home that has been prepared for us by our loving Savior, who does not leave us to go through the portal alone but who comes Himself for us.

Visiting a bereaved widow, she said, "You know, I was away when my husband took the attack of heart trouble. I just got home about an hour before he died. He was only able to say, "I am called home." Only able to utter four words, but those words left unspeakable comfort with his wife and children. Death to the Christian is simply going home to be forever with the One who died for him.

A doctor friend of mine said:

Death is the anesthetic God uses while He is changing bodies.

My hair is white and I'm almost blind
 The days of my youth are far behind.
 My neck's so stiff, I can't turn my head,
 Can't hear one half of what's being said.
 My legs are wobbly, can't hardly walk.
 But glory be, I can surely talk.

And this is the message I want you to get,
 I'm still a kickin' and I ain't dead yet.
 I've corns on my feet and ingrown nails
 And do they hurt, here language fails.
 To tell you my troubles would take too long.
 If I tried, you surely would give me the gong.

I go to church and Sunday school, too,
 For I love the story that is ever new.
 And when I reach the end of my row,
 I know to my heavenly home I'll go.
 Then when I leave my house of clay,
 If you listen closely, I'm apt to say,
 "Well, folks, I've left you, but don't forget,
 I've just passed on, but I ain't dead yet."

Walvoord points out:

The 4th chapter of 1 Thessalonians contains one of the outstanding prophetic or escatological passages of the New Testament. In this epistle there is constant reference to future things, each chapter closing with some allusion to prophecy. It was typical of the early church to have daily expectation that Christ would return. None of the apostles or early Christians, however, realized that the church age in which we find ourselves would be extended 2,000 years. They, of course, did not set any date for the return of the Lord, but they were looking for Christ's coming in their lifetime, and this expectation continued in the early church fathers.

William Barclay makes quite a shocking observation when he approaches this particular passage. He says:

We are not meant to take with crude and insensitive literalism that which is a seer's vision. It is not the details which are important. What is important is that in life and in death the Christian is in Christ and that is a union which nothing can break.

J. Vernon McGee says:

We come now to the next section of this epistle, a section which has been labeled one of the most important prophetic passages in the scriptures. It teaches the eminent and impending coming of Christ for His church.

v.13 Now we are not wishing you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are falling asleep, in order that you may not be mourning, even as also the rest who are having no hope.

You can tell that Paul is taking up a new subject again by the use of the word "NOW."

He also says:

"WE ARE NOT WISHING YOU TO BE IGNORANT, BRETHREN."

In many other areas of instruction he has pointed out the fact that they have either been "taught by God" or that they were instructed by the apostles when the apostles were with them. On this particular subject, however, there is a need for instruction.

Evidently, some of the believers who came to know Christ during Paul's ministry there had died, and there was concern among the rest as to what happened to those who died in Christ.

There is no guilt over the fact that they are ignorant at this point. They are new Christians and this is just an area in which the apostle needs to give them instruction.

"WE ARE NOT WISHING YOU TO BE IGNORANT, BRETHREN, CONCERNING THOSE WHO ARE FALLING ASLEEP."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The figure of sleep for death is common in the New Testament. It is not the sleep of the soul but the sleep of the body. The body is placed in the earth until resurrection.

John 11:11

This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, that I may awaken him out of sleep."

2 Corinthians 5:8

we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

Philippians 1:23

But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;

1 Thessalonians 5:10

who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.

So it is the sleep of the body in the earth until the resurrection.

Walvoord observes:

Sleep is a softened expression for death, which for a Christian is very much like sleep. We understand from scripture that it refers to bodies which are laid in the grave. As far as our souls and spirits are concerned we go immediately into the presence of God, into the conscious enjoyment of heaven, "for to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." We believe in the sleep of the body but we do not believe in the sleep of the soul. Those whose bodies are sleeping in the grave according to this scripture will be resurrected when Christ comes back.

Stedman observes:

Twice in this passage Paul uses a term for death that likens it to "sleep." God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep (v.14). That term, by the way, is never used in the New Testament of anyone but believers. It never says of a non-believer's death that he fell asleep. Jesus declared of Jarius' daughter who had died, "She is not dead but asleep" (Matt. 9:24). What a wonderful lesson! Death for the believer according to the scriptures is nothing more than sleep and when your loved ones fall asleep at night you do not run to the phone and dial 911 for emergency service. You know that they are quietly resting, that they will awaken again and that you will have contact with them soon. It is an encouraging word for those who are facing the death of someone dear.

Ryrie points out:

The object of the metaphor is to suggest that as the sleeper does not cease to exist while his body sleeps, so the dead person continues to exist despite his absence from the region in which those who remain can communicate with him; and that, as sleep is known to be temporary, so the death of the body will be found to be. Sleep has its waking, death will have its resurrection.

Barnhouse says:

The word asleep here does not apply to souls, only to bodies. There is no such thing as soul-sleep. It is the body that sleeps in death. Paul added that, "You sorrow not even as others who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus, God will bring with Him."

Hendricksen points out:

Ignorance concerning spiritual realities is always bad for the believer. It leads to lack of comfort. That was particularly true in this case.

(After the Storm by Col. E. H. Jim Ammerman (Ret.) & Rev. Charlene Ammerman with Andrew Collins)

So, was Paul concerned about his death? No! He was actually more concerned about his life, and that is a great lesson for every Christian.
p. 85

THE SLEEP OF DEATH

A Christian young boy named Kenneth was near death. Realizing the seriousness of his condition, he asked, "Mother, does it hurt to die?" With tears in her eyes and praying for the right answer, the wise woman replied, "Kenny, when you were a very little fellow, you often went to sleep on Daddy's bed. But in the morning you always found yourself in your own. Before we retired, your father would come and take you in his strong arms and carry you to your room where you belonged. Death is much like that for those who know Jesus. You go to 'sleep' here, and the Savior who loves you and died for you comes and takes you to your home in Heaven. You will find it a glorious place, Kenny, one especially prepared for you." (See John 14:1-3.) Her answer satisfied the boy, and a few days later without a struggle he went quietly "to sleep" here.

(From InfoSearch 2.21)

"HE'S ALL RIGHT!"

. . . sorrow not, even as others who have no hope.

1 Thessalonians 4:13

One Sunday morning Floyd Peterson, a deeply respected missionary friend, was missing from the breakfast table at the Michigan Christian Home where he lived. As is customary, a nurse went to Floyd's room to see if he was all right. Well, he was "all right." Sometime during the night, he had slept away into the presence of the Lord whom he loved and served so faithfully.

I'm sure that if we could ask Floyd, he would agree that right now he is happier than he's ever been. He is reunited with his beloved wife, who preceded him in death. And I believe a host of people he had led to Christ during his years of dedicated missionary service, and who have gone before, were waiting at heaven's gate to welcome him Home. Best of all, he is with his Savior. Yes, when the nurse found Floyd's lifeless body in bed that morning, she correctly reported that he was "all right." In his case, as with all believers when they die, "absent from the body" meant "present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

When a loved one is taken from us in death, we feel the deep pain of separation because that person is no longer with us. The sense of loss is real and severe; a vacancy cries to be filled. But the assurance that those who die in Christ are in the Lord's presence makes the sorrow bearable. In fact, it would be selfish on our part to wish them back to this world of sin.

What was said of Brother Floyd can be said of every child of God who has died.
They are "all right"! --R.W.D.

He's absent from the body
But present with the Lord,
Beholding his Redeemer,
The Christ whom he adored--Dugan

Death guarantees the sinner's penalty
and the saint's promotion.

(From Our Daily Bread, February 28)

2 Corinthians 5:1-8

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord--for we walk by faith, not by sight--we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

"NOW WE ARE NOT WISHING YOU TO BE IGNORANT, BRETHREN, CONCERNING THOSE WHO ARE FALLING ASLEEP, IN ORDER THAT YOU MAY NOT BE MOURNING, EVEN AS ALSO THE REST WHO ARE HAVING NO HOPE."

Paul's purpose in giving this instruction is in order that:

They would "NOT BE MOURNING, EVEN AS ALSO THE REST WHO ARE HAVING NO HOPE."

The unbelieving element in the world certainly had no hope beyond the grave, but one of the distinctives of the Christian faith is that there is a blessed hope.

We have a living Christ who has promised to come again and receive us unto Himself: "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

There is no hope of resurrection to glory with Christ on the part of those who have never received Christ as Savior.

Horne observes:

The pagan world meant death with grim resignation and bleak hopelessness. Aeschylus wrote, "Once a man dies there is no resurrection. Theocritus wrote, "There is hope for those who are alive but those who have died are without hope." On tombstones there were inscribed such grim epitaphs as: "I was not, I became, I am not, I care not."

Barclay points out:

In this passage he tells them that they must not sorrow as those who have no hope. In face of death the pagan world stood in despair. They met it with grim resignation but with bleak hopelessness. Aeschylus wrote, "Once a man dies there is no resurrection. Theocritus wrote, "There is hope for those who are alive but those who have died are without hope." Catullus wrote, "When once our brief light sets, there is one perpetual night through which we must sleep."

J. Vernon McGee says:

In Thessalonica they have found an inscription that says, "After death, no reviving; after the grave, no meeting again."

JOY IN OUR SORROW

[Do not] sorrow as others who have no hope.

1 Thessalonians 4:13

Those who have died in the Lord are far better off in the joy of Christ's presence than if they had remained on earth (Phil. 1:23). Although we grieve over our loss, we must not focus our attention on the grave. We must lift our eyes heavenward, where our loved ones are enjoying unending delights and are no longer troubled by this sinful world. The homecoming of His saints is precious to the Lord, and we should not selfishly want to keep them from His company. Let's rejoice that the Savior has taken them safely to glory and that He will return to reunite us with them in heaven's eternal day.

Once when I was thinking of the time when I would depart this life and go to be with Christ, I wrote a poem entitled, "I've Climbed the Golden Stair." "When I have heard the heavenly choir/ And left this temporal shore,/ I'll thrill with rapture here unknown/ As Jesus I adore./ Old friends I've known long years ago/ Will bid me welcome Home;/ Delighted in that bliss I'll rest,/ This earth no more to roam./ What joy will be my portion then,/ All free from sin and pain!/ With death forever past for me,/ Don't wish me back again./ When you see this old shell of mine,/ Don't think that I am there;/ I've traveled on to live with God--/ I've climbed the golden stair!"

Bereaved Christian, think of the happiness your loved one is experiencing right now with Jesus. Our tears are a God-given outlet for sorrow, but even in our grief we can rejoice for those who are with Jesus.

--H.G.B.

When I have gone, remember I'm with Jesus;
Then do not grieve because I've gone away;
Life holds so many trials and disappointments,
And will you weep because I did not stay?

--Ryberg

Death for the Christian is not bane but blessing,
not tragedy but triumph.

(From Our Daily Bread, July 6)

This verse is the KEY VERSE in our study on:

Are You Afraid of Death?

LIFE is like a bus ride and DEATH is just the next stop.

We are going to learn in these verses before us that the Christian should not fear or face death in the same way as those who do not know Christ because of the promises of the Lord.

The teaching of these verses help "to supply that which is lacking in our faith" if we do have a problem in this area.

John 11:25, 26

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Luke 23:42, 43

And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"

And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

When we see that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and is Conqueror over death, and we are identified with Him, then death should not have its fears like it would over a person who does not know Him.

v.14 For since we are believing that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

We should not grieve for 2 REASONS:

1. We have a revelation from God
2. We have a glorious future with Christ

STORY

A journalist always covers the following facts in a story: who, what, when, where, why, how? If your story on resurrection day were to be written: WHO would know Jesus because of your changed life as a result of the resurrection? WHAT will you be thinking or doing on resurrection day? WHEN will you accept the power and change in your life that the resurrection offers? WHERE will you be on resurrection day? WHY will you worship on that day? HOW will your life be changed by the resurrection?

"Story" by Roger C. Palms. Decision, Mar 1989. Page 22.

(From InfoSearch 2.21)

"I'LL SEE YOU OVER THERE!"

God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:14

Think of it! Every father, mother, son, daughter, relative, and friend who has died in the Lord will be with Jesus when He returns to gather His own to Himself. In verse 17 of 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul declared that "we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them." The two little words "with them" suggest a joyous coming together of all believers.

This hope burned brightly in my mother's heart as her life drew to a close. On the day before she died in 1976, my brother and I were called to her bedside. Although very weary, she quoted some favorite Bible verses and spoke of "going Home." After we had been with her for several hours, she urged us not to stay through the night but to go home and get some rest. As I was about to leave, she said, "If I don't see you tomorrow, I'll see you over There!" The next day she slipped quietly into the presence of her Savior just a few minutes before I arrived at her bedside. Her last words to me will be precious as long as I live.

What a joy to know that Christians do not say a final goodbye! While death breaks our earthly ties, we have the sure hope that those who die as believers are living in the presence of Jesus and will return with Him in glory.

Does your heart ache because death has taken a believing loved one from you? Think of the glorious reunion that awaits you. We will not see our dear ones again in this life, but we will see them over There! --D.J.D.

Oh, what a meeting, there in the skies,
No tears nor crying shall dim our eyes;
Loved ones united eternally,
Oh, what a daybreak that morn will be!

--Blackmore

Separation is the law of earth--
reunion is the law of heaven.

(From Our Daily Bread, July 31)

Paul bases his argument in this 14th verse on the resurrection of Christ.

Because He lives, we too shall live.

Wilbur M. Smith, in his little booklet Have You Considered Him, points out:

Many of the greatest thinkers of modern times have gladly confessed their faith in the resurrection of Christ. If you who are reading this happen to be a lawyer, you will of course know that one of the greatest works on evidence in this country for nearly 100 years was a treatise on the law of evidence, first appearing in 1844 by Samuel Greenley. This master of the important subject of evidence, trained in weighing facts, while still a professor at Harvard wrote a volume entitled An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists. As a true believer, he says of the apostles, "It was impossible that they could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated had not Jesus actually risen from the dead and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew the other fact."

1 Corinthians 15:20-22

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.

The fact is, Christ actually rose from the dead and has become the first of millions, now dead, who will come back to life again someday. Death came into the world because of what one man, Adam, did, and it is because of what this other Man, Christ, has done that there is a resurrection from the dead. Everyone dies, because all of us are related to Adam--being members of his sinful race--for where there is sin, death results; but all who are related to Christ will rise again.

Paul makes reference to the resurrection in:

1 Thessalonians 1:10

and to be waiting for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, the one who is rescuing us from the wrath which is coming.

The apostle Paul is an authority here because he saw the resurrected Lord.

On the basis of the resurrection of Christ, Paul builds his argument by saying:

"EVEN SO GOD WILL BRING WITH HIM THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP
THROUGH JESUS."

This is the basis for our hope.

Ryrie says:

The last phrase "through Jesus" is related to the fact that death has been changed to "sleep" through the work of Jesus.

"BACK SOON!"

... even so God will bring with Him those who
sleep in Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 4:14

Have you suffered the death of a loved one recently? Is your heart heavy? Does your soul cry out for that departed companion? The renowned English poet Alfred Lord Tennyson experienced such a loss. He wrote expressively: "And the stately ships go on/ To their haven under the hill;/ But O for the touch of a vanished hand/ And the sound of a voice that is still!" Yes, death leaves a void, but a Christian can find great comfort in a time of grief if those who died were also believers. Jesus is coming again, and He has promised to bring back with Him all who have died in the Lord. What a reunion that will be!

A Christian physician, whose testimony and grace radiated good cheer to his patients, was one day suddenly taken Home to be with his Lord. His wife, who had always been frail and sickly, was heartbroken by this deep loss. She seemed to depend on the sunshine of his warm and vigorous personality to sustain her along the road of life. The death of her precious husband left her with a profound feeling of emptiness. But as she trusted God, she also found that His comfort and strength filled her heart with peace. To express her confident faith, she displayed by the doorway of her living room the card her husband always posted when he left his office for a short time. It read: "GONE OUT--BACK SOON!" Her grief was eased by the comforting hope of Christ's return.

Yes, Jesus is coming in the clouds. The Bible tells us to "comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18).

--H.G.B.

"Blessed hope"--in the Word God has spoken,
All our peace by that Word we obtain;
And as sure as God's Word can't be broken,
We shall meet with our loved ones again!

--Anon.

In the night of sorrow, only the trusting UPLOOK
can give the Christian a bright OUTLOOK.

(From Our Daily Bread, July 5)

v.15 For this we are saying to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are living, we who are left behind for the coming of the Lord, we shall by no means precede those who fell asleep.

Titus 2:12, 13

instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus;

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Paul believed he might well be alive at the rapture.

Philippians 4:5

Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Ryrie says:

Notice that Paul included himself among that living group and evidently expected to live until the return of Christ. One of the wonderful things about the hope of His coming is that it burns brightly in the hearts of each generation of Christians, regardless of how long His return is delayed.

We are reminded of:

1 Thessalonians 2:13

And because of this we also are constantly giving thanks to God, because when you took to yourselves the word of divine preaching that goes out from us, you welcomed not the word of men, but even as truly it is, God's word, which also is operating in you who are believing.

This word that Paul is speaking is not something that he invented but it is from the Lord.

Here Paul gives to us the order of the resurrection and deals with those who are living and left at the coming of the Lord.

Those who are living and remaining on the earth will by no means precede those who are dead in Christ in the resurrection.

Donald Grey Barnhouse says:

When I was a small boy in California, my father kept bees. One day I was stung. My mother heard me yell and came with a pair of tweezers. She pulled out the stinger and explained to me that when a honey bee stings someone it loses its stinger and dies. On reading 1 Corinthians 15:55, "Oh death, where is thy sting," I remembered that childhood incident and drew the spiritual parallel. Just as the bee stung my hand, then lost its stinger and died, so death stung the Lord Jesus and left scars on his hands, but the sting of death was removed and death died. The Lord Jesus Christ died, but He rose again, Conqueror over death.

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

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 must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

v.16 Because the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the call of the trumpet sounded by God's command; and the dead in Christ shall be raised first.

Now the apostle gives the reason why the living will not precede the dead in the resurrection.

The Lord Jesus sits at the right hand of God in heaven. He will leave and come down from heaven.

Romans 8:34

who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Here in verse 16 we are going to see how it is all going to happen. Having stated the fact that the living shall not precede the dead, he now is going to explain just what is going to happen and will give us the order of the resurrection.

Ryrie says:

The word "Himself" is in the emphatic position in the sentence and emphasizes that no intermediary but the Lord himself will usher in this great event because it will be He himself who comes. The attendant circumstances will display all the grandeur due His personal presence.

There are 3 THINGS that are said here:

"BECAUSE THE LORD HIMSELF WILL COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN":

1. "WITH A CRY OF COMMAND,"
2. "WITH THE VOICE OF AN ARCHANGEL,"
3. "WITH THE CALL OF THE TRUMPET SOUNDED BY GOD'S COMMAND."

Let us look at these 3 things a little more closely.

"BECAUSE THE LORD HIMSELF WILL COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN":

1. "WITH A CRY OF COMMAND"

Ryrie says:

There will be a shout. It is a word of command used in classical Greek for the shout with which an officer gives the order to his troops or his crew. There is in the word a ring of authority and a note of urgency. It is not said who utters the shout, whether it is the Lord or an archangel. However, the voice of an archangel will be heard.

p. 65

Lenski says:

While it occurs only here in the New Testament, this word is common to designate a loud, military command. The shout of a charioteer to his horses, or a hunter to his hounds, of a shipmaster to the rowers. John 5:28: "All that are in the graves shall hear His voice," namely, that of the Son of man. This is then the Lord's command to all the dead to arise and not the Father's command to Christ to descend, nor Christ's command to His angel hosts. "Shout," in our versions is inexact. The word means "a shouted order or command."

ARE WE READY?

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven
with a shout.

--1 Thessalonians 4:16

It was just one man's opinion--an educated guess. Given all the scientific data at his disposal, a scientist stated last year that an earthquake of disastrous proportions was imminent in Missouri. On the basis of his prediction, thousands of people stocked up on supplies, schools were closed, and residents practiced emergency procedures.

You can't blame these people for taking precautions. The science of earthquakes has become more sophisticated, and predicting them is now a possibility. Besides, no one wants to be unprepared for an event as frightening as an earthquake.

Another prediction--one with more serious implications than a 7.0 Richter-scale quake, and with 100 percent certainty--is recorded in today's Scripture. Yet it doesn't seem to move us to the same state of preparedness as the prediction of an earthquake.

The New Testament declares repeatedly that Jesus will come back to this world He left nearly 2,000 years ago. And given the accuracy of the biblical predictions about His first coming (see Mic. 5:2; Is. 9:6, 7), we should realize that every day brings us one day closer to seeing Him.

Do we really believe that Jesus could return before a new day dawns? Are we ready? --J.D.B.

Christ could come back at any time

For those who are His own,
And then He will return to earth
To sit upon His throne.

--Sper

LIVE AS IF JESUS DIED YESTERDAY, ROSE THIS MORNING,
AND IS COMING BACK AT ANY MOMENT.

(From Our Daily Bread, October 22)

John 5:28

Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice,

John 11:38-44

Jesus therefore again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Remove the stone."

Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days."

Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me." And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." He who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Jesus simply gave a shout, "Lazarus, come forth." Lazarus obeyed the call of the Savior and came forth, even in his grave clothes, but alive.

If the Lord Jesus had not said, "Lazarus," He would have emptied the whole graveyard. The resurrection would have taken place at that moment.

"BECAUSE THE LORD HIMSELF WILL COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN":

1. "WITH A CRY OF COMMAND,"
2. "WITH THE VOICE OF AN ARCHANGEL,"

This is a reference to MICHAEL.

And:

3. "WITH THE CALL OF THE TRUMPET SOUNDED BY GOD'S COMMAND."

Exodus 19:16-19

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

Revelation 1:10

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,

HOLD THE FORT!

Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have.

Revelation 3:11

During the American Civil War, General William T. Sherman was driving his troops on his decisive march to the sea. He had left behind in a fort on Kennesaw Mountain a small contingent of men to guard the rations. General John Bell Hood of the Confederate Army attacked the fort, and a fierce battle followed. One-third of the men were killed or wounded, and J. M. Corse, the general in command, was severely injured in the fighting. Just as he was about to hoist up the white flag and surrender, a message came through the signal corps set up on a chain of mountains. General Sherman was within 15 miles of the fort and had sent the message: "Hold fast. We are coming." Those few words so encouraged the defenders that they held on and kept the fort from falling into the hands of their attackers.

Our Heavenly Commander has also sent us the assurance that He is coming. The Lord Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And 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" (John 14:2, 3). The fact that our Savior is coming again gives us a special incentive in our service for Christ. It makes us want to stand our ground. It encourages us to continue fighting the good fight of faith. It assures us of victory. Fierce as the battle may rage and difficult as the conflict may be as we serve Him, let's never give up! Christ is coming again--perhaps today. Let's hold the fort!

--R.W.D.

"Hold the fort, for I am coming."

Jesus signals still;

Wave the answer back to heaven,

"By Thy grace we will."

--Bliss

When faithfulness is most difficult,
it is most rewarding.

(From Our Daily Bread, January 24)

"BECAUSE THE LORD HIMSELF WILL COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN WITH A CRY OF COMMAND, WITH THE VOICE OF AN ARCHANGEL, AND WITH THE CALL OF THE TRUMPET SOUNDED BY GOD'S COMMAND; AND THE DEAD IN CHRIST SHALL BE RAISED FIRST."

THAT GREAT GITTIN' UP MORNIN'

For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout,
... and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

A true story is told about a distinguished man who is the only white person buried in a Georgia cemetery reserved exclusively for blacks. He had lost his mother when he was a baby. So his father, who never married again, hired a black woman to help raise him. That Christian lady took her task seriously, and seldom has a motherless boy received such warmhearted, careful attention. As he grew older, he often spoke of her faithfulness. One of his earliest memories was of her bending over him in his upstairs bedroom and softly saying, "Wake up, my boy! Mornin' is come."

With the passing years this devoted woman continued to serve as his substitute mother. The young man went away to college, but when he'd come home each summer, she'd climb the steps again--more slowly now that she was getting older--and call him in the same loving way. One day after he had become a successful statesman, the sad message came, "Mandy is dead. Can you attend her funeral?" As he stood beside her grave in that cemetery, he turned to his friends and said, "If I die before Jesus comes, I want to be buried here beside Mandy. I like to think that on that glad day she'll speak to me again and say, 'Wake up, my boy, GOD'S mornin' is come!'"

The sentiment expressed by this grateful man brings comfort to the heart. He will meet that dear woman again. But then it will be the Lord who will say, "Awake thou that sleepest. Morning is come!"

I wonder, Christian friend, are you anticipating that great "gittin' up day"? --H.G.B.

In the resurrection morning, what a meeting it will be,

We shall rise, we shall rise!

When our fathers and our mothers and our loved ones we shall see,

We shall rise, we shall rise!

--Thomas

THOT: Christians never say goodbye for the last time.

(From Our Daily Bread, July 20)

(The Rise of Babylon: Sign of the End Times
by Charles H. Dyer with Angela Elwell Hunt)

John Walvoord, chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary, said preachers were laughed at 50 years ago when they quoted the Bible as placing the great final battle in the Middle East.

"Skeptics laughed because the Middle East was insignificant and could never be the center of action," Walvoord said. "Now, for the first time, people believe the power that is in the Middle East. They're not laughing today."
pp. 184-85

(Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis
by John F. Walvoord)

Our present world is well prepared for the beginning of the prophetic drama that will lead to Armageddon. Since the stage is set for this dramatic climax of the age, it must mean that Christ's coming for His own is very near. If there ever was an hour when men should consider their personal relationship to Jesus Christ, it is today. God is saying to this generation: "Prepare for the coming of the Lord."
p. 228

Never before in history have all the factors been present for the fulfillment of prophecy relating to end-time religious trends and events. Only in our generation have the combined revival of Israel, the formation of a world church, the increasing power of Muslim religion, the rise of the occult, and the worldwide spread of atheistic philosophy been present as a dramatic setting for the final fulfillment of prophecy. As far as world religion is concerned, the road to Armageddon is already well prepared, and those who will travel to their doom may well be members of our present generation.
p. 120

Until our present generation, Western civilization was quite content with its scientific progress and its national and evolutionary explanation of the world. Today, however, things are different. The secure and rational world of the past is already beginning to collapse. On a scale never thought possible in a modern world, astrology, psychic phenomena, witchcraft, and the occult are permeating our culture. New perversions of Christianity, such as the New Age Movement, have captured the attention of many. A new, mysterious world of superstition, fear, and demonic activity continues to attract millions of people.
p. 109

(Escape the Coming Night by Dr. David Jeremiah
with C. C. Carlson)

Satellite technology is able to spread the gospel to every corner of the globe. One evangelist, Billy Graham, at the peak of his ministry, is preaching via satellite to millions around the world. During one crusade alone, twenty-three African countries were able to hear God's Word presented simultaneously in their own languages. What an exciting fulfillment of Jesus' words!

As we see Bible translators working on every known language, radios beaming gospel messages into remote corners, and now satellites, we can watch for more signs of the earth's race toward prophecy fulfillment.
p. 76

v.17 Then we who are living, who are left behind, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

In verse 16 we had the 3 THINGS that will happen:

- 1.the "cry of command,"
- 2."the voice of the archangel,"
- 3.and "the call of the trumpet sounded by God's command."

These 3 things happening will lead to the following:

- 1."THE DEAD IN CHRIST SHALL BE RAISED FIRST."
- 2."THEN WE WHO ARE LIVING, WHO ARE LEFT BEHIND, SHALL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR,"

And the result:

"SO WE SHALL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD."

Paul is speaking of the DEAD in verse 16,

and the LIVING in verse 17.

Paul is putting himself in the living group because of his belief that Christ was going to return in his lifetime.

Hendricksen observes:

The suddenness, the swiftness and the divine character of the power which is operative in this being snatched up are here emphasized. The survivors have been changed in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye.

Ryrie says:

We shall be "caught up." The word means "seize" or "snatch," and the Latin translation of this verb uses the word from which we get rapture in English. Thus, the translation of living believers is called the rapture of the church. Rapture means the act of conveying a person from one place to another, and thus, is properly used of this transport of the living to heaven.

Paul used it of his own experience of being caught up into the third heaven. It would appear from these other occurrences of the word that Paul had in mind being taken into heaven and not just into the mid-air, to turn around suddenly and return to the earth. It also implies in this idea of rapture the necessary change in mortal bodies in order to fit them for immortal existence in heaven. This is stated in greater detail in 1 Corinthians 15:50-53. And while the method of this change is never revealed, it is clear that Paul believed that it is possible to have a metamorphosis without the dissolution caused by death.

J. Vernon McGee says:

There are those today who hold a different viewpoint. They say the Bible does not teach the rapture and that one cannot find that word in the New Testament. I insist that it is there. It is found in this chapter in verse 17. "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." The Greek word translated as "caught up" is harpazo. It means to "catch up" or "grasp hastily," "to snatch up," "to lift," "to transport," or "to rapture." Rapture is just as good a word as caught up. It is a matter of semantics whichever word you choose to use.

When it comes to the subject of prophetic studies there are many differences of opinion with regard to the future kingdom. That also determines one's views on the rapture of the church:

1. There are PRE-MILLENNIALISTS who believe that Christ is going to come before His 1,000-year reign upon the earth.
2. There are the POST-MILLENNIALISTS who believe that Christ is going to come after the millennium.
3. There are the A-MILLENNIALISTS who believe there is not going to be any millennium.

And then are a couple of other positions:

One guy said, "I'm a PRO-MILLENNIALIST. I'm for it."

Another said, "I'm a PAN-MILLENNIALIST. It's all going to pan out in the end."

When we turn the prophetic focus to the rapture we also find there are 3 VIEWS on it:

1. There are those who hold to a PRE-TRIBULATION rapture,
2. those who hold to a MID-TRIBULATION rapture,
3. and those who hold to a POST-TRIBULATION rapture.

I am personally persuaded that the scripture teaches a PRE-TRIBULATION rapture. And because I also believe that the Lord Jesus is going to rule and reign on the earth in a literal kingdom, I would identify with the PRE-MILLENNIAL position.

CAUGHT UP!

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together
with them in the clouds to meet the Lord.

--1 Thess. 4:17

A great event awaits the child of God! When Christ descends from heaven, He will draw all believers to Himself--those who have died in the Lord, and those who are alive at His coming. The anticipation of that event should thrill the heart of every person who knows Jesus as Savior.

William L. Pettingill told of the time he visited a great steel plant. The owner was a devoted Christian. Together they walked out into the scrap metal yard. Motioning to the operator of the electric crane, the owner instructed him to lower a huge magnet over a wide dirt road beaten hard by truck traffic.

"Watch," he said as he gave the signal to turn on the current to the magnet. Up from that cracking road leaped pieces of metal, long covered and out of sight. They were caught up to meet that powerful magnet in the air! It attracted the metal having the same nature as itself. Pettingill knew that his friend was illustrating the truth of 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

Our Lord said, "I will come again and receive you to Myself" (John 14:3). And when He comes, those who have received His nature by the new birth will rise to meet Him in the air.

Friend, will you be caught up to Him in that moment?

--P.R.V.

Up, up! We long to hear the cry;
Up, up! Our absent Lord draws nigh.
Yes, in the twinkling of an eye,
Caught up to meet Him in the sky.

--Anon.

ALL WHO WANT TO MEET CHRIST IN THE AIR
MUST FIRST MEET HIM AT THE CROSS.

(From Our Daily Bread, July 24)

There are numerous accounts in scripture of individuals being "CAUGHT UP":

1. First of all, we think of ENOCH who "walked with God, and the Lord took him and he was not."
2. We think of ELIJAH, snatched home in a chariot of fire.

Acts 1:9

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Acts 8:39

And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing.

2 Corinthians 12:2

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a man was caught up to the third heaven.

Lange, in his commentary, says:

If we would one day be caught up to Christ, we must even now follow His gracious guidance and lift up our heart to Him. If we would be with body and soul ever with the Lord, we must with our spirit be with Him even now.

Colossians 3:4

When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

RAPTURE PREDICTION MISTAKEN

When September 1, 1989, came and went, Edgar Whisenant was still here along with millions of other people who expect to be taken into heaven during the rapture they believe is prophesied in the book of Revelation. Whisenant, a retired NASA engineer, originally predicted that the rapture would take place September 13, 1988. When last year's date proved to be inaccurate, he recalculated and came up with this year's prediction. When it proved inaccurate, Whisenant's reaction was, "I guess God doesn't always do things the way man thinks He will."

(From InfoSearch 2.21)

(Escape the Coming Night by Dr. David Jeremiah
with C. C. Carlson)

Seven times in chapters two and three, we read, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Then we read, "He who has an ear, let him hear" (Revelation 13:9). The Spirit is missing and the church is missing. They are obviously in heaven, while earth is suffering in the Tribulation.
p. 85

(Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life
by Barbara Johnson)

As I like to say,

HE'S GONNA TOOT
AND WE'RE GONNA SCOOT!

p. 198

"THEN WE WHO ARE LIVING, WHO ARE LEFT BEHIND, SHALL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR, AND SO WE SHALL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD."

The result of this being "CAUGHT UP" is:

"WE SHALL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD."

The focus is on the PERSON and not the PLACE.

John 14:1-3

Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 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. And 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.

v.18 So keep on encouraging one another with these words.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The logical and practical outcome of this revelation is comfort and encouragement.

On the basis of the instruction just given, Paul now concludes by saying that the Thessalonian responsibility is to be:

"ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER WITH THESE WORDS."

"THESE WORDS" which are not words from man but words from the Lord can serve as a basis of encouragement.

J. Vernon McGee says:

Does he say, "Wherefore, terrify one another with these words"? Of course not! My Bible says, "Wherefore, comfort one another." It not only means to comfort in the usual sense of the word but also to instruct and to exhort one another and to talk about these things. My friend, Jesus is going to take His own out of this world someday.

(Uh-Oh by Robert Fulghum)

In my files is an advertisement for a watch that had me thinking hard for most of a week once. I was in my pocket-watch phase then, but not all my clothes had a proper pocket, so I was either going to have to get new pants or a new watch, and besides, a whole new generation of watches was being born. Digital. Quartz. Progress. Count me in.

The ad announced the Pulsar--"the first completely new way to tell time in 400 years." More than that, the ad copy proclaimed this watch the new international status symbol: the delight of emperors, celebrities, diplomats, senators, governors, and stars. It had fifteen hundred transistors, no moving parts, nothing to wear out or oil or maintain. Two thousand five hundred fifty times the force of gravity would not harm it. Waterproof, made of stainless steel that would not scratch or rust or mildew. It was run by a quartz crystal vibrating at 32,768 times a second. The face was lit by a tiny lamp built to last through more than a thousand years of regular use. It would keep time accurate to the millisecond per century.

I was impressed.

Just what I needed.

So I almost got one. For a week, I almost got one.

On reflection from some years away from the moment of decision, I think that watch alienated me. For all its admirable technology, it set standards much higher than I was comfortable being close to. The watch was too good for me.

So I kept the pocket watch. We have a compatible relationship.

It's unreliable and unpredictable--like me. We both require attention and affection and patience to keep us working well. The watch is easily affected by heat and pressure. Like me. Neither one of us is waterproof or works well below freezing. My watch runs down, and is rusting and corroding and wearing thin in places. Sometimes it doesn't work at all. Me, too.

My old pocket watch won't last a thousand years. But it gets me by one day at a time, and is reasonably accurate about what it has to tell. You could say the same about me.

p. 208

COMFORT FOR SORROW

Therefore comfort one another with these words.

--1 Thessalonians 4:18

In 1858 Scottish missionary John G. Paton and his wife sailed for the New Hebrides (now called Vanuatu). Three months after arriving on the island of Tanna, his wife died. One week later his infant son also died. Paton was plunged into sorrow. Feeling terribly alone, and surrounded by savage people who showed him no sympathy, he wrote, "Let those who have ever passed through any similar darkness as of midnight feel for me. As for all others, it would be more than vain to try to paint my sorrows. . . . But for Jesus, and [His] fellowship . . . , I [would] have gone mad and died."

When death takes a precious loved one, the Lord comforts His own in a special way with the fellowship of His presence. It's a comfort in sorrow that the world knows nothing about. And this consolation reinforces in our heart the hope of the coming again of Christ described in 1 Thessalonians 4.

The apostle Paul told us that when Jesus comes again, as He promised (John 14:3), we will join with those who have gone before, and together we will live with Christ forever. As the years pass and more and more of our loved ones die and go to heaven, that hope burns more brightly than ever.

No wonder the apostle Paul admonished, "Therefore comfort one another with these words."

--R.W.D.

He's with us in the valley,
Amid the darkest night;
He tells us in our sorrow:
Faith will give way to sight.

--D.J.D.

GOD'S PEOPLE NEVER SAY GOODBY FOR THE LAST TIME.

(From Our Daily Bread, August 6)

Lange says:

Since in this vale of tears no one is wholly free from affliction, and we have frequent need of comfort and encouragement, every believer, even if not a teacher, should regard it as his Christian obligation to comfort others. One Christian ought to be the priest and comforter of another--It is not said merely: You teachers or preachers, comfort the common people.
p. 81

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.

We have considered together the question:

ARE YOU AFRAID OF DEATH?

We have noted that for the Christian there is no need to face death with dread and fear, because death for the Christian is just being "absent from the body and present with the Lord."

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 (Living Bible)

Now we look forward with confidence to our heavenly bodies and realize that every moment we are still down here means that that much longer we must be away from heaven where Jesus is. We know these things are true by believing, not by seeing. We are not afraid but are glad to be rid of these bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.

Philippians 1:23

But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;

Colossians 3:1, 2

If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 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.

2 Timothy 4:6-8

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 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.

They say we are nearing a sunset,
 And life with its meaning is past.
 Ah, no, we are nearing the sunrise
 And life in its fullness at last.

The sun of life's day is fast sinking,
 And the shadows of twilight have come,
 But there's no darkness of night in our spirits;
 We have glimpsed the bright glory of home.

Our steps may be faltering and feeble,
 Our eyes dim and faded may be;
 But we're walking triumphant with Jesus,
 And His beauty more clearly we see.

Do not pity the weakness and frailty
 Of bodies once active and strong.
 Our spirits are quick and unconquered,
 And our hearts overflowing with song.

Sorrow not, dear friends, for the sunset,
 For the ending of life soon to come.
 We are entering life's glorious beginning,
 Entering the sunrise and home.

Psalms 116:15

Precious in the sight of the Lord
 is the death of his saints.

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons that we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Death for the believer is like falling asleep.

LESSON #2: We have a hope that is steadfast and sure.

LESSON #3: Because we have a living Savior, He can and will return again.

LESSON #4: When He comes back, He will bring along with Him all those who have died knowing Christ.

LESSON #5: In the resurrection, the dead in Christ shall precede those who are still remaining upon the earth.

LESSON #6: The Lord himself is the One who is going to be coming down from heaven to take us to the place that He has prepared.

LESSON #7: The dead in Christ shall be raised first, then those who are living will be caught up.

LESSON #8: At the rapture, all the believers are going to be meeting the Lord in the air.

LESSON #9: We are commanded to be encouraging one another with these words.

Stedman says:

Samuel Rutherford was one of the Scottish Covenanters of the 17th century who served the Lord during times of persecution in Scotland. Elizabeth Clephane took some phrases from Rutherford's beautiful letters and put them together in one of the most popular hymns of the 19th century. It was D. L. Moody's favorite hymn, and it has always been a favorite of mine.

The sands of time are sinking,
The dawn of heaven breaks;
The summer morn I've sighed for--
The fair, sweet morn awakes:
Dark, dark hath been the midnight,
But dayspring is at hand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.

O Christ, He is the fountain,
The deep, sweet well of love!
The streams on earth I've tasted
More deep I'll drink above:
There to an ocean fullness
His mercy doth expand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.

The Bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory
But on my King of grace.
Not at the crown He giveth
But on His pierced hand:
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel's land.

p. 81

GRACE TO FACE THE GRAVE

Evangelist D. L. Moody was once confronted by someone who had heard him speak on the subject of heaven. "Preacher, you talk so confidently about the blessing of being 'called Home to be with the Lord,' but tell me, are you ready to die right now?" Moody looked at his critic thoughtfully and replied, "I'm prepared to die because I have accepted Christ as my Savior and He has given me eternal life. But I must frankly admit that I'm not ready to die at the present moment. God has given me living grace now to do His work, and I'm sure that when my time comes He'll give me dying grace." As Moody predicted, his last hours were filled with peace. At the end he seemed to look into heaven itself, for he said he could see his loved ones waiting for him there.

If you are living for the Savior, you can be sure He'll give you grace when you face the grave.

(From InfoSearch 2.21)

(Beyond the Mirror: Reflections on Death and Life
by Henri J. M. Nouwen)

My deep desire to be united with God through Jesus did not spring from disdain for human relationships but from an acute awareness of the truth that dying in Christ can be, indeed, my greatest gift to others. In this perspective, life is a long journey of preparation--of preparing oneself to truly die for others. It is a series of little deaths in which we are asked to release many forms of clinging and to move increasingly from needing others to living for them. The many passages we have to make as we grow from childhood to adolescence, from adolescence to adulthood, and from adulthood to old age offer ever-new opportunities to choose for ourselves or to choose for others. During these passages, questions such as: Do I desire power or service; do I want to be visible or remain hidden; do I strive for a successful career or do I keep following my vocation? keep coming up and confront us with hard choices. In this sense, we can speak about life as a long process of dying to self, so that we will be able to live in the joy of God and give our lives completely to others.

pp. 53-54

Nonetheless, I was somewhat surprised that no one even suggested that my return to the old life was not necessarily the best possible outcome of my accident. No one wrote, "To have been found not ready to be completely united with the Lord to whom you have given your life must have been a disappointment, but as your fellow traveler I welcome you back into the struggle of life."

p. 65

(The Good Shepherd by Haddon W. Robinson)

When G. Campbell Morgan was a pastor in London, a young girl from his church lay dying. She had given birth to a child, and it appeared that it would cost her her life. Dr. Morgan went to visit the girl and stood in the shadows while the doctor did his best to take care of her. She was delirious and kept saying, "Doctor, I don't want to go on alone. Doctor, please, I want to take my baby with me."

The doctor tried to say something that would help her. "My dear, your baby will have loving care--you need not be afraid. You can't take the baby with you. The gate through which you must go is only wide enough for one." Dr. Morgan stepped forward, touched the physician's shoulder, and said, "Doctor, don't tell her that! Tell her that the gate through which she is about to pass is wide enough for two--for herself and her Shepherd. He who has brought her to this place will not desert her now, but He'll see her safely home to the other side!"

p. 32

(Finding the Heart to Go On by Lynn Anderson)

Frank is hardly 60, but he looks easily a decade older. He is sick, alone, and unemployed. Frank is my friend and I love him--but somewhere, years ago, he lost his way.

The other day as we lingered over coffee, Frank--in a rare moment of self-disclosure--slammed his fist on the table and bellowed, "Lynn, I'm bankrupt." Then punctuating his declaration with some choice expletives, he catalogued his fear and helplessness, "I'm bankrupt financially. I'm bankrupt physically. I'm bankrupt morally and emotionally. I'm also bankrupt spiritually. But I don't want to do like so many old codgers do when they get sick and scared--turn to religion. That's a crock of . . ."

What do people think about when they see age creeping up and time running out? Do they dread the gathering darkness?

pp. 217-18

Barnhouse concludes his exposition of chapter 4 by saying:

What a day awaits us!

It may be at morn, when the day is awaking,
When sunlight through darkness and shadow is breaking,
That Jesus will come in the fullness of glory
To receive from the world His own.

It may be at mid-day, it may be at twilight.
It may be, perchance, that the blackness of midnight
Will burst into light in the blaze of His glory
When Jesus receives His own.

O joy! O delight! should we go without dying:
No sickness, no sadness, no dread and no crying,
Caught up through the clouds with our Lord into glory
When Jesus receives His own.

O Lord Jesus, how long? How long?
Till we shout the glad song:
Christ returneth! Hallelujah! Hallelujah, Amen!
Hallelujah, Amen!

--H. L. Turner

p. 66

STUDY #9 - 1 Thessalonians

What are some of the lessons that we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Death for the believer is like falling asleep.

LESSON #2: We have a hope that is steadfast and sure.

LESSON #3: Because we have a living Savior, He can and will return again.

LESSON #4: When He comes back, He will bring along with Him all those who have died knowing Christ.

LESSON #5: In the resurrection, the dead in Christ shall precede those who are still remaining upon the earth.

LESSON #6: The Lord himself is the One who is going to be coming down from heaven to take us to the place that He has prepared.

LESSON #7: The dead in Christ shall be raised first, then those who are living will be caught up.

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