

A Practical Study of 1 Thessalonians

Delighting The Heart of God “Learning to Bring Pleasure to God”

Question Number Nine – Are You Afraid of Death? – 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

(*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.

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You know we all feel that don't we? There comes a time in our lives where we become painfully aware of the fact that we are not all that we used to be. And that the outward temple is beginning to suffering wear and tear and showing signs of old age.

And that brings us to the question that we want to address this morning in our study.

Have we gotten to the place where we have had the victory over the fear of death? And our question is:

Are You Afraid of Death?

Now why is it necessary in the flow of the epistle for Paul to all of a sudden come back and address the issue of physical death and the coming of Christ?

Well there are TWO REASONS for that:

1. First of all, a lot of Christians had died since Paul left there.

After that three weeks of ministry, there was violent opposition to the birth of this little church. And a number of Christians died as martyrs in Thessalonica because of the persecution.

And the Christians were not ready for Christians to die. They didn't understand all that was going on and what had happened. That was one real area of need.

2. But the other area, as you'll remember last night I touched on it just a little bit, a lot of them had quit work because they thought the Lord was coming right away.

So what he's doing is he's solving two problems in these verses between now at 4:13 down to chapter 5, verse 11 where we'll

finish this evening. And he's dealing with a prophetic theme but he's also in the midst of the prophetic theme dealing with the subject of death.

And more than the PROPHETIC theme in these verses this morning is the DEATH theme.

It's bringing comfort to believers when it comes to the matter of physical death more than it is talking about the rapture of the church.

Now I believe in our generation because we've become such prophetic bugs. We have missed the reason why 4:13-18 is there in the text.

[1 Thessalonians] 4:13-18 is the one great passage that teaches the rapture of the church. I mean it's in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 [should be 5:1-4], but this is really the clearest teaching on the rapture of the church. And so prophetic bugs have come along and picked that out and made that the emphasis when really the emphasis was designed to comfort Christians who are facing physical death.

Now if you'll follow that train of thought with me, we'll also have some fall-out when we get to the subject of the rapture here in just a little bit. But he's using that to comfort them with regard to physical death, is all I'm saying.

Ok, pick up with me at verse 13 and we'll just move down to verse 18.

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.

Now remember what I told you last time? Little word “now,” watch it. When you’ve got the word now, you come to a new section. And here it is again.

He’s getting ready to teach them:

“we are not wishing you to be ignorant, brethren,”

What’s the difference between what he’s teaching them about death now and what he had to say about love last time?

Remember about love last week, he said “I don’t have to teach you because you have been taught of God to love one another.”

But now he says this is something you really need to know and the Lord is going to use me to supply what is lacking in your faith. I’m going to give you some information that is going to comfort you, sustain you, help you when you walk through that valley of the shadow of death.

“we are not wishing you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are falling asleep,”

Now that term “falling asleep” is only used of believers. And

that term “falling asleep” does not mean that the soul falls to sleep. All that means is the body goes to sleep and the body goes into the grave.

Let me give you a few references to clarify this—John 11:11. This is where Jesus has heard that Lazarus is dead and He’s still north in Galilea and he’s talking to his men. And this what He said:

John 11:11

... “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, that I may awaken him out of sleep.”

So Jesus called physical death like the sleeping of the body.

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.

See the body is the thing that goes to sleep and it goes in the grave. But instantaneously when death occurs, we are absent from that body and we are present with the Lord.

Matthew 10:28

And fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

So the soul immediately departs the body and to go be with the Lord and that's what Paul would have preferred. He looked forward to it.

And then the other great passage is:

Philippians 1:23

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

What does it mean when it says “desire to depart and to be with Christ”?

You know that word means to pull up the stakes, fold up the tent and go to the house.

It's like living in a temporary dwelling. You're going to that permanent place.

Now isn't that what it says in the book of Hebrews? We are just pilgrims just passing through, looking for a city whose builder and maker is God?

Now do you understand why it's so wrong to get your stakes driven down here and spend all your time here as though this is permanent and to get all stressed out about everything here like we're talking about last night? You know, it glorifies God when we use a light hand on this stuff and we're here just

borrowing it and we're getting out of here. We're going to the real thing. We're going to that place of joy and blessedness.

Now, 1 Thessalonians 5:10 we're going to get to that in chapter 5 tomorrow:

1 Thessalonians 5:10

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

So the word "sleep" is often used when it comes to the subject of physical death.

And then the central passage on anything that somebody asks you about physical death and the believer is 2 Corinthians 5:1-8. When anybody—I use this passage more than any other passage to comfort people at the time of physical death. Whether it's in the hospital or at the funeral home or wherever. Listen to Paul—2 Corinthians 5:

2 Corinthians 5:1-8

For we know that if the earthly [WHAT?] 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 know this 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.

And that brings great, great insight into what takes place in physical death.

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

This is our KEY VERSE.

Are you afraid of death? Is it a fear of the unknown? Is it a fear of what might be out there? A fear of not having been faithful enough here so you're afraid to face Him out there?

And then I've heard others say that the hardest thing about death is letting go and losing control because we are so much individuals that want to control everything and want to be in that position. But to let go of that is difficult.

One person said:

“Life is like a bus ride and death is just the next stop.

(source unknown)

And you know if we can simply learn from these verses that God has already taken care of the physical death part of it and that we are indeed leaving here and going there.

Now what is the “hope” that we have?

I want to give you some hope, okay?

This is where you can drive your stakes while you’re thinking about your own physical demise.

John 11:25-26—I want to go back there just a minute:

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 [no never, absolutely, positively, no never] die. ...

It’s the strongest Greek negative. And then he says to her.

“Do you believe this?” Do you really believe this? And of course, you remember, she said “Yes I do.”

More than what Jesus says to Martha in the face of physical death, my very favorite of all of the passages to turn to when I need comfort about my own physical demise is Luke 23:42 and

43. You're going to say, what in the world do you find as comfort in that passage?

Well in Luke 23:42 and 43 Jesus is hanging on the cross and you'll remember it well. Listen to the words:

Luke 23:42, 43

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

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

Now that tells me that Jesus knew full well what was going to happen. He had nothing to lose. If He had lived 33 years and He was a phony and He was just another man like you and me, hanging there on the cross you have nothing to lose to tell the truth.

But when some guy looks to you in faith and says "remember me when You come into Your kingdom" He could have said "Hey look, I've been phony. I don't know where we're going either. I think death really ends it all. I think we're finished. And so don't look to me for any help."

But it's at that crucial point that He looks back at him and He says "today you'll be with Me in the Paradise."

It's just like we're both leaving here sometime this afternoon and instantaneously we're both going to be together in

paradise because of your act of faith in asking Me to remember you when I come into My kingdom.

You know those kind of things are just human enough to make me able to identify with that. And to find some comfort in knowing that He faced those final hours expressing to an individual what was going to happen just as soon as the cross had done its dirty work in physical death.

He was going to be present with the Lord.

And then Matthew 28:18-20 sure has a lot of comfort in it:

Matthew 28:18-20

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 nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Jesus Christ has the power and authority and as the resurrected Christ He speaks of that in Matthew 28.

Verse 14.

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.

Now verse 14 is a bridge between the instruction that he's given about physical death and how it's all going to come about in the rapture of the church. That's why the passage is tied together prophetically. But the primary purpose is to teach the comfort to the believer of what happens in physical death.

And so here he says since we all believe that Jesus died and rose again, God's going to do something. He's going to "bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus"—including the thief on the cross that said "remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

And so these believers that have died, they're in the city of Thessalonica, when the Lord comes He's going to bring them with Him. And that's the basis of our hope.

Because He lives, we too shall live.

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.

"For"—REASON, verse 15—"this we are saying to you by the word of the Lord,"—isn't that comforting?

Paul wants it quite clear that he didn't make this up and this is not something that he is just snatching out of the air to teach as though it's coming from his head.

“this we are saying to you by the word of the Lord,”

Now comes a powerful message.

“that we who are living,”—and notice where Paul identifies himself. He now says WE. It's like to Paul, he's not going to die before the rapture takes place. Well he happened to be wrong at that point. But it's comforting to all of us sitting here, too, to say “we” are going to leave with our tennis shoes smoking when that time comes and the rapture takes place.

“we who are living, we who are”—WHAT?—“left behind”

The rest of them have been absent from the body, present the Lord. They've gone.

“for the coming of the Lord, we shall by no means precede those who fell asleep.”

In other words, the Christians that are still living on the earth at the time of the rapture are not going to precede the Christians who've gone to be with the Lord. They are going to get their new bodies first before we do.

Now, you need to have a little understanding of what takes place at the event called the **RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH**.

Now the word RAPTURE is not in the Bible any more than the word TRINITY is in the Bible, but the message is there.

The word “caught up” in verse 17 in Latin is *rapturo* or “take away,” “caught away,” “snatched away.” So we’ve gotten the term, Latin term, rapture from that.

In the same way we got the Latin term “Trinity” to define the God-head.

The key passage, the other key passage on the rapture is 1 Corinthians 15:51-53. Listen to him:

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, [there’s your word again] but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, [just like that] at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, [see, they’re going to come up first] and we shall be changed [right here]. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

So when that event takes place, there is going to be an instant transformation here on earth but we’re not going to proceed the people who have already died. They’re going to get their new bodies and be with the Lord just ahead of us.

Now look at the rest of the verses.

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.

“Because the Lord Himself will come down from heaven”—and there are THREE THINGS that are going to happen—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.”

They're going to get their new bodies “FIRST” the apostle says.

Now let's take those three things. When this event takes place, that we're talking about here, the Lord is going to descend. He is not coming back to the earth in the Second Coming here.

This has nothing to do with the Second Coming of Christ. This is an altogether different event.

In the Second Coming of Christ His feet are going to touch the Mount of Olives. We'll talk more about that in tonight's session.

Here we've got a meeting in the MEETING IN THE AIR. This

has nothing to do with the Second Coming of Christ.

Now I'm aware of the fact that there are divergent schools of thought when it comes to prophetic truth. And we must make a lot of allowances for differences of opinion.

And I feel that the Rapture and the Second Coming are very distinct. And I would hope that as you make a prophetic study you would come to similar conclusions, but that's between you and the Lord as you study the scriptures.

Now when this Rapture, this event takes place, there are **THREE THINGS** that happen.

1. First of all, there is a "cry of command."

And I put John 5:28 there:

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,

I always liken it to John chapter 11. Remember after He got through talking to Martha and then He met Mary, they went out to the cemetery. Remember that?

And when He got out there, what did He say?

He prayed to the Father after they rolled away the stone and

He said with a cry of command “Lazarus, come forth!”

Now if He had not said Lazarus, the resurrection would have taken place. But He specifically called one. And I take it that that cry of command is “come forth.”

There are those that believe that in Revelation chapter 4 where John is commanded “Come up hither!” is really the cry that is made at this point.

The Lord is saying “Come home!” and instantaneously these things are all going to happen.

“The Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of the archangel”—and there’s only one, so that’s Michael—“with the call of the trumpet sounded by God’s command.”

There is a great sound like a trumpet.

Do you remember back in the book of Exodus when the Lord descended on Mt. Sinai in the giving of the Law that it sounded like a horrible trumpet blast? That’s the picture.

It is just a great sound to let us know that the time is now here.

Ok, when those three things happen:

1. “cry of command,”

and you've got:

2. "the voice of the archangel,"

and you've got:

3. the voice "of the trumpet."

When those three things happen, what then happens?

The little word "then" in verse 17 tells you what's going to take place in response to that. Now let's look at it closely.

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.

"We who are living, who are left behind,"—Paul is still putting himself with the living group here—"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."

Ok, now in response to those three things in verse 16, you've got three things that happen in verse 17.

First we learn here that the "dead in Christ" shall be raised first, "Then we who are living, who are left behind, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds" so shall we ever

be with the Lord.

Now I want to spend some time on that word “caught up” for just a minute but because we’re now in the realm of prophetic truth, I want to define some schools of theological thought so you can put a handle on where you are and you can tell somebody with some sense of coherency and confidence “this is what I believe.”

First of all, we want to deal with those who are:

1. PRE-MILLENNIAL.

What is it to be a Pre-Millennialist?

A Pre-Millennialist is a person who believes that Christ is going to come BEFORE He rules and reigns for a 1,000 years on earth—Pre-Milli—1,000. He’s coming to set up His kingdom and He’s going to rule and reign for a 1,000 years here on earth. That’s Revelation 20. That’s a Pre-Millennialist.

Then you hear of a:

2. POST-MILLENNIALIST.

These are people who believe that we’re in the millennium and it’s going to keep on getting better and better and better. And that’s the only millennium we’re to enjoy. That school is fading fast with the corruption of society.

Then there is the third school that's probably the largest of all and that is the:

3. A-MILLENNIALISTS.

They don't believe that there is going to be a literal millennium.

And the reason these theologians feel that way is they believe that the church today is taking the place of Israel and therefore there is no need to fulfil anything for Israel because we have all the promises of Abraham and of the Davidic covenant given to us. And so they are A-Millennialists.

I would dare say that the majority of those in your major denominations are A-Millennialists.

Now there are another couple that aren't quite so dominant but I've run into both of these.

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

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

So, pick your school.

Now, that's the Kingdom.

The other school has to do with the RAPTURE. We just got

through talking about it.

And you need to get a handle on this because tonight's study is going to talk more about it. It's almost the same.

1. There are the PRE-TRIBULATIONISTS.

These are the people who believe that Jesus is going to come to snatch His church home before you have this horrible period of tribulation on the earth—which is 7 years long. And we're going to talk about it tonight a little bit in the “day of the Lord.”

Ok, you got that in your mind? Pre-Tribulationists.

Now there are the other school of thought who believe they are:

2. MID-TRIBULATIONISTS.

That 7 year period is divided into two 3 1/2 year periods and there are people who believe that the church is going to be snatched out of here half-way through that thing—at the 3 1/2 year mark.

And then then there are the:

3. POST-TRIBULATIONISTS who believe that the Second Coming and the Rapture are the same.

And it's going to be "WHOO!" we're going to go up and come down. And that's all going to take place and they melt the passages together as a Post-Tribulationist.

And there are a lot of people who hold to that school.

Now I don't think you've got any problem to understand that Don Anderson is a PRE-TRIBULATIONIST, PRE-MILLENNIALIST. And I will teach from that prophetic point of view for the rest of my life until there comes some other understanding. Because I really have studied and I feel very comfortable with this position.

I believe the safest place in Biblical interpretation is to be a person who holds to the literal view of scripture unless there is something very clearly stated that it is a symbol or that it is saying something that can be spiritualized in some way. And there's only one place that I know of in scripture that takes place and that's Galatians chapter 4 when Moses uses, I mean when Paul uses an allegory of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar in relationship to the Law and our freedom from the Law.

Now, having gotten that before you, let's take a moment on the words "caught up."

Are there places in scripture where people are "caught up"?

Well Acts 1:9 is a great illustration. Jesus ascends into heaven right in their presence. And we read in Acts 1:9:

Acts 1:9

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 is another great one. The Lord put Philip down on the Gaza Strip and he meets an Ethiopian eunuch and leads the guy to the Lord. They stop and have a little baptismal service there and Acts 8:39 says:

Acts 8:39

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

Same word again, 2 Corinthians 12:2. Paul says:

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.

So yes, there is scriptural precedent for being snatched out of here or “caught up.”

Now I don’t want to scare you but there is nothing in the way

of the Rapture occurring this morning. I mean it could have occurred after the study last night before the study today.

There is nothing prophetically that has to be fulfilled before the rapture of the church.

Now there's some prophetic students who believe that the Temple has got to be rebuilt in Jerusalem and the gospel's got to go to the ends of the earth but I don't read my text that way. I see nothing in the way.

I do know that the Jews have got the cornerstone over there. They're getting ready to lay it. It was going to stir such a riot when they got ready to do it before that they put it away for a while.

They've got over 65 of the instruments of sacrifice already. They've got full designs on restoring temple worship.

I think the thing that brings most credibility to prophetic studies is the fact that they've been there since 1948. Wake up! They've been there for 44 years now. We better be paying attention because time is running out. They're back in the land!

Barbara Johnson said it well:

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

HE'S GONNA TOOT

AND WE'RE GONNA SCOOT!

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You know, we're getting out of here! We're going to glory.

The problem is, with regard to the Rapture, we've got some kooks running around who are trying to predict it.

And you know, it's not for us to know the times and seasons.

When we read this:

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)

That's exactly right.

It will come exactly on schedule just like the first coming took place.

Galatians 4:4, 5

When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son...

And you can count on it. You can stake your life on it. You can stake your eternal destiny on it. Christ is coming back to snatch His church home, as I read these verses.

“we shall always be with the Lord.”

Verse 18.

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

I put down 2 Timothy 4:6-8:

2 Timothy 4:6-8

I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. [INTERESTING] 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 those who loved His appearing.

So when it comes to physical death, when it comes to facing the possibility that we can be raptured even before we

experience physical death, we need to remember Psalm 116:15:

Psalm 116:15

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

The hymn writer was right.

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.

(source unknown)

There are nine lessons that come from this passage. Here they are.

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 gone to prepare.

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.

You know one of D. L. Moody's favorite hymns was "The Sands of Time are Sinking."

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.

(source unknown)

You know I've shared some things with you about Henri Nouwen this Catholic theologian. But in this book he's talking about death after he had that accident along the road and got hit in the back and then he survived, miraculously those arduous hours as medical technology took over. He says this:

(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.

[But it's a continuous process of releasing. Just like Moses was asked to release the staff and to let it go.]

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

And then he ends with this:

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

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

You know, death is exciting because it’s then that we are going to be present with our Lord whom we love and whom we serve.

“So encourage one another with these words.”

Father, we all fear in a way that ugly head of death rearing itself up and bringing to termination all the opportunities we have here on earth. Father in view of that day which is real for every one sitting here, may we live today to the fullest and may we have comfortable priorities that can keep us at peace if this is the day. And Lord I just pray that Your Holy Spirit

would minister to each heart, whether it has to do with physical death or the assurance that You're going to call Your church home one of these days before too long and that we want to be part and parcel of that. Father, I pray that everybody here has made reservations and that everything is in order so that when we get there we'll know beyond a shadow of a doubt that everything has been prepared. Father, too many times in our lives we wait till the last minute. And Father we realize because of the instantaneous nature of the Rapture, we could be caught unprepared. And I pray if there's someone here today that has a deep fear inside simply because they've not come to know Christ, that this day would be the day of salvation in their household and that they would come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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A Practical Study of 1 THESSALONIANS: Your Spiritual Checkup

“Victory in Areas of Vulnerability”

Key verse 3:10 — *“night and day praying as earnestly as possible that we might see your face and complete what is lacking in your faith”*

QUESTION NUMBER NINE – ARE YOU AFRAID OF DEATH? – 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

KEY VERSE 4:13

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.

NOTES

QUESTIONS:

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. What is it that Paul wants to tell them, according to verse 13?

3. To what great event does Paul make reference in verse 14?

4. What is the basis for Paul's instruction, according to verse 15?

5. Who will be the first to rise at the rapture, according to verse 15?

6. Describe the rapture and sequence of events from verses 16 & 17.

7. What is going to happen to those who are still alive at this time, according to verse 17?

8. If we are Christians, why is it that we should not be afraid of death? Read also 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 to help answer this question.

9. What verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons 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.