

Much of chapter 4 from 1st Thessalonians is, as it were, a question and answer time with Paul. Could you imagine having a Q & A with the Apostle Paul? For me that would have been exciting. Much of Paul's writings were to answer and correct and set forth right thought and behavior among the 1st century churches. Here, in 1st Thessalonians, he addresses two questions that the young church had. They were being misled by Judaizers and false teachers, who were wolves in sheep's clothing. Even though they called themselves brothers in Christ, they were out for their own gain and served the evil one. These agents of the evil one continue to found among us today. This is why we need to know the Word of God and hold fast to it. If one knows the eternal truth of God it is easy to spot the false. It seems from what Paul wrote, there was a growing tension among the members of the church. The first question had to do with brotherly love among the congregation. It is, however, the second question I want to delve into today: the resurrection of our Lord and our resurrection as well. The second question had to do with what happens to those who die before our Lord returns? This concern leads Paul to teach the church an overview concerning the second coming and the resurrection of the dead. These words from Paul are to be a wonderful encouragement for the church as Paul states in verse 18 after he explains what will happen in the future, **"Therefore encourage one another with these words."** This is the purpose of the message this morning; to encourage one another. As believers we can be discouraged by what we see and experience as we live in this fallen world. We may be discouraged by not being able to gather together during this pandemic. Before we continue in chapter 4 of 1st Thessalonians let me go back to what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 24, beginning in verse 4, for this is the

condition of the world we live in, “See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ **All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.** ⁹ Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Considering what is happening all around us, including this pandemic, Paul’s answer to the 1st century church is acutely relevant to us as well. Prompting the question, “Are these the birth pains of the coming tribulation?”

Paul understood the followers of Jesus as the Christ needed occasional reminders that God’s promises are true and will come to pass, just as we need reminding. We need to be reminded that our deceased loved ones, who also believed in Jesus, will share in the great reunion, as we all, come together to meet our King. None will be overlooked and none left out. Today, on this resurrection Sunday, I want to look at Christ’s resurrection and then at our resurrection as well.

First let me pray for our time in God’s Word.



Jesus’ Resurrection: Reason for Our Hope

Now that we have prepared our minds and hearts, please hear what God has for us today, reading 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, verses 13 to 18, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.” Amen!

The truth from this passage I want you to lock onto as we examine this passage is: *Upon Christ’s return true followers of Jesus will meet our Lord in the air, as He brings those who have fallen asleep with Him, and together, they will be with Jesus forevermore.*

All Scripture tells us who God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are and who we are through faith in Christ. Faith given by the grace of God, the Word of God and the indwelling of God as the Holy Spirit in each believer enables us to know beyond doubt that our future is secure in Christ. All people live in linear time called “history”. However, God who created everything from nothing is outside of time or history; therefore, in God’s eternal realm all that He promises is complete. This is why we can trust every word of the inspired and holy scriptures and this is why Paul encourages the believers in Thessalonica beginning in verses 13 and 14, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about

those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” Notice Paul’s pastoral concern as he truly loves and cares for the Church. He understood that they had misconceptions because of false teachers concerning the afterlife and their concern for their loved ones. He also knew this could hinder their spiritual growth, so he wants to move their thinking to be biblical. His desire is to teach them the truth about their loved ones who have gone on before them. As he instructs them and us, we begin to see the vital significance of the cross of Christ, His resurrection and His Second Coming. I love how the Apostle refers to the dead Christians that had gone on before them. He refers to them as those who are asleep, not dead. Their bodies have died and they are asleep to us. Now, he is not talking about the Catholic doctrine of soul sleep, where when the body dies, the soul sleeps until they are both raised at the resurrection. Which would omit those suffering in Purgatory. Paul is directing the Thessalonians to the fact that the dead and living will be brought together at the Parousia (πα-’rū-zē-ə), the word in the Greek meaning Christ’s Second Coming.

I think this is a big misconception for our Catholic friends; that the soul sleeps until the resurrection along with the biblically false teaching about Purgatory. These doctrines are false and wrong. The soul is not asleep at all. In fact, the souls of all believers are currently with Jesus Christ. To be clear, souls are not asleep, but the moment one takes their last mortal breath they are with their Lord for eternity. It does not get any clearer than Luke, chapter 23, verses 42 to 43, where the thief on the cross requested, ⁴² “ ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ ⁴³ And he said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.’ ” The Greek word translated as today mean this present day

or before this very day ends. So, Paul terms the state of the dead believers, not as dead but as asleep – asleep to the living, not to Christ. Why does Paul say he wants those young believers to understand this? As he says in the 2nd half of verse 13, “that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.” When our Christian loved ones pass away or fall asleep, as Paul writes, we do not need to grieve as the world of pagans grieve; they grieve because for eternity they have no hope. We can grieve at the death of believers, because we so dearly love them, but we grieve with hope. The saddest thing is when a believer has a loved one die who is an unbeliever – for there is truly no hope.

I want you to understand the conviction of this truth given to Paul by God. Paul knew Christ had given him a mission but he longed to be reunited with his Lord for eternity, a few years after penning his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5, verses 6 to 8, “So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” Paul is completely consistent in living his faith given by Christ. A few years after this letter Paul wrote in the opening of his letter to the believers in Philippi, in verses 21 to 23, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” We understand what Paul taught, is what he believed completely and this is what Paul wants us to believe and as Paul chose and as Joshua said in chapter 24, verses 14-15, I believe, and “as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” To this, I say Amen and amen!

I want to define what Christian hope really is. Christian hope is the result of Christian faith as Paul taught. It is also important to point out Paul states, that unbelievers, those who are without Christ, have no hope. As Paul taught in his letter to the Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 11 to 13, “Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, *where* called ‘the uncircumcision’ ... ¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ ... strangers to the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God in the world.** ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Christian hope is founded on the absolute belief and faith in what God has told us will happen – we believe God’s eternal truth. For God there is no time and no resistance to His will and plan for the salvation of those He chose before the beginning of time, His plans will come to pass. Christian hope believes the future will come about just as God said it would so strongly that we live in light of that belief. It is a hope that is sure and we know it by the faith God gives us by His grace. Not long after Paul wrote his letter to the Thessalonians a pagan philosopher sent a letter of condolence to a friend, stating the hopelessness of the lost world, *“Irene to ... Philo, take heart! I grieved and wept much over the departed as for Didymas. I did everything that was fitting, ... But, for all that, there is nothing that can be done in the face of such things. Therefore, comfort one another. Farewell.”* (Egyptian papyrus letter from 2nd century A.D., pages 145-146, Letter Writing in Greco/Roman Antiquity by Stanley K. Stowers) Unbelievers can offer each other comfort and there is some value to that. However, it is a comfort people give to each other for a short time, for it is a fleeting comfort when one has no eternal hope.

Paul gives us what we need to have – true eternal hope. The reason we can have hope in this world is because of the work of Christ; His death and resurrection are what bring us hope. Hear Paul’s statement again, in verse 14, “For since we

believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” Many scholars believe this to be an early church confessional statement. Much like the Apostle’s Creed which states 12 beliefs. Let me quickly review them with you.

1. *I believe in the God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:*
2. *And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord:*
3. *Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary:*
4. *Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried:*
5. *The third day he rose again from the dead:*
6. *He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty:*
7. *From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead:*
8. *I believe in the Holy Ghost:*
9. *I believe in the holy *[“Christian” church: the communion of saints:](#)*
 - *A common misunderstanding among evangelicals is the line that states, [“I believe in the holy catholic church.”](#) In this creed the word [“catholic”](#) means [“general, universal, concerning the whole”](#) and does not refer exclusively to the Roman Catholic Church. (To avoid the confusion some churches, say, [“holy Christian church.”](#) As I have done.)*
10. *The forgiveness of sins:*
11. *The resurrection of the body:*
12. *And the life everlasting. Amen.*

According to Paul orthodox belief leads to right views, right understanding and right living. We have hope because Christ died and has conquered death. The cross is Jesus paying our death sentence and the resurrection is God accepting payment on our behalf, as Romans 6:23 declares [“The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,”](#) Because Jesus knew no sin, death could not hold Jesus, he had complete authority over death and it had to let Him go. Just like our Lord rose from the grave, so too, because of the work of Christ, we will rise to be with Christ forever. We know this because verse 14 says,

when Jesus returns, “God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” The resurrection of Jesus is proof that there is the resurrection of all believers. Paul has so much confidence in Christ’s resurrection that he states this amazing conclusion; “even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”



My beloved, if we, as believers die before Jesus’ return, like the thief on the cross we are with Him and we will return with Him at the Parousia! Amazing!

Resurrection: Power of Hope

As we examine verses 15 and 16, I want you to notice how emphatic Paul is. Notice the authority he claims. Here is something he received directly from the Lord Jesus. Paul says, “For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Jesus told Paul specifically – as we read, “by a word from the Lord”.

My beloved, know this truth, our Christian loved ones will not be left behind when it comes to the future resurrection. In fact, Jesus is going to so care for His beloved who have fallen asleep, they will come to Him first and then He calls His living saints to meet Him in the air. In other words, by the original Greek we understand those who remain alive will have no advantage over those who are asleep.

Verse 16 reads, “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” I want to examine 3 things; 1) cry of

command, 2) voice of an archangel and 3) with the sound of the trumpet of God. I believe these 3 facts will strengthen our hope.

Cry of Command

The Lord gave Paul His Word directly for our encouragement and the Lord Himself will see to it His Word is fulfilled. Observe at the beginning of verse 16, “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command.” The Greek construction is very clear in this verse, the Lord shouts the command. When Jesus, Himself, descends He will give the command that the dead will obey. Perhaps the command is as He commanded Lazarus who was also asleep or dead, Come Forth! Whatever the command is, it will be so authoritative that every dead body belonging to God’s people will rise all at the same time all over the world. That will be an amazing sight.

Voice of an Archangel

Notice, there will also be the voice of the archangel - then, “the dead in Christ will rise first.” Here again is another example in the original language that means to be snatched or plucked out. So, strong is the language here it is intended to give us a picture of the command of Christ being so powerful that it is as if the command itself reaches into the graves and pulls our bodies and remakes them in an instant reuniting them with their souls. In our Lord’s royal Parousia or arrival, the Archangel gives this great announcement. Probably something to the effect similar to the announcing of the King’s presence, *King Jesus has arrived, come meet the King!* The point here is that this is no secret coming. Everyone on the planet will know. When Jesus returns, He will bring all those who have fallen asleep with Him and all those on earth will hear and see and believers will meet him in the air.

With the Sound of the Trumpet of God

Trumpets were not primarily musical instruments but used to make grand announcements. Here the trumpet of God will blast, announcing our Lord's return. In Joel 2 and Zephaniah 1, the trumpet of God is sounded to mark the Day of the Lord. This is why I connect this trumpet blast with the seventh trumpet in Revelation. Especially in light of 1 Corinthians chapter 15, where Paul specifically calls this trumpet the last trumpet. Paul makes several things clear for the Thessalonian believers who feared the worst for their deceased loved ones. First, they are not dead but it is more like their bodies are sleeping. Second, they no longer had to fear that their loved ones would be left behind but that in fact they would be first to rise to meet their King. Some see a contradiction here but I want to show you that there is none. I do not know if you have caught it or not, so here is where it seems to be, reading verse 14, ["even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ...¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."](#) How can the dead in Christ be brought with Jesus and be called to rise from the grave? Jesus is bringing the souls of those who died in the Lord with Him and He then calls from the bodies to rise. Then the souls and the resurrected bodies are reunited. I want to take us a little bit deeper today into the event of the second coming and the command of Christ to rise and to meet Him in the air. In so doing, I will share my personal view of the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. It has much to do with one Greek word and how Matthew and Paul use it. The word in the Greek is *Parousia*. If you study Christ's second coming you will no doubt run across this word. Books have been written about this word. It is not so much the

word but the meaning of the word that is important. It is the word used for the coming or visit of royalty. There are many different words that the New Testament writers could have used to refer to coming of Christ. They chose this word that is used for royalty. This is the coming or return of Jesus, King Jesus. In our text today, He is coming and bringing his people with him. Now, it was a very common practice when the king visited a city that all the people would go outside the city limits greeting the king and then escorting him into the city with great pomp and celebration.

We saw this when the people thought Jesus was an earthly conquering king entering Jerusalem to rule in Matthew chapter 21, verses 8 and 9, “[Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.](#) ⁹ [And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’](#)” But in today’s passage Jesus returns as King of kings. Traditionally, when a king came there would great celebrations, great feasts, there would speeches given to honor the king, and often a new era was inaugurated. King Jesus descends from heaven to earth bringing the souls of believers who have already died. Then those bodies are resurrected and instantly changed to glorified resurrection bodies, united with their souls and those who are still alive on earth are snatched up and all believers everywhere and throughout all history unite to greet our King and escort Him back to earth where Christ will set up His eternal kingdom. But while we wait our hope can and must be getting stronger. We worship King Jesus even though we have never physically seen Him. We fellowship with other believers, other saints, who are the King’s subjects while we wait. Waiting in our day has taken on a bad reputation. There are rooms designated for this; waiting rooms. No one likes a waiting room. But our waiting is

different. It really is not waiting like we might think but rather our waiting is a time of preparation. Are you prepared to meet the King? Most of the time when a preacher asks this question, he is referring to salvation, asking are you saved? While that is the first step, what I am referring to today is not initial salvation but are you as a born again saved Christian ready to meet the King? Let ask, “Have you prepared yourself?” Is your life about Jesus and His kingdom or are you still more concerned with the trivial kingdom of earth? Are you becoming more and more like the King of kings every day? Are you obeying the Kings edicts and commands? Does your life honor the King?



Parousia: Hope Complete

Parousia is the arrival or return of the royal King. Reading at verse 17, “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” We now arrive at the verse that includes all who are alive when Christ returns. After the resurrection of the dead then those who are still alive will also be changed in a blink of an eye and all of God’s people from Adam to the last one saved will all be caught up in the air to greet and escort our sovereign King back. The English phrase, caught up or what many call the rapture of the Church is taught here. This is from the root of the Greek word *Harpozo*, which has a flavor of wartime rescue by a righteous force. It is a very strong word, literally meaning that the command of our Lord which reverberates throughout the whole earth, by means of force Jesus snatches the dead out of their graves and snatches those who are alive up so powerfully and quickly that we, if we are alive, probably will not know what happened. King Jesus will victoriously overtake planet earth. So, what is the end result of all this amazing activity? The answer is, “we will always be with the Lord.” This brings us to the encouragement and peace of mind Paul wanted

believers to have. As our Lord said in John chapter 14 and he wanted us to possess until his return, reading at verse 25, **“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”**

What we must realize in this passage Paul’s goal is not to disclose everything there is about our Lord’s return. His goal is not to educate on the 2nd Coming in detail but to encourage the Thessalonians who had been told by false teachers that their Christian loved ones were going to miss out on the future hope and being with Christ. Paul’s goal is to straighten and encourage with truth that dealt with their struggles.

In closing, I ask our Lord to bless you and may you take His blessings and use them to bless others in His name. In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ, who was given to die for us, and for His sake, God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ. To these blessings and for the expected return we say, Come Lord Jesus, come! Until then - Lord may we prepare for Your coming and be found faithful and ready! Amen!