While We Wait - 1 Thessalonians Study | Sunday, November 15, 2026
Living in the hope of the Resurrection | 1 Thess. 4:13-18

I. Review and Intro

A. Last week Rory walked us through the first part of this chapter and we will be picking up right in the middle of the chapter where Rory left off. In review Rory did a great job of making it clear that Paul was concluding his letter via exhortation to live a godly life while we wait for the King to return.

1. Give yourself to the will of God - your sanctification
2. Strong emphasis abstaining from sexual immorality
3. Increase in brotherly love
4. Aspire to lead a quiet life through hard work, minding your own business, and conducting yourself in godliness to your fellow man

B. As we look at this section it is heavily focused on practical day-to-day kingdom living as we wait for its full arrival. This brings us to Paul's next subject when calling us to walk out our faith as we wait. What of our loved ones who have died as they waited for the return of Jesus? What of ourselves and our lives if we die before His coming?

1. As we have clearly laid out many times in our studies together, the resurrection of the dead is a fundamental Christian hope and belief that Paul clearly taught these new believers in Thessalonica. Paul is now going to give much more detail to the actual resurrection event itself.

II. Verse by Verse

A. <u>But I do not want you to be ignorant concerning those who have fallen asleep</u> (vs 13a) - The scriptures are clear that when this phrase “fallen asleep” or “sleep” when used in terms of death, it is talking about the death of the physical body only. It is never referring to the soul of the individual. There is an unbiblical doctrine that is taught in some circles today called “soul sleep”. This is absolutely unbiblical. The scriptures teach us that the soul of an individual who dies remains conscious but is disembodied.

B. <u>Lest you sorrow as others who have no hope</u> (vs 13b) - Every other religion in the world and in history has a belief in some form of afterlife existence. In every single instance that afterlife existence carries sorrow of permanent loss for the loved ones still living. The resurrection of the dead stands alone as the only belief that carries with it the hope of a total restoration of that which was lost. The sorrow of waiting for the resurrection of the dead is a temporary separation of a loved one unto restoration. Whereas the sorrow of all other religions is a permanent separation of a loved one into a totally different permanent reality.

C. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again (vs 14a) - The belief in the resurrection from the dead unto restoration is not just a promise that we believe will come to pass one day. It is a promise that HAS come to pass. (

D. God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus (vs 14b) - Jesus, who is fully God and rightfully called God forever, will bring with Him at His return the souls whose physical bodies lay sleeping in the dust of the earth. When our physical bodies sleep the sleep of death, we do it “in Jesus”, or in other words, we sleep in His promise of resurrection.

E. For this we say by the word of the Lord (vs 15a) - Paul wants to be clear here that what he is about to teach is not an impression derived from study of the scriptures. Nor was it taught to him by another man's study. Rather this teaching is straight from the mouth of Jesus to Paul.

F. We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (vs 15b) - This passage is well known as the pinnacle passage used to speak of the hope the living have for the rapture of the church. But please notice the context. This passage is about the hope that the living have in the resurrection of those who have fallen asleep. Paul now references this exact reality. Those who are still alive when Jesus comes will be carrying sorrow and grief for those who have fallen asleep in Jesus during their life. Paul is stirring up hope for the resurrection but not for themselves, but rather for their loved ones to be restored back to them through the promise of resurrection.

G. Will by no means proceed those who are asleep (vs 15c) - The hope of the resurrection is those who sleep first, the receiving of the promise of resurrection will happen to them first, then to those who are alive and remain.

H. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven (vs 16a) - Now Paul gives us how the entire fulfillment of the resurrection will happen practically in the future. The resurrection will happen when the Lord Himself descends from heaven.

I. With a shout, voice of an angel, and the trumpet of God (vs 16b) - This decension will not be a secret coming. Rather it will be announced to the earth with a worldwide shout heard by all. Then a voice of an archangel will be heard worldwide, and lastly, a trumpet will sound from heaven worldwide to all. At this time Jesus will descend from heaven with all the souls awaiting their resurrected body.

J. The dead in Christ will rise first (vs 16c) - Many view the rapture of the church and the resurrection of the dead to be two totally different events in time. They are clearly together and happen at the same time. However, it is good to point out that Paul makes it clear the dead rise first.

K. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them (vs. 17a) - Now comes the moment that many theologians call “the rapture of the church”. The word rapture is a form of the Greek word translated, “caught up”. It literally means to “snatch away with force”. Those who are alive and remain will then rise up into the air in their natural bodies and literally be changed in the air and their natural bodies will transform into supernatural resurrection bodies. (1 Cor. 15

L. To meet the Lord in the air (vs 17b) - This is a very important part of understanding why the church is raptured and why the dead and the church are going up into the air while Jesus is descending to the earth. The Greek word translated “to meet” here is apantesis, which is only used when speaking about going out of your city or home to greet and escort back a very important guest as a gesture of great honor.

M. Thus we will always be with the Lord (vs 17c) - Going beyond the comfort of being resurrected from the dead, given an eternal glorified incorruptible body, and being reunited with all our loved ones who have died. Paul now gives the ultimate statement or truth of the post-resurrected state. We will forever be with the Lord.

N. Comfort one another with these words (vs 18) - Now that we have been able to walk through this entire passage verse-by-verse, you can see how much comfort is here. What situation could you possibly experience where these verses do not bring you some measure of comfort and hope?

III. Summary

A. The context of this passage is not the rapture of the church but rather the resurrection, and specifically how the resurrection of the dead comforts us today and causes us to stay steady in the face of the trials and tribulation of this age.

B. There is a great day that all of heaven will announce to all of earth that the great King has finally come in all his glory and power. The immediacy of the power and life that he will bring when he comes will cause all those who have loved him in this age, whether they are dead or living, to burst into the fullness of life forevermore as they escort Him with honor and joy back to be reunited with His creation forever.