

Week 6

Day 1

Read **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** below three times and then follow the instructions:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For we say this to you by a word from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still 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. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1. Circle any words that seem important to you in this passage.
2. Put squares around the verbs (action words) in this passage.
3. Write down three questions that you have after reading this passage:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
4. What encourages you from this passage?
5. What challenges you from this passage?
6. What would you say is the main idea of this passage?
7. Choose a verse or group of verses that you will memorize this week. Write that verse or those verses below:

Day 2

The cape of the southern tip of Africa used to be called the Cape of Storms. Many vessels were beaten by the storms and disappeared forever in those treacherous waters. But then brave soldiers began to steer sturdier ships through the storms to the quieter waters on the eastern side of Africa. As more and more sailors made their way through the storms into the quiet waters on the other side, people began to think differently about the cape. In fact, they gave it a new name: the Cape of Good Hope. Just like the new name given to the cape, we can have a different perspective on death because of Jesus. Specifically we can talk about death as a passageway to hope . . . to a new and fuller life.

1. What immediately comes to mind when you think about death? What images or thoughts do you associate with death?

2. What similarities do you see between death and the illustration above?

Read **Psalm 116:15**.

The death of his faithful ones is valuable in the Lord's sight.

3. How would the death of a faithful one be valuable?

4. How does the concept of death as valuable or precious contrast with society's view of death?

Read **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**.

5. How does Paul refer to death in this passage? Why is that significant?

Sleep is just one of the metaphors that Paul uses in describing death. With each metaphor, Paul lessens the impact of death for a believer. For instance, saying death is simply a form of sleep is intended to make death a less intimidating foe. Death is permanent; sleep is temporary. Death is the end of life; sleep is the continuation of a life. Sleep is the recouping of strength and energy so that a person might go on in life.

Read 2 Timothy 4:6 to discover another metaphor Paul used for death.

“I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.”

Paul has spent the bulk of his life pouring it out like a drink offering for others. He has worked in the service of God for years. His life has been used up in ministering to others. Now, the time of his departure has arrived. That’s the beginning of another life. In this verse, Paul compares death to a journey.

The word departure is a fascinating one. It was used of the striking of a tent. When soldiers were planning to move to another location, they would take down the tent, pull up the stakes, and move on. The word used for that action is the word Paul uses here to describe his death.

Departure was also used for the untying of a boat from its mooring. The anchor would be lifted. The ropes were loosened. And the sailors would put out to sea and head for a distant shore. Before the great adventure of his new voyage, Paul looks back over his ministry of thirty years and says, it is time for a journey - a new adventure.

For a final picture of death in the New Testament, read John 14:1-4.

In this passage, death is compared to going home to a place meticulously prepared for us. Our new home will be a place inhabited by our Savior. I don’t know the layout of your house in glory - whether there will be an open floor plan or vaulted ceilings. What I do know is that it will be HOME.

6. Of the three metaphors of death (sleep, a journey, and going home), which of those three brings you the most comfort? Why?

7. Write down one truth you learned today.

Day 3

Paul was writing to the saints at Thessalonica, and they were confused, and the reason that they were confused is found in verse 13:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope.

In one verse, Paul mentions three significant problems: ignorance, sorrow, and hopelessness. So what did he fear had driven these believers to that point. Paul told these people at Thessalonica, "Jesus is coming, and we're going to see Him, and we're going to reign with Him in His kingdom." And they were all expecting the Lord to come at any moment. But in the interval, some of those people in the church died. And the loved ones were saying, "Oh, they missed it. They weren't here. They have missed the Second Coming of Jesus Christ." And Paul wrote what he wrote to put their hearts at ease and to tell them that even those who have died have not missed the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Their concern arose from miscommunication and unmet expectations.

1. Describe a time in your life when you were disappointed because someone or something did not live up to your expectations.

2. Describe a time in your life when you were disappointed because of miscommunication.

In fairness to the Thessalonians, Paul only had a few weeks with them to teach a lot of information. I have been pastoring FBC Goodlettsville for almost 13 years. In some ways, I feel that we have only scratched the surface of the depth on many biblical concepts. I cannot imagine only having 3 weeks. Also, they were confused by a topic that is not easy to grasp - the second coming of Christ.

3. What is a theological concept that is still difficult for you to understand?

4. What aspect(s) of the second coming of Christ do you find confusing?

In these verses, Paul quickly moves to assure them about the certainty of Christ's return. In the next two verses he gives reasons that we can be assured of the return of Jesus.

Read **1 Thessalonians 4:13-15**.

5. What are two reasons that Paul gives for the assurance of His coming?

Paul says that we can be assured of his return because:

1. We believe in the Gospel - if Jesus rose again, we can trust that He is coming back.
2. We have His word - Jesus said He is coming again.

Praise Be to God!

6. Write down one truth you learned today.

Day 4

Read **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**.

Verse 16 ought to take our breaths away: *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*

J. B. Phillips translates this verse, *"One word of command, one shout from the archangel, one blast from the trumpet of God and the Lord himself will come down from Heaven!"* His translation catches something of the vividness of Paul's words. This verse is the fullest description of the return of Jesus in the New Testament. Paul's main point is that none other than the Lord himself who will come. The end of the age is not to be ushered in by some intermediary, but by God himself. It is awe-inspiring.

R. G. Lee was a great preacher of the 20th century. When he talked about this verse of Scripture, he often told a story about a conversation he had with his mother as a child. Today, I want you to read that story as told by him and then think about Christ's return:

You know, my mother and I were very close. We lived on a very poor farm. It was so poor you couldn't raise an umbrella on it, much less a mortgage. One day, the family was in town, except for myself and my mother. We were sitting on the porch. She was in a rocking chair. I was down on the floor of that porch—just a lad with my head, my face, in my hands, my heels sticking up in the air. I looked over at my mother's hands, and they were timeworn and gnarled. I asked my mother a question.

"Mother, would you tell me the happiest day of your life?"

My mother said, "Well, Son. You've asked a hard question."

I waited for the answer. I thought maybe it would be the day when my dad, who was a tall six-footer with dark eyes, spoke to her, and told her of his undying love. But she didn't mention that. I thought maybe it might be the time over there by the garden gate when he looked at her and asked her to be his bride. But she didn't tell me that. I thought maybe it might have been that time over in the corner of the farm in that farmhouse when they became husband and wife, and lived that way for fifty years until God called my daddy home. But she didn't say that.

She said, "Son, you've asked a hard question. In the war between the North and the South, it brought heartache. It brought separation. It brought deprivation and tears. The only salt that we had was the salt that we scraped up from the smokehouse floor. The only tea that we had was tea that we made from sassafras. The only coffee that we had was from roasted corn. Those were hard days. The men were all off at war. I joined your grandmother and my mother; we ladies, we women, worked out in the fields. And your granddaddy was off at war."

Then she said, "Son, one day, the news came that Granddaddy Bennett was lost at war, that he had died. My daddy, your granddaddy, was dead. As a little girl, my mother was so important to me. I watched to see if my mama would cry. My mama didn't say much at all. She didn't cry except at night. I could hear her, and she would bury her face in the pillow and sob her heart out."

My mama continued with, "One day I was sitting on the porch with my mama in the cabin down by the old river road, and my mama was sitting there snapping and stringing beans. There was a figure that came walking down the river road; and my mother, your grandmother, said, 'Elizabeth, I declare, but

that man walks like your daddy.' Then, after a while, she said, 'Elizabeth, don't think it strange; but, honey, that man looks like your daddy.'

And I said, 'Now, Mama, Daddy's dead. They've told us Daddy is dead, and all the hoping and all the wishing can't bring him back.'

But after a while, she stood up and threw those beans all over that porch and said, 'Elizabeth, that's your daddy.'

She gathered up her skirt and began to run down the old river road. He was there. One arm was missing. The sleeve was pinned up. But I watched as he put that other arm around her and held her up close. And they cried, and they laughed, and they cried, and they laughed."

My mama said, "I ran as fast as my little girlish legs would take me, and I hugged my daddy around the knees. And I reached my hand up in that empty sleeve and felt that funny little knob, what was left of that arm." And then she said, "I think that was the happiest hour I ever knew."

My mother's happiest hour is but a small joy compared to seeing the face of Jesus Christ.

1. What is your first reaction to this story?
2. On another sheet of paper, draw an illustration of **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**.
3. Write down one truth you learned today.

Day 5

Read **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**.

1. According to vs. 18, what is the purpose of Paul's instruction in the letter about Christ's return?

Here is one of my favorite Peanuts comics:



2. How does this comic strip relate to **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**?

Paul's discussion of what will happen in the future was not an end, but only a means to an end. Knowledge of the future ought to shape and influence how we live in the present, even in the presence of death, and it is on this basis that the apostle exhorts and encourages the Thessalonians. He does not want them to be uninformed because he wants them to be comforted. His words are meant to strengthen faith and provide hope, and hope is the basis of encouragement.

We all struggle with our faith, with obedience and assurance. But we must not forget that we have been so influenced by the gospel that we live with a constant sense of hope. People without Christ have no real way to comfort one another about death. One person in Paul's time said, "Hopes are for the living; the dead have no hope." Only the gospel provides comfort for the living because the dead have hope in the coming of Jesus Christ.

Paul gives us four reasons to find comfort in the passage:

1. **Christ's Return** - The central figure in all of this is the Lord Himself. One of these days, He's going to stand up from His throne and step from the lofty lights of Heaven's splendor and begin His descent toward this earth. The Lord shall descend, and we will see Him as He comes in the glory of the Father with all of His holy angels.
2. **Our Resurrection** - Just as Christ rose with a new body, so shall the dead in Christ. In a moment, they will be reunited with their body. But this body will not be like the frail ones that we currently inhabit. Instead, it is the body for which we were designed - a glorified physical body.
3. **Mysterious Rapture** - First, the dead are raised, and then every living person, when Jesus Christ comes will be "caught up" with Jesus in the air. The word for caught up in this passage is the word from which we get the word rapture. This word in Scripture can be understood in a variety of ways. It means someone that is speedily taken away. The word describes being taken by force or moved to another place. Finally, this word can mean to rescue from danger. In some sense, all of those definitions work together to tell us of what is coming for the living - we shall be quickly taken by force and moved to a place where danger no longer exists in the presence of Jesus.
4. **Marvelous Reunion** - They were worried about their loved ones. They had sorrow about their loved ones. And what he says is this: "We are going to be caught up together. We're going to have a heavenly homecoming." All of us have lost someone close to us, people who died believing in Jesus, and they won't come home—not in this world. But there is a homecoming - We'll be caught up to meet them in the air.

One of my favorite renderings of this passage is a paraphrase from Eugene Peterson's Message translation. Here is how he interprets this passage:

And regarding the question, friends, that has come up about what happens to those already dead and buried, we don't want you in the dark any longer. First off, you must not carry on over them like people who have nothing to look forward to, as if the grave were the last word. Since Jesus died and broke loose from the grave, God will most certainly bring back to life those who died in Jesus.

And then this: We can tell you with complete confidence—we have the Master's word on it—that when the Master comes again to get us, those of us who are still alive will not get a jump on the dead and leave them behind. In actual fact, they'll be ahead of us. The Master himself will give the command. Archangel thunder! God's trumpet blast! He'll come down from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise—they'll go first. Then the rest of us who are still alive at the time will be caught up with them into the clouds to meet the Master. Oh, we'll be walking on air! And then there will be one huge family reunion in the sky. So reassure one another with these words.

3. What stands out to you in this paraphrase?

4. How does this version further your understanding of the passage?

5. Who are you looking forward to having a conversation with at the "huge family reunion in the sky"?

6. Write down one truth you learned today.