

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, says your God.”

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, says your God.” **Isaiah 40:1** Here, God is speaking through the Holy writer Isaiah and makes it known that his people are to be comforted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All the comforting assurances of the unconditioned Gospel should be declared in all its brilliance. Not

one gem of this set of sparkling jewels should be darkened or left uncovered for the burdened and sorrowing sinner who has been brought low by the law. The preacher that does not speak God's words (*words that would give full comfort to his people*) is a hireling and an unfaithful servant. "Comfort ye comfort ye..." It was not mere chance that Isaiah repeated the word "comfort". This holy writer wrote by inspiration of the Holy Ghost and it was the almighty God that wanted his people to be impressed with the comfort available to them. Christians should speak of God's comfort to one another.

When we experience reverses and are visited by troubles in this life and when all seems to forsake us - then a true friend comes to help by speaking words of encouragement. We would say of such a friend that he or she is a great comfort. Besides the Godly sorrow that every Christian has over sin, there is nothing in this life that weighs on one's heart and soul more than when death takes a close friend or relative. And it is then that all the condolences and comfort of friends and acquaintances cannot be compared to the comfort that our Savior gives. This comfort of our God is given to us in today's text. We are told by the apostle to comfort one another with these words. Calling upon the Holy Ghost to direct our hearts, let us learn from the words of our text:

The Christian's comfort when death takes our dear ones from this life

Our text says:

I – That they are asleep

II - Having died trusting in Jesus, they will arise and live in eternal bliss

III – We will be reunited with our dear ones and live with the Lord forever

I

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.”

Thessalonians 4:13 Certain Christians of Thessalonica had the false idea that those who die before the coming of the Lord will be at a disadvantage. The apostle Paul corrects them in their error and comforts them with the assurance that their departed dear ones are not separated from the Lord. These words of comfort addressed to the Thessalonians are meant for Christian congregations and individual Christians of all time. Therefore these words are addressed to you and me for comfort. Verse 13 is something that the Lord wants each and every one of us to know, namely, about those who have fallen asleep in the Lord. Throughout scripture the death of the believer is called a “*sleep*”. Speaking to the mourners of the twelve year old daughter of Jairus, our Savior said: **“The girl is not dead but asleep.”** **Matthew 9:24** When the tidings of the death of Lazarus reached Jesus, He said: **“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going**

there to wake him up.” John 11:11 The death of a Christian is also pictured in scripture as a blessed rest. We read in **Revelations 14:13,14:** “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”

Upon death, the soul of a believer immediately is with God and dwells with Christ in Paradise. Of this we are assured when Paul says in **Philippians 1:23:** “I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far...” This sleep of the believer does not mean the exclusion of a blessed enjoyment of God but rather it includes the enjoyment and bliss of being with God. Here are the words of Christ spoken to the believing, crucified prisoner hanging next to him on a cross: **“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:43** This passage leaves no doubt whatever of a blissful state for the soul after death.

When we put to rest a fellow Christian, our sorrow is not to be like that of the unbelievers who have no hope. This, however, does not mean that it is wrong to weep for the departed – that would be unnatural. We are told that Abraham wept for his departed wife, Sarah. Martha and Mary wept for their departed brother, Lazarus, and Jesus also wept at the grave of Lazarus. But our sorrow is not to be the sorrow of the unbelievers, who have no hope.

An unbeliever's sorrow is a hopeless and terrible state. For to them their friends and relatives die to be seen no more, there is a parting without hope of meeting again. But that is not to be the sorrow of a Christian. The Lord wants us to know that those who live a life in the Lord Jesus and die in this faith are asleep in the Lord and that even in death they are the Lord's. Just as a sick child is carried in its mother's arms until it falls asleep to wake again healthy and happy - so also, when death closes the eyes of one who believes in Christ - he or she will be in the hand and bosom of the Lord. This then is our comfort - the death of our dear one is like a gentle sleep from which there will be a glorious awakening.

There is also a warning implied in our text, namely, to those living who do not listen to the Word of God but turn away. This warning is for people whose affections and attentions are fastened to the things of this life and therefore live as though this world were their permanent home. Ever and again we Christians repeat to ourselves the fact that this world is not our home. We know that all of the material things we might own and trust at the present time will eventually be taken away. The person who considers the things of this fleeting life of more importance than the soul's needs may be duly warned now that without turning to Christ - one's death will be filled with terror.

If you find yourself becoming attached to the things of this life, if the amusements, sins and follies of this world attract you -

come away and turn to Christ before it is too late. Don't wait until tomorrow as tomorrow may be too late. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.

II

Just as sleep presupposes an awakening, so we are assured that those that have fallen asleep in Jesus will arise and live in eternal bliss. **“We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.” I Thessalonians 4:14-16**

Paul makes it very clear to the Thessalonian Christians that the living will have no preference to those that are asleep in Jesus. The living will not attain the blessed fellowship of Christ sooner than the dead, nor have precedence in blessedness. Just as surely as Jesus is raised from the dead, all his disciples who are asleep will rise in glory as well. To Paul there is an intimate connection between the resurrection of Christ and our own resurrection. He declares: **“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.” I Corinthians 15:13** It was for us that Christ died, and for us that he rose again. His death is our death and his resurrection is our

resurrection. Jesus is the head, and all believers are his members: **“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” I Corinthians 12:27** Remember that the faithful are members and friends of Christ. Christ would not have a quickened and glorified body that sits on the throne of heaven while the bodies of his faithful friends remain in the grave. Therefore when you sorrowfully close the eyes of a friend in death (*a friend who believes in Christ*) they will hear the voice of the Lord and open their eyes again to see the glory of Jesus.

On the Last Day the Lord himself will descend from the heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God - all who are in the grave will hear his voice and come forth. The sea will give up the dead who are in it, and all will arise no matter in what manner or what place they left this life. Those that are dead in Christ will rise first and to them this will be a day of exultant joy. Not only will the believers arise, but also the unbelievers. All will arise as Paul testifies when speaking to Felix about the resurrection: **“... I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.” Acts 24:15**

To the unbelievers this day will be a day of horror - for they will arise to shame and everlasting torment in hell. Today Christ calls men to himself through the means of his Gospel, but they may turn their backs upon it and refuse to listen. But not so on Judgment day, for on that day his call must be answered by all,

and all must obey. This call is irresistible. When the unbelievers hear the voice of the Lord so great will be their fright and terror on that day that they will begin to say to the mountains: **They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” Revelations 6:16-17**

During this life people may run away from God, but because of their rejection of the Gospel here in this life, on the Last Day they will not be able to run away but will be delivered to eternal disgrace, dishonor, and torment. Today Christ is offering to you salvation. Even now he extends to all people his powerful and merciful hand. Receive him as he now knocks at your door pleading for admission and do not be like the Jews of Jerusalem over whom Jesus wept because they would not accept him. Christ’s appeal should not be taken lightly. May our conversation be in heaven and like those of whom it is written: **“Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord. But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death.” Proverbs 8:34-36**



For those that remain faithful unto the end, eternity holds an immeasurable store of joy and happiness. **“After that, we who**

are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” I Thessalonians 4:17

The description is short, but unendingly rich in its comfort. There is a world of consolation and comfort in this short passage. Immediately after the Lord has called for the believers from their graves with glorified bodies, then the believers who are still living in the flesh will experience the power of Christ’s majesty in their own bodies. They will be caught up into the clouds to be reunited with their fellow believers and live and reign with Christ forever.

The bliss and happiness of heaven is so great that the human tongue and mortal pen cannot properly describe it. But this we know - that heaven is a definite place prepared for us. And in order that we may not despair in afflictions, God wants us to know that he desires to have every person with him to enjoy eternal bliss. Jesus wants us with him as he prayed to his Father in his great High Priestly Prayer found in **John 17:24: “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”**

The glories of heaven far surpass any comparison that a mortal mind can perceive - for heaven is an abode not built with hands and is eternal in the heavens. Scriptures tells us that there are many mansions which are great in their grandeur, magnificence and splendor. No wonder that the Holy writer says: **“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what**

God has prepared for those who love him” I Corinthians 2:9 All of this is no idle illusion for God, who cannot lie, says: **“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you.” John 14:2** But all this is not the greatest bliss of heaven for the greatest bliss will be to have intimate fellowship with Jesus, to be with him and our dear ones. Our earthly home would be empty were it not for the fact that our dear ones are there. So our heavenly home will have its greatest bliss in this that we will be in blessed fellowship with our dear Savior and our fellow Christians. The bliss of an eternity in heaven is not restricted to a select few, for every sinner through Christ has a right to this home in heaven.

This world that we live in now is but an inn, not permanent, but temporary. Here we are strangers and pilgrims but our permanent home awaits us in heaven. Many in this life may not be able to acquire a home of their own, but we know that in heaven we all have one prepared and waiting for us - but your soul must tear itself loose from the lusts of the world and look forward to heaven.

May Christ so govern our earthly pilgrimage that we may prepare ourselves for our eternal habitation.