

MEN'S END TIMES STUDY
Session 3 - I Thessalonians 4:14-5:11

In this selection of Scripture, the apostle Paul answers two distinct questions or distortions that the Thessalonian believers were experiencing concerning two different aspects of the end times. At the end of chapter 4 Paul discussed the fate of the dead in Christ because many in the church were unsure and unsettled that those who died before Christ's return might be lost forever and miss out on heaven. Then in chapter 5 Paul addressed the time of the Lord's return and teaches the correct attitude of faith in relation to Jesus' return.

I. The fate of the dead in Christ

A. [Read I Thessalonians 4:13-18]

1. Paul begins with the statement that he doesn't want them to be uninformed or ignorant concerning the fate of believers who have died. This phrase is a usual expression that what follows needs special attention - listen carefully as it is important.

2. The problem was that the Thessalonians concluded in some way that those who died before the second coming would miss the victories and glory of the Lord's return. They would fail to be a part of God's eternity in heaven.

a. It is interesting to note that we are not told how the Thessalonian believers came to this conclusion. There is no mention of false teachers. It appears that it was a sincere concern that arose in this church. As we will see, it may have come from the pagan environment the church grew up in. The ancient pagan faiths had no hope in an afterlife.

b. Paul is attempting to explain the truth and allow that truth to bring comfort to this young church body.

Q: What does Paul say will happen to those believers who have fallen asleep before the return of Christ? (*v.14 - Jesus will bring them back to earth with Him when He returns.*)

[I Thessalonians 5:23]

Q: How many "parts" are there of a person according to this verse and what are they? (*There are 3 parts: body, soul, and spirit. The physical body of man relates to the physical world, it is the natural or mortal body referred to last week in I Corinthians 15. The soul is our mind, our will and our emotions - our personality and character. The spirit of man is dead until he is born-again from above. Then his spirit is brought to life and that living spirit then can relate to God through the indwelling Holy Spirit.*)

[Ephesians 2:4-6]

Q: Where does this passage say believers are seated and when did this "seating" happen? (*v.6 - We were, in the past tense, seated with Christ in the heavenly places when we were saved from our transgressions. The tense of "raised" and "seated" in v.6 are both aorist which means the action happened in the past but the results of that action are ongoing.*)

The significance that we are seated goes back to the Old Testament practices of the

priests at the temple. There were no chairs for the priests because they were always busy offering sacrifices from sun up to sun down. A priest could only sit when their work was done and since it was never completed, they weren't allowed to sit while on duty. However, in Hebrews 8:1 & 10:12 (and other places) we are told that after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, He became our great high priest and sat down at the right hand of the Heavenly Father. In other words, His work for the redemption of mankind was complete. There is no further work necessary for the salvation of mankind other than the sacrifice He Himself accomplished. Now, what that means for our spirits is that when we come to Christ for salvation, since He has completed all the work necessary for our salvation and we have received His grace and forgiveness, our spirits are seated in heaven along with Christ. They have been made perfect (Hebrews 10:14) for all time those who are saved. Thus, there is no further work necessary for our salvation other than to believe and receive the Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead according to the Father's will.

Q: Which of the three parts of man is actually seated in heaven currently with Christ? (*Our spirits as our bodies are still on earth and our souls are united with our bodies until death when the soul leaves the realm of time and enters eternity to be with God.*)

3. "fall asleep" - this is an ancient figure of speech for death. It was used extensively by the Romans, Greeks and even Jesus. While it is interesting that the pagans used this metaphor for death, it is appropriate for Christians to use it considering our eventual resurrection. For Paul, death was not a state of unconscious repose but rather it meant that one was with Christ.

[Philippians 1:21-24] - Paul saw those who died as continuing their relationship with Christ, thus our souls are with the Lord when we die (just as Moses and Elijah did at the transfiguration).

4. Remember Paul's goal is to lift the spirits of the believers from their grief so that they don't grieve as those who have no hope (v.13) Relief for the Christian is related to what the future holds (v.14). Like last week in I Corinthians 15, just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so will all those who sleep in Him at His return. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees the sequel in all Christians being resurrected at His return.

5. Paul is not making this stuff up. V.15 he states that it is the Lord's own words here. The deal is that we don't see these words anywhere recorded in Scripture where Jesus is speaking. Thus, we know that this must have been a direct revelation to Paul or another contemporary prophet. In either sense, what he was saying was authoritative as it came from the Lord Himself.

Q: According to Paul in v.15 what is the order of the resurrection? (*Those who are dead in Christ shall be caught up with Christ before those who are still alive at His coming.*)

a. The first part of the prophetic statement describes what WILL NOT happen. "shall not proceed" in the Greek is a very strong double negative. By no means will it occur this way. What won't? Those who are still alive at Christ's second coming will not be called up to meet the

Lord before those who have fallen asleep and are in Christ. His main goal is to bring comfort to this church and do so by correcting a false notion they had picked up somewhere. This lets them know that those who died will actually be with Jesus first, before those who are still alive.

b. There was a strong belief that Christ's return was going to happen in their lifetimes - that it was immanent. Yet, after twenty centuries of waiting, we know that it wasn't immediate.

c. V.16 - the Lord Himself will descend from heaven when he returns to earth.

Q: According to v.16, what are the three events that happen to announce the Lord Jesus' return? (*a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God*)

1) The shout - this the only time in the New Testament this word is used. It was a military shout - such as an officer shouting a command. Christ is the Lord of hosts (angel armies) and He is returning as a Conquering King.

2) voice of the archangel. There is only one archangel named in the New Testament and that's Michael (Jude 9). The problem here is that there is no definite article in front of the word archangel which means it could be translated "an archangel" implying more than one of them.

3) The trumpet sounds (again). This one is the trumpet of God sounding which signals the return of the Lord to planet earth. This trumpet was a sign mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24 and again by Paul in I Corinthians 15.

d. The dead in Christ are raised first.

e. "THEN", the living Christians are caught up to meet Jesus and the other saints who had previously died. "shall be caught up" is future passive. Passive voice means that the subject is being acted upon and not doing the action itself. In other words, Christ will do the snatching up of the saints. We will have nothing to do with it but it will be all His power at work and in so doing we will be grabbed up to the sky with Him at His coming. This is the rapture.

Q: Where will we be caught up to meet Christ? (*v. 17 - The sky - in the clouds*).

[Acts 1:9-11] - Jesus will return in the same manner in which He left, in the clouds.

g. "and so" (v.17) Paul does not say in this passage whether believers go directly to heaven or down to earth all he does say here is that we remain with Jesus from this point on always. In fact, considering this truth, it really doesn't matter where we go from the clouds, as we will be with Jesus always from then on. This passage is describing a single event.

h. This section of truth was meant to bring comfort to the Thessalonians. Instead of wallowing in the doubt and fear and anxiety that come from wrong beliefs, they are to encourage each other by speaking this truth to those in doubt.

B. By looking at v.17 we can link this passage with **Matthew 24:29-31** and **I Corinthians 15:52**. They all three describe the second coming in slightly various ways to give us a fuller understanding of that day. The trumpet lets us know that this event, the second coming of Christ, will be a public event and is the same event described in Matthew 24 and I Corinthians 15. In fact, this will be the time when the believers will be glorified - their spirit, soul and new body united by God's power as Christ returns, which is what we studied last week in I Corinthians 15.

C. Notice that there are two questions this passage does not answer.

1. When will this happen? Still, no one knows. It will be even more apparent after reading the next section in chapter 5 that no one knows when the second coming will take place.

2. What happens to believers immediately following being caught up with Jesus in the air. Do they go to earth? Do they ascend to heaven? Do they stay in mid-air? The purpose of Paul writing this passage is to comfort believers with the truth. Thus, he ends his statement with believers will be with Christ forever. It doesn't really matter what they are physically, they are with the Lord from then on. This passage doesn't answer those other questions.

II. The time of the day of the Lord

A. [Read I Thessalonians 5:1-11]

1. While the subject shifts from the security of the dead in Christ to the day of the Lord, the two subjects are not totally unrelated.

a. The Thessalonians had received some instruction on the end times as noted by Paul's mention of the phrase, "you have no need of anything to be written to you." (v.1)

b. "times and epochs". What's interesting is that both of these words in the Greek are usually translated "time" into English.

1) The first word "chronos" means time in the sense of measuring time, like a clock or a calendar. It's the movement of elapsed time.

2) The second word "kairon" means fulfillment of time. It's when something that is supposed to happen actually happens. That's what is meant by this word. It's what happens in the time that is the emphasis of this word. It is often interpreted opportunity or season or right time. **Matthew 8:29** - the demons used this word to describe when their time would be up.

Galatians 4:4 to describe the fulness of time that led to Jesus's birth.

3) This was a figure of speech denoting that the Thessalonian believers had been taught the truth concerning the events of the last days and how these things would unfold.

2. V. 2 - the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. In other words the Lord's second coming could be compared to a thief coming in the night. The "in the night" doesn't appear anywhere else in the New Testament. The phrase "in the night" emphasizes the nature of Jesus' coming - it will catch those who aren't expecting it by surprise. While the coming of Jesus will be universally seen and experienced, the time of the arrival of Jesus will be a complete surprise.

3. Paul breaks the rest of this discussion down into two parts: the day of the Lord and the lost and the day of the Lord and the saved.

Q: What will the mantra of the lost be on the day of the Lord? (v.3 - *Peace and safety*)

a. The lost will be proclaiming "peace and safety" but the day will come as a total surprise to them. This surprise beginning has a two fold impact.

1) For those who are not in Christ, they are caught unprepared and the consequences are far from pleasant or welcome. Just as disaster overtakes the unsuspecting house owner when set upon by a thief, so catastrophe will overcome the living who are

spiritually lost.

2) The second impact will be that they will be priding themselves on their secure lifestyles. Peace and security. Yet as soon as these two qualities seem to hit their peak in the mind of the world, that's when it will be revealed that they aren't secure or at peace with God and destruction will come upon them suddenly. Then Paul goes on to describe it like a woman going into labor - she doesn't know when the pain will begin but when it does, there's nothing she can do about it. "they will in no way escape" - another double negative meaning it will be impossible for the lost to escape this judgment and wrath.

b. However, Paul is assured of a better ending for those in Christ, such as those believers at Thessalonica. Look at the word "but" at the beginning of v.4 - it's means a different course of action than what came before it.

1) Whereas before the word "night" was meant to describe when thieves do their work - the literal cover of night and the darkness it affords. Now he shifts the word to mean moral darkness such as wickedness and sin. In other words, Christians don't exist in moral darkness or sin. The day of the Lord will not overtake them as it will the lost. Christians are expecting the day of the Lord and will be delivered from it - as a man who knows when thief will strike will be delivered from being robbed.

2) V.5- the day is not referring to the day of the Lord but rather to a literal day where the light of the sun shines upon people. This gives us our identity. Christians have their existence in the light of Christ. **Matthew 5:14** - Believers are the light of the world. It is part of our identity in Christ. Thus, we don't belong in the darkness any longer. It's not who we are.

3) As a result of what is going to happen to the lost and who we are as believers, Paul warns the Thessalonians against a lifestyle of moral laxity. v.6 "let us not sleep" - don't adopt the same lifestyle as those who will be destroyed. It turns out that proper conduct of a saint is to remain alert. Inattention to spiritual priorities is utterly out of keeping for those who will escape the day of wrath. V.6 "sober" means to be self-controlled.

4) The activities of the night are opposed to the believer's activities. Those who are part of the night sleep at night (not alert or watchful) and they get drunk (not self-controlled) at night. Self-control is the last quality of the fruit of the Spirit and it is what is essential here in being prepared for the day of the Lord. The phrase "get drunk" (v.7) while it certainly could include getting drunk is really a metaphor for living immorally and in a state of laxness or spiritual inattention so that one is completely caught off guard when Jesus returns.

Q: How does one live this way or stay alert and sober according to v.8? (He equates three Christian qualities to pieces of a Roman soldier's armor. The three qualities that protect a believer are faith, love and hope. Self-control is a function of our relationship with Christ and our ability to maintain our faith in Christ, hope in Christ, and love for Christ. Faith is belief in what God says over what the world or our emotions say. As the world gets darker, the voices of the world will grow louder trying to drown out the Word of God. We've already seen in Matthew 24 how the love of many will grow cold in the last days. Hope is believing in God's promises even though we don't have them yet. Hope is a confident assurance that God will do as He has promised to do. It will be easy to live by sight in the last days and lose hope and become bitter about the promises of God, if one does not hold tightly to their love of Christ.)

c. The Christian is given assurance of guaranteed salvation in v.9. The "wrath"

mentioned here is specific and future. It is what is assured for the lost on the day of the Lord. Believers will not face this wrath. With this hope, the Thessalonians could rest in the truth rather than continue to be disturbed and agitated about what was to come.

1. The reason we can know salvation from God's wrath is due to the fact that Christ died for us (v.10). It doesn't matter what state our body is in when the day of the Lord occurs, we will live together with Him at that time. Jesus' death on the cross made this possible.

2. Lastly, since Paul had just reminded them what they had already been taught about the day of the Lord, they were to now encourage each other with these truths now.

Q: How do we encourage one another with these truths? In what way are they edifying? (*give time for responses*)

Clear teachings from I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

1. Jesus is coming back.
2. Those who are dead in Christ will be caught up in the air with Christ before those believers who are still alive when He returns.
3. The return of Christ will be a public event. It will be accompanied by a shout, a voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God.
4. When Christ returns believers will be caught up with Christ in the clouds and will remain with Him forever.
5. The world will be caught completely unaware when Christ returns. The saved, though they will not know when it will happen, will be prepared by living in the light of Christ.
6. God has not destined believers for wrath rather for obtaining salvation from God's wrath. It doesn't matter whether a believer is alive or dead at the time of Christ's return, they will be caught up with Jesus and live with Him.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?