

# Promised

The promised return of Christ gives believers hope when grieving.

## 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18



...SAL  
wake  
ch him.  
togeth-  
also ye do.

YOURSELVES  
brethren,<sup>13</sup> to know  
g you, and are over-  
dmonish you;  
them very highly in  
s sake.<sup>14</sup> And be at peace  
s.  
nortl you, brethren,<sup>15</sup> warn  
unruly,<sup>16</sup> comfort the feeble-  
support the weak,<sup>17</sup> be patient  
men.

that none render evil for evil unto  
an; but ever<sup>18</sup> follow that which is  
both among yourselves, and to all  
H.

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice evermore.  
<sup>17</sup> Pray without ceasing.  
<sup>18</sup> In every thing give thanks: for this  
is the will of God in Christ Jesus concern-  
ing you.

Quench not the Spirit.  
Despise not prophesyings.  
Prove all things;<sup>20</sup> hold fast that which  
is good.  
Abstain from all appearance of evil.

**FINAL EXHORTATIONS**  
<sup>23</sup> And<sup>24</sup> the very God of peace<sup>25</sup> sanctify  
you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit  
and soul and body<sup>26</sup> be preserved blameless  
unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Cor. 4:30 <sup>15</sup> 1 Cor. 14:30 <sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. 14:30 <sup>17</sup> 1 Cor. 14:30 <sup>18</sup> 1 Cor. 14:30 <sup>19</sup> 1 Cor. 14:30 <sup>20</sup> 1 Cor. 14:30 <sup>21</sup> 1 Cor. 14:30 <sup>22</sup> 1 Cor. 14:30 <sup>23</sup> 1 Cor. 14:30 <sup>24</sup> 1 Cor. 14:30 <sup>25</sup> 1 Cor. 14:30 <sup>26</sup> 1 Cor. 14:30

coming are caught up (Gk. *harpazo*) clouds to meet the Lord in the air. The term "rapture" is derived from *rap* in the modern state of Israel. Just before the day of the Lord when people think they have this peace, sudden destruction will Christians will be kept out of the hour of testing (Rev. 3:10) **5:10** See note at vv. 4-8.

99

**How would you describe the spirit of the last funeral you attended?  
Did most treat the death as a period or a comma?**

A period represents the ending of a subject matter or an event. A comma represents a temporary or slight pause and then a continuation of the subject or event. Paul was concerned about how the Thessalonian believers understood the death of loved ones. We need to see their passing as a comma and not the end, because of the hope we have in the promised return of Christ.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

While Paul gave the Thessalonians plenty of advice about day-to-day living in this world, he knew that the true hope of the gospel has nothing to do with this life. Therefore, he reminded them that Jesus would come back one day (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Apparently, either some were teaching false doctrine regarding the second coming, or the Thessalonians simply had not understood the teachings concerning the resurrection and the timing of the second coming that Paul had given while he was with them. It is likely that Paul was combating the false teaching that those who died would not be resurrected or would have to wait until after those living were resurrected.

Paul knew that without the truth of the future resurrection of all believers, followers of Jesus had no hope beyond this world. When death came to their friends and family members, they would have no reason to expect comfort in the midst of their grief. But they could take great comfort in knowing that Jesus was coming back. One day, they would be meeting the Messiah in the air. But for now, their day-to-day lives needed to reflect that confidence.

# 1 THESSALONIANS

## 4:13-18

**13** We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning **those who are asleep**<sup>A</sup>, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have **no hope**<sup>B</sup>. **14** For if we **believe**<sup>C</sup> that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, **through Jesus**<sup>D</sup>, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

**15** 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.

**16** 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. **17** 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**<sup>B</sup>, and so we will always be with the Lord. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.

### Passage Outline

Hope (1 Thess. 4:13-14)

Return (1 Thess. 4:15-16)

Reunion (1 Thess. 4:17-18)

### Key Words

- A. Verse 16 clarifies the asleep as "those who have died believing in Christ" (GNT).
- B. This special hope present in Christian grief goes beyond the experience of death. It is not based on present circumstances but on eternal truth.
- C. Belief is not the same as faith, as "even the demons believe" (Jas. 2:19). But belief must be present for the beginning of faith (Rom. 3:22).
- D. It is "through Jesus" that the opportunity for faith takes place, made possible by His death, burial, and resurrection, and it is through the resurrection of Jesus that believers will also be raised.
- E. Believers who are alive at the Lord's coming and those who have been resurrected will join the Lord "in the clouds," where God encounters or appears to humans (Matt. 17:5; Luke 9:34-35).

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

Paul, Silas, and Timothy wanted the Thessalonian believers to be informed about the return of Christ. A false teaching concerning those who had died would be devastating to members of the congregation who lost loved ones.

## How can inaccurate teachings about the return of Christ cause despair?

Paul provided a basis for the believers' hope in grief by pointing to the resurrection of Jesus. Verse 14 is a statement of belief—not a question of faith. The Greek word translated *if* can also mean *since*. Since the recipients believed in the resurrection of Christ, certain conclusions could be reached concerning their loved ones who had passed away.

## What does it look like to grieve with hope?

### KEY DOCTRINE: Last Things.

According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. (See Luke 27:27-28; Jude 14.)

Paul outlined the sequence of events at Christ's return. The first thing he addressed was the destiny of those *who are still alive* when Christ comes back. They will *not precede* those who *have fallen asleep*. Paul left no doubt—he emphatically stated that Jesus is coming back. The apostle explained how it will happen. *The Lord himself will descend from heaven*. This phrase is important in that it shows Christ's present location. Christ

resides in glory and is sitting at the right hand of the Father in power (Eph. 1:20-23). Paul revealed when He returns, those who have fallen asleep *in Christ* will be raised *first*, and those who are alive will then join Him.

## What does the inclusion of those believers who have died and those who are living at Christ's return tell us about His power and glory?

We find hope in verse 17 because Christ is coming back for His entire church.

## What word or phrase used by Paul in this part of his letter gives you the greatest hope? Explain.

Paul did not call the church at Thessalonica to be there for the grieving person merely in the moment, but rather to engage in an extended partnership with the grieving.

## Why is it important to continue to walk with people as they process their grief? What are the dangers of not doing so?

### BIBLE SKILL: Study other passages to get a deeper understanding of Christ's return.

Review the passages below and discover what each reveal about Christ's return. Compare and contrast them with what Paul shared in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Ask God to give you a fuller understanding of these events. (See Mark 13:1-27; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 1 Cor. 15:1-54; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Rev. 19-22.)

# APPLY THE TEXT

- The return of Jesus gives believers hope when grieving the death of another believer.
- Jesus will return in His full glory gathering all believers through the ages for eternity.
- The certainty of Christ's return should encourage believers when grieving.

**Reflect on the hope that comes through faith in Jesus. If you have not trusted Jesus, review the information on the inside front cover and discuss doing so with your leader. If you have trusted Jesus, take some time to thank Him for the hope of eternity.**

**Who do you know who is not a believer in Jesus? Commit to pray daily that they will come into a relationship with Him.**

**Share with each other times when you experienced the death of a loved one who was a believer. What specific and tangible actions can your group take this month to encourage each other?**

## Prayer Requests

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# DAILY EXPLORATION

## Day 1: False teachings create turmoil.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13, underlining the phrase “no hope.”**

The word *uninformed* in the original language shows that the believers lacked knowledge. This does not mean that Paul was dealing with a group of ignorant people. Instead, it shows that they simply did not know the truth. The language used here shows that Paul and his coworkers felt compassion for those who were grief stricken, and they sought to offer assurance and hope to the church. The second half of verse 13 shows Paul’s motivation for addressing this matter. The false teachers had created turmoil within the church by teaching that those who had recently passed away would miss out on the resurrection, and therefore believers would not be reunited with their loved ones. This was not true, and the missionaries were actively combating the false teaching with the truth of God. It is vital to understand what this passage is teaching and what it is not teaching. We clearly see here that we are not to grieve like those who are without hope. This passage, however, does not say believers should not grieve. When we have to say goodbye to a loved one who has a relationship with Jesus, it is perfectly normal and natural to feel grief. But we are to grieve with the hope of being able to see that loved one again.

**How have inaccurate teachings about the return of Christ caused you despair?**

## Day 2: We can grieve with hope.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 4:14, highlighting the verse.**

A key word in this verse is the word *believe*. To believe is not simply mental assent to information given. Instead, it is a definitive conclusion based on personal experience. We can walk up to a bridge and say we believe it will hold us, yet never walk across. If, however, we walk up to the same bridge and walk over it, our mental assent has reached a different level. We demonstrate our belief through our words and actions. The church at Thessalonica had not simply believed in hearsay passed down from one generation to the next. Instead, they had personally experienced the power of Jesus in the midst of difficult circumstances, and they had found His grace to be sufficient. Paul was leading them back to this point and pushing them in their faith journey. He wanted them to see that Christ had defeated death, and thus He would not abandon their loved ones to an eternal death. Because Christ has defeated death, believers need not grieve as those without hope.

**What does it look like to grieve with hope?**

### Day 3: Jesus will return.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16, identifying what will happen when Jesus returns.**

Paul used the word *asleep* as a euphemism for death. This is significant, since sleep is not final but temporary. Jesus likewise spoke of death as sleep. (See Mark 5:39; John 11:11-14.) The phrase translated *certainly not* represents a strong negative, emphasizing the impossibility of a situation. The Thessalonians could know without a doubt that the dead in Christ will participate in the second coming, and the living would have no advantage. The next piece of hopeful information is that all will know when Christ returns. When Jesus returns, no one will have to wonder if it happened or not. We are all going to know. Paul noted that three loud sounds will accompany Christ's return. First, He will come with a shout. The Greek word here is a military term relating to a loud command. The next two noises mentioned—the *archangel's voice* and *the trumpet of God*—are closely associated with the shout. It is possible that the terms are synonymous, and that the voice and trumpet serve to explain the shout. However, the Greek wording also allows for three separate events taking place at roughly the same time. Whatever the case, this will not be a secret event. Paul revealed when Jesus returns, those who have *fallen asleep* in Christ will be raised *first*, and those who are alive will then join Him. As the apostle noted in verse 15, believers who are living at the time will not have an advantage.

**What does the inclusion of those believers who have died and those who are living at Christ's return tell you about His power and glory?**

### Day 4: All who are truly in Christ will be reunited with Him.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 4:17, noticing when we will be with the Lord.**

This verse is written to indicate that all who are truly in Christ will participate in this experience. The apostle did not distinguish between rich and poor, powerful and weak, white collar and blue collar. He simply stated that those who are in Christ will *be caught up together with them in the clouds*. In the Old Testament, clouds often signified the presence and glory of God (Ex. 19:16). Jesus Himself associated His return with clouds (Mark 13:26), just as He ascended into a cloud when going back to the Father (Acts 1:9). The reunion that Paul described is permanent and without end: *we will always be with the Lord*. Believers in the church at Thessalonica were grieving over the passing of their loved ones. We too feel the same grief when our loved ones pass away. We long to reconnect and see them. If we are in Christ and our loved ones died in Christ, then the reconnection will take place, and according to God's Word it will be without end.

**What word or phrase used by Paul in this part of his letter gives you the greatest hope? Explain.**



## Day 5: Walk with those who grieve.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 4:18, noting Paul's command.**

Paul expected the Thessalonian believers to live this command out immediately and continually. We need to understand the meaning of the word *encourage* in order to effectively live out this command. To encourage in the original language means to come alongside another—to develop a bond or partnership with another. The passing of a close loved one, whether a spouse, parent, or child, changes us. Others grieve with us in the moment, but they return to their normal lives in a few days. The one who remains, however, is faced with a new normal. It is this grieving person who needs encouragement. It is this grieving person who needs an encourager to walk with them and uphold them when the pain seems unbearable. Paul did not call the church at Thessalonica to be there merely in the moment, but rather to engage in an extended partnership with the grieving.

**Why is it important to continue to walk with people as they process their grief? What are the dangers of not doing so?**

## TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 1 Thessalonians 4, sharing with the other members of your Bible study group.

**What does describing believers as being asleep vs. dead convey?**

**How does the descriptive nature of Christ's return create anticipation and excitement?**

**How can understanding biblical truth on the return of Christ help you comfort mourning believers?**

