

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

What About the Dead?

I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

1 What about the state of the dead? When you breath your last breath in this life, what happens then?

The thinking in ancient culture was dominated by Greek philosophy. 2 Catulius said, “Suns may set and may return; we, when our brief life wanes, have eternal life to sleep.” 3 Lucretius said, “None ever wake again whom the cold pause of life has overtaken.”

Here was the situation in the predominately Gentile (people from a non-Jewish background) church in Thessalonica. These new Christians, raised in this philosophical thinking, didn’t know if their dead would participate in the eternal life Lord Jesus would give when He returned!

The lessons in our scripture today will also answer questions for us. 4 In the classic movie “It’s a Wonderful Life”, Clarence, the angel, was pictured as the spirit of a dead person trying to earn his wings. Other movies followed implying the same thing. Many, in our age, think that is how God gets angels. 5

Martha Williamson, the creator of the TV series “Touched by an Angel”, had to exclaim, “Angels are not recycled dead people.”

I believe that ghosts, if they really exist, are not spirits of the dead, but demons.

So, what about the dead? ⁶

The first part of our passage today answers the question . . .

I. What About Those Who Are Asleep in Christ? – 4:13-18

What about those who are asleep in Christ? ⁷ From First Thessalonians, chapter 4, verses 13 through 18, we read, **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.^{1 8}

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 together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.^{2 9}

The first thing this scripture tells us is **those who die are considered to be asleep**. Verse 13 says, **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.**¹⁰

¹ | Thessalonians 4:13-15.

² | Thessalonians 4:16-18.

First Corinthians, chapter 15, verse 51,³ describes the dead in Christ as asleep until the Second Coming takes place.¹¹

When Stephen was being stoned to death, he **fell asleep**.^{4 12}

If God raised Jesus from the dead, He can also wake you up!

So there's no reason to be sorrowful about those who die in Christ because they are in a different situation than non-Christians who have no hope!¹³

Second, **those who die as Christians will be with Jesus**. Verse 14, **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**.¹⁴

³ 1 Corinthians 15:51 - Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.

⁴ Acts 7:60 - Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

The logical conclusion, then, is, **We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.**⁵

When you die are you immediately with the Lord? If our earthly life is wrapped up in time and eternal life is timeless, maybe so!

Picture this. Time is like being in a giant terrarium. The beginning of time is at one end and the end of time is at the other. You and I are living in time somewhere in that terrarium. God, and the heavenly hosts, are outside the terrarium (in timelessness) looking in at us. They can see anywhere in time simultaneously. God can say to a prophet that something is going to happen in the future. The angels can pop into time at will to produce certain outcomes. God could step into a human life; teach us how to live a godly life; live it personally to demonstrate how it's done; die on a cross to redeem

⁵ II Corinthians 5:8.

us and, then, resurrect Himself. He could, then, step back out of time into the eternal realm.

So, maybe Martha Williamson was right in “Touched by An Angel”. A person dies. Andrew, this young hansom Mississippi gentleman, walks into the room, smiles and takes the deceased person by the hand. The door to heaven opens and, together, they walk through the clouds into eternity. To **be away from the body** is to be **home with the Lord!** ¹⁵

Third, **what will those who die in the Lord experience on “that day”?** Verses 15 through 17 tell us, **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 together with them**

in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.¹⁶

Notice verse 16, the Lord will **come in person**. No substitutes.¹⁷ He will **shout a commend**.¹⁸ The Archangel Michael⁶ will call the angels to **gather up Christians**.¹⁹ The dead in Christ will **rise**⁷ first.²⁰

Then, in verse 17, The living and the dead in Christ will be **caught up together to be with the Lord**.²¹

The phrase **with them** suggests a joyous reunion.²²

One will be taken and another left.⁸ In the “A Thief in the Night” movie series, they dramatically depict the biblical account of non-believers being left behind. How would you feel if your family were taken and you were left behind?²³

Verse 17 continues with the fact that those who are taken **will be with the Lord forever!**²⁴

⁶ Jude 9 - But even the archangel Michael . . .

⁷ ἀνίστημι = to stand up.

⁸ Matthew 24:40-41 - Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

The second part of the message today answers the question . . .

II. What About Those Who Are Asleep in Darkness? – 5:1-11

What about those who are asleep in darkness? ²⁵

From First Thessalonians, chapter 5, verses 1 through 11, we read, **Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.**

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But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-

⁹ | Thessalonians 5:1-3.

controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ¹⁰ ₂₇

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. ¹¹ ₂₈

Verse 3 tells us that **they will live as though they had no concern about the Lord returning.** ₂₉

What will **the destruction will come** be like? ₃₀ **It will be like a burglar coming at night; unexpectedly.** ₃₁

It would be like the flood coming during Noah's time. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being

¹⁰ | Thessalonians 5:4-8.

¹¹ | Thessalonians 5:9-11.

given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. ¹² ₃₂

It would be like the end of the foolish farmer's life. Luke, chapter 12, verses 19 and 20 tell us, **And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."** **"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'** ₃₃

There will be no escape! ¹³ The Lord doesn't want this to happen to them! ₃₄

So what is the Lord's appeal to those living in darkness? ₃₅

Verse 4; **don't be unprepared** when **that day** comes like a thief. ₃₆

Verse 6; **don't be asleep** to spiritual things. ₃₇ A horse can doze off by standing up. A hippopotamus can sleep while he's floating in the water. Bats sleep by

¹² Luke 17:27.

¹³ I Thessalonians 5:3.

hanging by their feet. A desert shrew sleeps with his eyes wide open. You can be asleep spiritually and yet still be awake physically by just daydreaming your way through life.

Don't let that day, like a thief, **rob you of your life**. Lord Jesus firmly stated, **For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.** ¹⁴ ₃₈

Verse 5; **be exposed to the light and the day**. Have you ever used solar lights along your walkway? They are exposed to the light during the day first, then light up your pathway at night. ₃₉

Verse 6; **be alert and self-controlled**. ₄₀

Verse 8; **be wearing your breastplate and your helmet**. Here the breastplate of your life should be **faith and love**. ₄₁ Your helmet is **the hope of salvation**. ₄₂

Verse 9; **be confident that the Lord's desire is to give you salvation, not wrath!** ₄₃

¹⁴ Luke 9:24.

The God Who created you loves you just like a father loves his children. Embed in your memory the golden text of the Bible, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Surrender to God's Lordship today so that when you pass from this life you will be in Christ instead of in the darkness!

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