

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT; 1 THESS. 4:13-18 (Ed O'Leary)

INTRODUCTION.

OUR CHURCH HAS GONE THROUGH A LOT IN THE PAST FEW YEARS WHEN IT COMES to home-goings.

▶▶ And some of us have seen loved ones go home to be with the Lord who were not a part of our congregation.

▷▷ So I thought that in the light of the most recent home-going, ~ our brother Wayne's, ~ we should kind of pause, ~ catch our breath, ~ 77

↪↪ and look at a word of encouragement from our gracious Lord on this matter of the death of believers.

→→ Philippians on hold and turn to [1 Thess. 4:13-18](#)

THE CHURCH IN THESSALONICA HAD QUESTIONS FOR PAUL ABOUT THOSE WHO DIE prior to the return of Christ.

▶▶ In Paul's discussions, ~ the emphasis seems to have been on the imminence of Jesus' return. ~~ Their concern was the role of dead believers at His second advent.

▷▷ What would be the lot of such? ~~ Would death rob them of participation in the Grand Event?

▶▶ So Paul instructed them in this matter.

▷▷ He told them that, ~ on the contrary, ~ believers who die prior to the return of Jesus are to share fully in the glories of that day.

▶▶ And in Paul's instruction to these believers, ~ 77

▷▷ Paul gives us a wealth of encouraging information and teaching regarding the death of believers and the believers who have to say good-bye to them.

↪↪ And that is what we're going to focus on this morning.

→→ The plan is to just read through the passage, ~ making observations about the death of believers and the believers who have to say good-bye to them.

SO LET'S DIG IN. 77 1/7

VERSE 13

THE WORD "ASLEEP" IS A FIGURE OF SPEECH USED IN THE NT TO REFER to believers who have died.

▶▶ Though unbelievers in Paul's day used "sleep" as a metaphor for "death", ~ it would obviously not have the same implications.

▶▶ This is not "soul sleep," ~ where our souls are sleeping. ~~ Unbiblical. ~~ Next week

▷▷ At this point, ~ I'll just say this. ~~ After death a believer is not unconscious. ~~ Believers are very much conscious in Jesus' presence. ~~ **Elijah and Moses**

THE WORD "SLEEPING" IS A GREAT WORD PICTURE.

▶▶ In life, ~ when we are sleeping, ~ we're still alive, ~ aren't we? ~~ Well, ~ the same is true for believers who die. ~~ They are very much alive, ~ more alive than ever.

▷▷ In Ex. 3:6, ~ God said to Moses, ~ "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." ~~ Not "I was."

▷▷ And in Jn. 8:56, ~ Jesus said, ~ "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

▶▶ Also, ~ in life when we are sleeping, ~ we don't cease to exist.

▷▷ Well, ~ the same is true of anyone who dies, ~ believer or unbeliever. ~~ They don't cease to exist.

↪↪ But there is a big difference in destination for them.

→→ At death, ~ the believer goes straight to be with Jesus, ~ and will eventually spend a glorious eternity on the new earth.

→→ In contrast, ~ the unbeliever goes straight to hell, ~ and eventually will be sent to the lake of fire.

▷▷ So our brothers and sisters who have gone home before us, ~ still exist. ~~ We just can't see them or be with them at this time.

▶▶ Furthermore, ~ in life sleep speaks of something temporary. ~~ We sleep only a certain number of hours and then wake up. **↪↪ 2/7**

▷▷ Similarly, ~ the separation of our spirits from our bodies at death is only temporary.
~~ We're going to get them back at the resurrection.

▷▷ Only with a huge difference. ~~ At the resurrection, ~ our bodies will be new and improved models.

↪↪ Paul explains in [1 Cor. 15:35-44](#)

CONTINUING IN VERSE 13, ~ PAUL SAYS, ~ "THAT YOU MAY NOT GRIEVE AS OTHERS do who have no hope."

▶▶ Notice that Paul does not put a period after the word "grieve." ~~ This is extremely important to notice.

▷▷ He does not say, ~ "that you may not grieve (period)" ~~ Or, ~ "you're not supposed to."

▷▷ And Paul does not belittle their sorrow. ~~ He doesn't say, ~ "You are Christians, ~ so you have no business grieving, ~ what's the matter with you?"

▷▷ Of course we grieve. ~~ Of course we have sorrow when a believing loved one goes home to be with the Lord.

▷▷ Jesus grieved

▷▷ And as we'll see later in [Philippians](#), ~ Paul told the [Philippians](#) that he would have had "sorrow upon sorrow" had their messenger and his coworker [Epaphroditus](#) died.

▶▶ What' Paul's point then? ~~ Well, ~ his point is that we don't grieve in the same way unbelievers do. ~~ That's who "others" refers to in [verse 13](#).

▶▶ Both believers and unbelievers rightly express grief at the loss of a loved one. ~~ The distinction that is highlighted in [verse 13](#) is that the unbeliever has "no hope."

▷▷ "no hope" could be the inscription on every unbeliever's tombstone.

▶▶ Believers have the confident expectation of reunion with the believers who have gone before us, ~ of resurrection, ~ of a glorious eternity spent in the fellowship and presence of Jesus, ~ !!

▷▷ and of "an inheritance that can never perish, ~ spoil, ~ or fade."

↪↪ Unbelievers don't. !! 3/7

▶▶ Believers will therefore still have sorrow at the death of a fellow believer, ~ because our fellowship with them has been interrupted.

▷▷ But our hope alleviates and transforms our grief, ~ because one day our fellowship will be restored.

↪↪ Death's sting is removed from our grief, ~ because the temporary separation of death will yield to the eternal fellowship of the Lord's people.

AT THIS TIME I WOULD LIKE TO CALL OUR ATTENTION TO VERSE 14

THREE OBSERVATIONS HERE.

▶▶ 1st, ~ Paul notes that "Jesus died and rose again." ~ Believers can have a confident expectation of resurrection because of what happened to Jesus.

▷▷ Because Jesus died and was raised to life again, ~ believers can have absolute trust that we too will be raised, ~ and that our brothers and sisters who have died will also be raised.

▷▷ The guarantee of our resurrection is Jesus's resurrection. ~ Jesus' resurrection guarantees that we will be raised from the dead and will receive our resurrection bodies.

▷▷ In Jn. 14:19, ~ while speaking to the disciples on the night of His arrest, ~ Jesus said, ~ "Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live."

↪↪ Let's break this down. ~ "Yet a little while and the world will see me no more," ~ His death. ~ "but you [i.e., ~ the disciples] will see me," ~ His resurrection.

→→ Then He states the implications for all believers. ~ "Because I live, ~ you also will live."

▷▷ Without Jesus' resurrection, ~ we would have a dead hope.

↪↪ As Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:19, ~ "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."

▷▷ But Jesus has been raised from the dead. ~ And through His resurrection believers have "a living hope" as Peter puts it in his first epistle.

▶▶ The 2nd obs. from verse 14. ~ Phrase "through Jesus" reminds us that it is only because of what Jesus has done that made our hope a reality. ~ Eph. 2:8-10 ↵ 4/7

▶▶ The 3rd observation from [verse 14](#).

▷▷ Believers who have died are presently with the Lord.

▷▷ More next week ~~ Just say this. ~~ They are not forgotten. ~~ Not lost. ~~ They are with Jesus.

▷▷ And when Jesus returns, ~ they will accompany Him.

▷▷ They won't miss out on anything. ~~ All of us, ~ believers, ~ will participate in that grand event. ~~ If Jesus were to come back this afternoon

▷▷ And this truth should certainly alleviate and transform our sorrow when a believing loved one goes home to be with the Lord.

NOW LET'S LOOK AT VERSES 15-17

IN VERSE 15a, ~ PAUL INDICATES THAT THE TEACHING HE OFFERS IS BASED ON THE authority of Jesus himself.

▶▶ "we declare to you by a word from the Lord."

▶▶ This may refer to Jesus' teaching about his return, ~ particularly His assurance that at his coming he will gather together all of his people

▷▷ Mk. 13:26-27, ~ "26 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven."

▶▶ The point we want to highlight here is that Paul's teaching is not made up of his opinions or uninformed speculations.

▷▷ What Paul is speaking is the absolute truth. ~~ It comes from Jesus Himself.

↪↪ As Peter says in 2 Pet. 1:20-21, ~ "NIV ~ 20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

▷▷ (Display 1 Thess. 4:15-17) ~ My brothers & sisters, ~ 15-17

IN VERSES 16-17, ~ PAUL DESCRIBES THE ORDER OF RESURRECTION. ↵↵ 5/7

▶▶ Believers who have died are raised first, ~ then believers who are alive at the time of Jesus' return.

▶▶ In [1 Cor. 15:51-53](#), ~ Paul elaborates on this

IN VERSE 17, ~ PAUL TELLS US THAT THERE WILL BE A GREAT REUNION.

▶▶ If the Lord tarries and does not return in our lifetime, ~ then we will be reunited at our death with those who have gone before us.

▶▶ The generation of believers still alive when Jesus returns will at that time be reunited with those who have gone home before them.

▶▶ But either way, ~ we will be reunited with those who have been called home before us.

▶▶ And in that we can rejoice. ~~ A glorious reunion awaits us.

BUT EVEN MORE GLORIOUS IS WHAT PAUL SAYS AT THE END OF VERSE 17.

▶▶ "and so we will always be with the Lord."

▶▶ "we," ~ i.e., ~ all believers "will always be with the Lord."

▷▷ All believers will make it across the finish line. ~~ No one who has confessed . . . ~ will be lost.

▷▷ In [Jn. 6:39](#), ~ Jesus said, ~ **NIV** ~ "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day."

▷▷ Remember what Paul said in [Phil. 1:6](#)?

↪↪ "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

▷▷ My brothers and sisters in Christ, ~ no matter what we go through, ~ no matter what happens to us in this life, ~ **77**

↪↪ the outcome will be the same, ~ we will cross the finish line and enter into our Lord's presence.

▶▶ (Display verse 17) ~ "and so every believer will always be with the Lord."

▷▷ And Jesus desires us to be with Him. **11 6/7**

▷▷Jn. 17:24. ~~ "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world."

▷▷Every believer longs to be in the presence of Jesus.

↪↪How comforting and encouraging to know that Jesus desires us to be in His presence.

→→And we will be forever.

CONCLUSION.

WE CLOSE WITH VERSE 18

▶▶It is my prayer that we all have been encouraged by this passage this morning.

LET'S PRAY 7/7