# The Coming of the Lord

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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*Strong & Ready! (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)*

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**livinghopechurch.net**

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 4. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “The Coming of the Lord.”

“The apostolic church thought more about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ than about death and heaven. The early Christians were looking, not for a cleft in the ground called a grave but for an opening in the sky called Glory.”

- **Alexander MacLaren**

**Reading of Holy Scripture**

**1 Thess. 4:13-18**, “But we do not want you to be **uninformed**, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you **may not grieve** as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore **encourage** one another with these words.”

**Errors in the Church due to Ignorance**

The errors that troubled them probably included: the thought that only those believers who were alive at the second coming of Christ would be saved, that their dead brethren would not shine in glory, and that they would not receive new glorified bodies.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**The Encouragement of God’s Word**

Paul says, “Don’t be uniformed.” Don’t be ignorant. Paul clearly reveals that their **grief** and **hopelessness** was the direct result of their failure to understand death from God’s perspective. **Theological ignorance invariably leads to confusion, worry, and frustration.** Think of all the sleepless nights and restless days we can avoid if only we learn to view every circumstance through the lenses of God’s Word.

Fortunately, however, the passage ends on a much better note than it begins. When we jump ahead to verse 18, the picture is much more hopeful. Paul concludes with this admonition: “Therefore **encourage** one another with these words” (4:18; emphasis added). Do you see the connection between their encouragement and the exposition of God’s Word? The passage begins with confusion, hopelessness, and grief but ends with understanding and encouragement.[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. We have **Hope** from God’s Word, vs.13.

**1 Thess. 4:13**, “But we do not want you to be **uninformed**, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you **may not grieve** as others do who have no hope.”

**The Secret Ingredient to Life: Hope**

Ignorance of the truth causes anxiety. Since the Thessalonians had heard and believed the gospel, some of their fellow Christians had died and they were concerned about their eternal safety. As a result, they were in danger of grieving like pagans who have no hope of a bodily resurrection to eternal life. Paul contrasts the black despair of death that accompanies the mourning of pagans with the glorious Christian hope. In death, pagans embrace hopelessness, because as far as they are concerned death is the end and there is nothing beyond; whereas Christians, although they grieve over their departed loved ones, grieve in the hope of a better and more glorious future for them.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Death is Difficult**

Death is difficult and devastating. I just came back from Pennsylvania. It was there as college student that three Christian ladies from Child Evangelism Fellowship helped me to learn Christian character, became spiritual mothers to me, and helped pay my way through school. In the last two months, two of these three ladies has died, and the third is 92 years old.

We grieve for those we lose. When I was 15 (Jan. 1, 1990) I lost my mother to a massive heart attack. She was 49 years old. I still grieve for her and miss her to this day.

But we do not grieve as the world grieves. We have hope! Leon Morris says in his commentary on this text:

“For Christians death is no longer that adversary whom no person can resist, that tyrant who brings all worthwhile existence to a horribly final end. Death has been overcome by the risen Lord, and that has transformed the whole situation for those who are in Him.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. We have **Life** beyond Death, vs.14.

**Hope: Not Even Death Severs our Union with Christ**

**1 Thess. 4:14**, “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”

The logical conclusion of the death and resurrection of Jesus is that all those who believe in him, whether dead or alive, will rise again to eternal life. The Thessalonians had to realize that not even death severs the union of a believer with Christ, which is the foundation of the Christian’s hope: ‘Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep’ (1 Cor. 15:20).[[5]](#footnote-5)

Isn’t it amazing that not even death can separate us from the love of Christ? “Death is swallowed up in victory!”

**Romans 8:37-39**, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

**Never Get Over the Death and Resurrection of Christ**

**1 Thess. 4:14**, “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” Because I know my sins are propitiated for, I have no fear. God has accepted Christ’s sacrifice, and He has been raised from the dead!

There is now no fear of condemnation. There is now no fear of death. You will meet your dear ones in Christ!

*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow,*

*Because He lives, all fear is gone;*

*Because I know He holds the future,*

*And life is worth the living,*

*Just because He lives!*

Grief is a normal emotion as we think about our loved ones who have passed on, but to sorrow like those who did not have hope is to forget the very purpose for which Jesus came.

**Never Lose the Wonder of Your Sins Forgiven**

Such a reminder is important for every generation. Have you noticed that the further you get from your conversion experience with Christ, the less you tend to think about it? It is not unimportant to you, but you simply move on to bigger and better things. We must never lose the wonder of what Christ has done for us. Without His sacrifice we have no standing. Nothing in our lives is “bigger and better” than what Christ has done for us. Like Paul, may it be your desire to know nothing “except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (**1 Cor. 2:2**).

1. We have **Comfort** in Christ’s coming, vs. 15-18.

There is comfort and joy in the Second Coming of Christ. John 14:1-3, Jesus says we are not to let our hearts be troubled, we believe in God, we are to believe in Him. And that He is preparing a place for us. And that He will come again!

John Calvin Quote

Calvin said it this way, “Let us consider this settled: that all who have made progress in the school of Christ will joyfully await the day of death and final resurrection... Let us not hesitate to await the Lord’s coming, not only with longing, but also with groaning and sighs, as the happiest thing of all. He will come to us as Redeemer.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

**1 Thess. 4:15-18**, “For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore **encourage** one another with these words.”

**What a Reunion!**

What a reunion it will be when Christ comes again. Those who have gone before us will meet us with Jesus!

Paul goes on to say that not only will believers be resurrected, but: “the dead in Christ will rise first” (vs. 16). The God who raised Jesus will raise the followers of Jesus. He will bring their souls from heaven to be united with their bodies; therefore, all believers can die in peace with the song of triumph on their lips:

‘ “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

‘ “Where, O death, is your victory?

‘ “Where, O death, is your sting?”

‘The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 15:54–57).[[7]](#footnote-7)

**A Word from the Lord**

**1 Thess. 4:15**, “For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord.” Jesus spoke much about His own coming, but not in the detail that Paul is giving. Remember the disciples asked Jesus in **Mt. 24:3**, “what will be the sign of Your coming and of the completion of the age?”

Jesus also said in **Mt. 24:31**, “he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

It seems if they only had the Lord’s earthly teaching, they didn’t have a full picture, so it seems that the Lord gave Paul a special revelation that St. Paul gives to the Thessalonians.

**What is that Special Revelation?**

We find the revelation in **1 Thess. 4:15b-18**, “…that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.”

**The Dead Rise First**

God has not forgotten about our loved ones in Christ! Paul assures the Thessalonians that living believers will have no advantage over dead believers, for both the living and the dead in Christ will be gloriously joined in glory to the glorious Lord.

In fact, the order seems to be that the souls of the redeemed who have died will leave heaven and be joined with their new bodies before the resurrection of the living.

**The Certainty of Christ’s Coming**

We find the revelation in **1 Thess. 4:16**, “For **the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command**, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And **the dead in Christ will rise first**. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore **encourage** one another with these words.”

Without question the Bible teaches that Jesus is coming again. For instance:

* 23 of the 27 books in the New Testament state that He is coming.
* 1 out of every 30 verses in the New Testament either speaks directly of His coming or of the end times surrounding His coming.
* For every biblical reference to Jesus’ first coming there are 8 that point to His return.

Clearly the biblical writers did not want their readers to miss this truth. From the perspective of the biblical authors, Jesus’ coming was never intended to be a subject for speculation; it was always intended to be a reason for anticipation and motivation. Such an awareness of Christ’s imminent return is vividly portrayed in the Thessalonian letters. In the Greek of this passage, he refers to Christ’s return as the *parousia* (**4:15**). The word points to the arrival of an important person or dignitary. The Thessalonians were to be watching, waiting, and expecting the day when Christ Himself would come for them.

**The Suddenness of His Coming**

Paul introduces the subject of the Lord’s return with these simple words: “For **the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command**, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God…”

No advance warning, no heads-up, and no notice given. With a shout, a voice, and a trumpet, the Lord will come. Paul makes this same point to the Corinthians when he writes:

“We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed” (**1 Cor. 15: 51-52**).

Scriptural support for the imminent return of Christ is not lacking.

* **Phil 3:20**, “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”
* **Col 3:4**, “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”
* **Jas. 5:8**, “You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”
* **Rev. 3:3**, “Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.”
* Consider Paul’s words to Titus: “We wait for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (**Titus 2:13**).

The resounding message of the New Testament is that Christ could come at any moment!

**The Order of Christ’s Coming: Three Reunions**

**1 Thess. 4:16b-18**, “And **the dead in Christ will rise first**. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore **encourage** one another with these words.”

When Jesus comes for His church, at least three reunions will occur.

**THE DEAD IN CHRIST**. First, the bodies of the dead in Christ will be reunited with their spirits (1 Cor 15:23,52-54). We know that when believers die, their bodies go in the grave but their spirits go to be with the Lord (2 Cor 5: 8; Phil 1:23). When Christ comes, He will gloriously reunite body with spirit.

**THE LIVING IN CHRIST**. Second, those who are alive when Christ returns will be united with Him (1 John 3:2).

**THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT**. Finally, in one magnificent gathering, both those who were alive at Christ’s coming and those who were dead will be reunited in the presence of the Lord. Paul is saying that grief over the loss of loved ones need not lead to hopelessness. The grave is not the end. Death is not final. Just as you have the absolute assurance that you will see Jesus one day, so too you have the same assurance that you will see your loved ones again. This promise of a coming reunion should give every believer a present hope.

**Encouragement!**

**1 Thess. 4:18**, “Therefore **encourage** one another with these words.”

The truth of Christ’s coming brings more than just the hope of a reunion; it also brings the promise of deliverance. Life was difficult for the Christians in Thessalonica. Their faith in Christ resulted in severe persecution and intense hardship (1:6; 2:14-15; 3: 3-4; 2 Thess 1: 4-6). Christ’s return would bring them the relief they longed for. Even the presence of severe hardship and intense suffering could not steal their joy or diminish their hope.

**MacLaren Quote**

The Second coming of Christ motivates us not to live for this world, but for the world to come!

Scottish preacher of the 19th century, Alexander MacLaren, said this: “The apostolic church thought more about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ than about death and heaven. The early Christians were looking, not for a cleft in the ground called a grave but for a opening in the sky called Glory.”

1. Shenton, T. (2006). *Opening up 1 Thessalonians* (p. 87). Leominster: Day One Publications. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Howell, Mark (2015-01-13). *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 109). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Shenton, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Morris, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Shenton, 88-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Institutes*, 3.9.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 89-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)