



1 THESSALONIANS

THE RETURN OF THE LORD

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

MAIN IDEA

Jesus is coming back, and believers should be prepared as they wait with hopeful anticipation. Christians should also share the hope they have with others.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Most people will agree that there is a difference between sleep and good rest. It is possible to wake up from a night's sleep and not feel rested. We even have various devices that can track how much deep sleep and recovery a person experienced. If you don't feel rested after sleep, it may be that your mind was not at peace. Turbulent or troublesome thoughts can obstruct rest and peace. Today, we are studying a subject that caused worry or unrest in the early church. Paul reminded them they could trust in God's plan even when they didn't know all the details.

- **How would you describe the difference between rest and sleep?**

- **What keeps you from experiencing rest? Why?**

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14.

Though Paul had taught the Thessalonians about the return of Jesus, and they believed Christ was coming back, they still had concerns about Christians who died before Jesus's return.

- **Why is it important that Christians not be uninformed about important things like the return of Jesus or those who have died in Christ?**
- **How does understanding these things help us live today?**

The people were concerned that those who had already died might miss out on the return of Christ. Paul wrote to calm these fears and give further clarity.

Christians aren't to view death or sorrow with the same hopelessness of the world. Though Christians mourn and grieve when a loved one dies in Christ, we have hope that we will see them again. This hope is more than just wishful thinking. It is grounded in the truth of God's Word and our confident belief that Jesus lives and defeated death in the cross so that we can have eternal life with Him.

- **How does this teaching about those who have died in Christ encourage you?**
 - **Who do you know that could use this encouragement about a loved one they are grieving?**
-

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16.

Paul stressed that his message was not based on his thoughts or opinions but given from the Lord. Many teach with confidence that isn't based on the Word of God but rather personal perspectives or opinions. These believers needed to be grounded in the truth about Christ's return and not swayed by popular opinion.

- **What are some popular opinions about life after death in our culture?**

Paul made clear those who are already dead will not be at a disadvantage compared to those who living when Jesus returns. Note Paul used the word "we" in application to the ones alive at the time. This is a reminder we should live in a state of readiness and expectation of Jesus's return.

- **Why is it important to anticipate Christ's return at any time?**

Paul said, at Christ's return, believers will be gathered with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. Though we don't know every single detail of how that will happen, the assurance is that those who have died will not miss out at all.

- **How is this a reminder that God is in complete control of history and our lives (and deaths)?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18.

Paul assured the believers that not only will the dead rise to be with Christ, so will believers who are living at the time.

- **How often do you reflect on this coming reality? What impact does it have on our lives to remember this truth?**

Paul left no doubt about the certainty of this event. People have different opinions about the end times, but the fact that Jesus will return in complete victory is certain. Considering this promise, we are to continually be ready.

- **What are practical ways we can seek to be ready for Christ's return?**

Those who are in Christ will be raised to be with Him and will live with Him forever. This is to be an ongoing means of encouragement in the church. The purpose of the church is to continually encourage and remind one another of the truths of our faith and to go to others to share these truths that they might come to know Christ also.

- **How do you find comfort in the promised return of Christ?**
- **Who can you encourage with what we've discussed today?**

APPLICATION

- **What is one thing God is calling you to do today to further prepare for His return? Do it.**
- **What needs to change in our lives to further align with the reality that Christ has promised to return?**

PRAY

Praise the Lord for His great plans. Ask for excitement and anticipation for the return of Jesus. Commit to using today's study to encourage others outside of the church.

INTRODUCTION TO 1 THESSALONIANS

Paul spent a very short time in the city of Thessalonica, but he was able to establish a church during his stay. He may have had little time to instruct the new converts, so it is not surprising that Paul wrote a letter to address some questions.

Author

No serious objections have been made to dispute that Paul was the author of 1 Thessalonians (1:1). The greeting also mentions Silvanus and Timothy. Sometimes Paul wrote from the team perspective, but he was the primary author (2:18; 3:2).

Background

About AD 50 the missionary team led by Paul and Silas (“Silvanus”) left Philippi and traveled westward on the Roman road known as the Via Egnatia. They proceeded toward Thessalonica—the strategic capital city of the Roman Province of Macedonia. Thessalonica was a large port city on the Aegean Sea in modern-day Greece, with a population of about two hundred thousand. The city was filled with pagan worshipers of idols, the full pantheon of Greek and Roman gods, and was well known for its emperor worship. Thessalonica was loyal to Caesar, who had granted its citizens many privileges.

Message and Purpose

Timothy reported to Paul that although the church at Thessalonica was suffering affliction, they were holding fast to the faith. And though they had some doctrinal misunderstandings, they were laboring for the Lord out of love and patiently hoping for the return of Christ. Paul wrote to encourage the church in their faith, to remind them that sanctification was God’s will for them, and to correct misunderstandings about end-time events.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

4:13 The term asleep in this context is a metaphorical reference to Christians who have died. This metaphor is particularly appropriate because of the future resurrection of the body. Just as a sleeping person expects to rise in the morning, Christians who have died will experience a bodily resurrection and will rise again (v. 16; Jn 11:11). Until this happens, for deceased believers to be out of the body is to be at home with the Lord (2Co 5:8). Apparently the cause of the Thessalonians' grief was related to the misunderstanding that dead Christians would miss the events and subsequent blessings associated with the Lord's coming. Paul corrected this misunderstanding by teaching that the dead in Christ will rise first (1Th 4:16). In contrast to unbelievers who grieve over the loss of loved ones, Christians who grieve over a fellow believer can do so with hope because of the future glorious resurrection.

Notes:

4:14 Jesus's resurrection revealed what resurrection will be like for those who have fallen asleep. We can partially understand the nature of our bodily resurrection by reading about his (Lk 24:36–43).

4:15–17 The word that Paul received relates to what has been called the "rapture." It refers to the event when believers who are alive at the Lord's coming are caught up (Gk *harpazo*) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. The term rapture is derived from *rapturo*, the Latin translation of the Greek term. The Greek term means "to snatch or take away suddenly." Paul referred to this event as a mystery (some truth previously hidden but now known) in 1Co 15:51–52 and said it will happen in the twinkling of an eye. We who are still alive implies that Paul thought the rapture could occur at any moment, even during his lifetime. The "archangel" or chief angel is probably a reference to Michael (Dn 10:13; Jd 9).