

THE EPIC LIFE – BOB HALLMAN

Beam Me Up!!

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

2010

Introduction

If you have lived for any length of time, you have had to bury someone you love.

You have felt the sting of regret, the sorrow of unfinished business, the paralyzing confusion and the emptiness of loss. You have probably also found your mind flooded with questions about life beyond the grave.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 we read the words of Paul as he addressed some of these same concerns in the church at Thessalonica. The very first generation of Christians was beginning to die. Most of these people had believed that Jesus would return during their lifetime. Now, they had questions: Did death mean those who died would miss the Second Coming of Christ and His reign on the earth? Would these people miss all the glory that had been promised? This text not only answers some of those questions – it also contains one of the outstanding eschatological (end times) passages in the New Testament.

I Paul's Desire For The Church

A. He does not want them to be **ignorant**: [Verse 13a]

Ignorant = Agnoeo = “To be without knowledge or uninformed”

God does not want believers to remain spiritual novices:

Col 1:9-10 “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way ...”

Application: 2 Peter 3:18 “... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

1. About those who fall asleep

Fall asleep = Koimao = “A euphemism for death”

The verb “koimao” is used of both natural sleep and of death, *but only in reference to the death of the Christian.*

Biblical examples of those whose death was described as “falling asleep”:

- a. King David: Acts 13:36
- b. Jarius' daughter: Mark 5:39
- c. Lazarus: John 11:11-13
- d. Stephen: Acts 7:59-60

Note: As a result, the early Christians were the first to call their burial places "cemeteries," which means, "sleeping places."

Application: You may miss many appointments in your life but, barring the rapture of the church, death is one appointment you will not miss.
 Heb 9:27 "It is appointed for man once to die and after that to face judgment"

B. He does not want them to **grieve**: [Verse 13b]

1. Like the rest of men who have no hope

Hope = Elpis = "To anticipate with pleasure or expectation"

Paul contrasts two kinds of people:

1. Those who grieve without hope

Quotes from Paul's unbelieving contemporaries:

Catullus, a Roman poet: "The sun can set and rise again; but once our brief light sets, there is one unending night to be slept through."

Theocritus, a Greek poet: "Hopes are for the living; the dead are without hope."

Mcleod, Jonathan. Sermon Central. *Encourage One Another*.
<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/encourage-one-another-jonathan-mcleod-sermon-on-christian-values-107278>

2. Those who grieve with hope

Notice, both groups grieve: There is nothing wrong with being sad about someone dying. Even Jesus grieved over the death of his friend, Lazarus (Jn 11:35). But our grief is tempered by our hope and confidence in the resurrection!

Even Job looked forward to the hope of the resurrection:

Job 19:25-27 "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes -- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"

Illustration: Becky and me parting ways at the Kamalani Kai Bridge

Me: "See you on the other side!" **Her:** OK, see you in a minute!

II Paul's Doctrine For The Church

A. We believe that Jesus died and **rose** again [Verse 14a]

We believe = Pisteuo = "To have faith, entrust, commit"

Note: Paul's statements aren't based on wishful thinking. Instead, they are

anchored in the central doctrine of the death/resurrection of Jesus Christ. **So our hope for the future is grounded in the certainty of the past!**

Isa 26:19 “[In that day] your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.”

2 Cor 4:13-14 “It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.”

1 Thess 5:10 “He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.”

How important is the resurrection? Paul answers that question in 1 Cor!

1 Cor 15:12-20 “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

B. We believe that God will **bring** with Jesus: [Verse 14b]

1. Those who have fallen asleep in Him

Fall asleep = Koimao = Figurative term for those who have died

Paul is saying that when Christ comes again, He’s not planning on coming alone! He will come **with** the souls of those who have died as believers in Jesus so they can be united with their resurrection bodies.

At the believer's death, the body and soul are separated -- the body is buried in the ground, but the soul goes to be with the Lord in heaven (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23) into the conscious enjoyment of heaven -- “to be absent from the body” is “to be present with the Lord.” We believe in the sleep of the body, but we do not believe in the sleep of the soul. Those whose bodies are sleeping in the grave, according to this Scripture, will be resurrected when Christ comes back and united with their soul.

C. We believe that those who have fallen asleep will not be **preceded** by: [Verse 15]

1. Those who are still alive

Notice that Paul uses the plural pronoun, “We ...”

He lived with confidence in the imminent return of JC – and so should we!

2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-9 "... in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation ... But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Application: Every day of delay is a demonstration of God's love/patience! However, we can speed it's coming via evangelism - 2 Pt 3:11-12

2. Those who are left till the **coming** of the Lord

Coming of the Lord = Parousia = "The arrival of a dignitary or a king"

The imagery is of a conquering king returning from victory whose subjects rush out to meet him and escort him back to be enthroned in his kingdom (Matt 25:1, 6; Acts 28:15)

Paul is making it clear that there is an order to the events of the Last Days:

1 Cor 15:21-23 "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him."

The chronological order of the resurrections:

1. The resurrection of the New Testament saints (dead/living) prior to the Great Tribulation (John 14:3; 1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-53)
2. The resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs who will rule and reign with Christ for 1,000 years following the 7-year Tribulation (Rev 20:4-6)
3. The resurrection of Old Testament saints following the 1,000-year Millennial Reign of Christ (Dan 12:1-2; Isa 26:19; Ezek 37:13-14)
4. The resurrection of the unbelieving dead who will then be judged at the Great White Throne judgment and cast into the lake of fire (Dan 12:2b; John 5:29b; Rev 20:11-15)

III Paul's Eschatology For The Church

A. The Lord Himself will come down from heaven: **[Verse 16a]**

Acts 1:11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

1. With a **loud** command

Loud command = Keleusma = “An authoritative shout of instruction”

This term was used in a variety of ways:

- The cry made by the **ship’s master** to his **rowers!**
- The cry made by a **military officer** to his **soldiers!**
- The cry made by a **hunter** to his **hounds!**
- The cry made by a **charioteer** to his **horse!**

John 5:25-29 “I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out ...”

Jesus did command the dead to rise from the grave, including Lazarus, whom He commanded to come forth from the grave!! (John 11:38-44)
Some have suggested that if Jesus hadn’t refined His command to include only Lazarus, the entire cemetery would have been emptied!!

2. With the **voice** of the archangel

Archangel = Archaggelos = “A chief angel”

In attendance was the voice of the archangel, who is none other than Michael, the chief of the angels, and the special protector of God’s holy people (Daniel 10:13; Heb 1:14).

Dan 12:1 “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people -- everyone whose name is found written in the book -- will be delivered.”

3. With the **trumpet** call of God

Trumpet call = Salpigx = “Vibration or reverberation”

In Jewish history, the trumpet was used for a number of reasons:

- a. To announce the feasts - Num 10:10
- b. To announce various celebrations - 2 Sam 6:15
- c. To announce a sacred assembly - Lev 23:24
- d. To sound an alarm during a time of war - Num 10:9
- e. To assemble a crowd or to advance an army - Ex 19:16-19; Num 10:2; Judg 6:34
- f. To make an announcement - 1 Sam 13:3; 15:10; 1 Ki 1:34, 39, 41

This particular trumpet is sounded to announce the coming of Christ and to gather the New Testament saints to meet their King!

1 Cor 15:50-54 “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit

the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed -- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

B. The **dead** in Christ will rise first [Verse 16b]

Dead = Nekros = "A corpse"

Rise = Anistemi = "To stand up, lift up"

Who are the dead "in Christ"?

The "dead in Christ" are those who received and believed in Christ for salvation, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit and had experienced physical death.

Eph 1:13-14 "And you also were included in Christ when you **heard the word of truth**, the gospel of your salvation. Having **believed**, you were **marked in him with a seal**, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession -- to the praise of his glory."

C. After that, we who are still **alive** and are left: [Verse 17-18]

Still alive = Perileipo = "Those who have not yet experienced physical death"

1. Will be **caught up** together with them in the clouds

Caught up = Harpazo = "To seize or carry off by force"

Note: It's a word that always implies a change of location.

Is the word "Rapture" in the Bible? No. It comes from the Latin Vulgate, which translates the Greek phrase harpazo (caught up) as *rapturus*, from which we get our English word *rapture*.

Do we have any other examples that foreshadow rapture in the Bible? **YES!!**

1. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away: Gen 5:24
2. Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind: 2 Kings 2:11-12
3. Philip was suddenly taken away by the Spirit of the Lord and deposited in Azotus – some 20 miles away: Acts 8:36-40
4. Paul was caught up into the 3rd Heaven: 2 Cor 12:2-4

How long will it take? In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1Cor 15:51). How fast is that? Faster than it takes to blink your eyes!!

One moment you're stuck in Kapaa traffic, the next moment you're flying like Superman. One second you're eating poke and rice, the next you're in the air. One minute you're surfing at Kealia, the next you're being blown dry at 30,000 feet!!

2. We will **meet** the Lord in the air

Meet = Apantesis = "To have a friendly encounter"

In the air: This is significant!

According to Ephesians 2:2 and 6:12, "the air", or our atmosphere, is the domain of Satan and his hordes. In fact, Paul tells us plainly in 2 Cor 4:4 that the world is currently under the dominion of the devil.

Eph 2:1-2 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

Eph 6:12 "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

When Jesus comes, He will come directly through enemy territory, call up His Bride into the realm of the enemy and lead her safely and triumphantly through the devil's territory as a display of His power and victory over all the powers of evil!

3. We will be with the Lord **forever**

This is the great prize! It is the ultimate goal! On this great day we will no longer have to search for God. We will no longer feel alone. We will never again feel like our prayers aren't getting past the ceiling. We will never be afraid or feel lost because we will be with the Lord – FOREVER!

John 14:1-3 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

Paul finishes by saying, "Therefore, encourage one another with these words!

Heb 10:25 "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Conclusion

What should be your response to the imminent return of Christ for the church?

1. Make sure you are included in Christ! Don't get left behind! - Eph 1:13-14

2. Remember who you are!! Citizens of a better kingdom with a perfect King!
Phil 3:20-21 “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”
3. Keep yourselves pure! You’re sons/daughters of God -- the Bride of Christ!!
1 John 3:3 “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”
4. Let the anticipation of Christ’s imminent return inspire you to go *BIG*:
 - a. Love like you’ve never loved before:
 1. Love God with all you heart, mind, soul and strength - Matt 22:37-38
 2. Love others as yourself (you really love yourself a lot!!) - Matt 22:39
 - b. Serve God, His body the church and others with a humble and glad heart!
 - c. Don’t sweat the small stuff (BTW, it’s all small stuff!)
5. Obey the Great Commission and get on board with the Epic Life:
 - a. Share the gospel: Phil 1:6
 - b. Make disciples: Matt 28:19-20; 2 Tim 2:2

A final word of exhortation from Paul as he anticipated his own death:

2 Tim 4:6-8 “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day -- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

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