

What Happens to Christians Who Die?, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Code: 52-17

This morning, we come finally to the great text of 1 Thessalonians 4:13 through 18. Please open your Bible to that particular passage of Scripture. This is, of course, familiar to most of us as believers. We know it as the Rapture passage, the passage which describes the catching away of the church. It is in many ways the favorite text in this wonderful epistle that we've been studying here for months, and months, and months. And finally, we have arrived at the long-awaited time to discuss this great event. As we approach the text, I've entitled it: "What Happens to Christians Who Die?" What happens to Christians who die? I'm often asked that, even by Christians; in fact, usually by Christians. Questions like: after we die, do we go directly to heaven? Or, what happens to our bodies? The details of those kinds of questions are very, very important to us, and they can be troubling if we don't know the answer. We want to know what happens after we die, and we would like to know what happens to the bodies of those we love when they go into the grave. Those are pressing issues and they were equally pressing issues on the young believers in Thessalonica.

Remember now, those to whom Paul wrote this letter had only been in Christ a matter of a few months and they had only had just a few weeks, really, of exposure to Paul's ministry so they were very much babes. And they had become very troubled about this issue of what happens to Christians when they die. They believed certainly in life after death because it says in chapter 1 verse 3 that they had hope. There's no question that Paul had told them about eternal life because he preached to them the gospel, and they believed it and they turned from idols. And so, we know they knew about eternal life. They knew that salvation was synonymous with living forever with God in heaven. And they also knew about the coming of Jesus, that Jesus was going to someday return and gather all His people together and take them to be with Him. They knew about that great gathering event.

And so, there were some questions in their minds about how that all sort of worked out, like if you die now do you miss the gathering? Apparently, Paul had made that gathering event so glorious, he had made that gathering event so wonderful that they were very worried that some of them might miss it, even though they would be living in eternal life, they would still be very concerned if they missed the gathering together. In fact, it was so much on their minds that when you go back to chapter 1, would you notice verses 9 and 10? As Paul describes them he says they turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven. Now, there you have the three dimensions of their salvation: the past, turning from the idols of the past; the present, serving a living and true God; and the future, waiting for His Son from heaven. This was a waiting group. Chapter 2 verse 19, Paul refers to them as his hope and joy and crown in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming. So,

they must have known that the coming was something very special. First of all, they would meet Jesus and they were waiting for Him. Secondly, they would be the crown and joy and rejoicing of the apostle and they were thrilled about that.

Beyond that, they knew a few other things, look at chapter 5 verses 1 and 2. Paul says, "Now, as to the times and the epochs," or seasons, "brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you for you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night." They also knew about the day of the Lord. They knew about a time of coming judgment on the ungodly. They knew then that when Jesus came He would gather them to be with Him. And He would also judge the ungodly. They were waiting for Jesus to come. They were waiting for the gathering time.

Now, in their waiting they had become somewhat disturbed. Some of them probably feared that they had missed it, that it had happened without them. How so? Well, they were entering in to persecution and afflictions and some of them probably thought that they were going to be gathered before that happened. So, in chapter 3 verses 3 and 4 Paul has to say to them, "So that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions, for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this for indeed when we were with you." We kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction. And so, it came to pass, as you know." He reminds them, now wait a minute, you shouldn't be surprised by difficulty and persecution, I told you it was coming. But maybe there were some of them who thought they were going to be gathered together before that really took place. Certainly, they were living an immense expectation and would fear that they might miss such a great event. In fact, in chapter 2 of 2 Thessalonians Paul says, "We request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come."

Somebody had been spreading the word around, either by supposedly an angelic messenger, a spirit, or some fabricated letter from Paul that the great event had already happened and the day of the Lord had arrived. And so, there was an awful lot of concern, and loss of composure, and they were disturbed. Had the day of the Lord already begun? Had they somehow missed the gathering together? And then, the most imminent question was, what about the Christians who die? Will they miss it? It isn't that they didn't believe that they would go to heaven; it was: will they miss this great event? Will they somehow become second-class citizens in the future? Will we know them only eternally as sort of disembodied glorified spirits while we go in our glorified bodies so that they are sort of secondary? Or maybe we won't even have communion with them at all, and there won't even be a reunion with these two kinds of beings. All of these questions were in their minds. We can't identify anything more specific than that.

But they were living in expectation of Christ's return. They were so excited about it that the best way to describe their hope was they were waiting for His Son. They wanted the Lord to come. They knew

it was the climax, the culmination, the great event that signaled the pinnacle of redemptive history, and they didn't want to miss it.

It's also interesting to note that they loved each other so much they didn't want each other to miss it. And so, apparently they were feeling grieved as believers were dying, for fear that they would therefore miss this great event. It is with their grief and their confusion that Paul intends to deal. If you look at the text in verse 13, he mentions being uninformed or ignorant and the fact that you are now grieving about it. And then, in verse 18 he mentions the word "comfort." His purpose was to eliminate their ignorance, thus to eliminate their grief, and thus to bring them comfort. Now, summing that up let me say this. The passage is more pastoral than it is theological. It is more intended to alleviate confusion, grief, distress, and bring comfort than it is to give a theological, eschatological delineation of every factor in the gathering together.

They were agitated. They were upset. They were confused. They were worried. They were fearful. After all, they're baby Christians; they don't know very much, they're living every day waiting for the Son to come. And as some of them die in the months since Paul has left, their question is: what happens to those people? Do they miss it? And their love for each other is so strong, chapter 4 verse 9 says, "As to the love of the brethren you have no need for anyone to write to you for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren." They loved each other so much they were grieving because some might miss this great event.

So, Paul writes to alleviate their grief, to bring them great measure of comfort. Their anticipation was very, very high about the return of Christ. And I believe it is fair to say that Paul had communicated to them that Jesus could come in their life time. If that was not what they believed, then the whole question is meaningless. Their concern was: they were believing Jesus would come at any moment, and as some were dying their fear was they're going to miss it. The only reason they would have that fear, they would have that anticipation is because they believed it could happen soon. The major question then is: what happens to Christians who die before the Lord returns? And since they had the impression that He could come at any moment, they were deeply concerned about this issue. It may well have been that somebody could've suggested, "Well, according to the principle in 1 Corinthians 11:30, if some Christians fall into sin, some are weak, and some are sick, and some are asleep or dead, it may be that these people are dying because of sin in their life that we don't know about. And God's just laying them in the grave because of their sin, and only the ones who live a pure life are going to make it to the coming of Jesus. And maybe if they are resurrected in the future, it's going to be some time after, and some lesser circumstance, and all of that."

And so, Paul pens these verses. Let's start at verse 13. "But we do not want you to be uninformed or ignorant, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as do the rest who have no hope." He says I don't want you to be ignorant and as a result of being ignorant, grieving. I don't want you to worry about those who died having missed the Lord's return. You say, "Well, how did Paul

even know they were thinking like this?” Back in chapter 3 verse 1 you’ll remember he mentions how he couldn’t endure any longer not knowing about them, and so in verse 2 he says we sent Timothy, and then in verse 6 it says Timothy has come back. And when Timothy came back, it says he brought us good news of your faith and love. I like that. Because back in chapter 1 Paul commended them for their faith and their love and their hope. But when Timothy came back apparently he only brought them good news about their faith and their love because their hope was a little messed up and it needed to be straightened out a little bit because they were so confused. So, Paul writes to deal with that confusion and its consequence, grief.

Now, would you note at the beginning of verse 13. We’re going to take our time with this, we’ll continue next week and maybe even finish it, but I want to do it very carefully because this is a very, very important passage and a very important subject. You’ll note at the beginning he says, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren.” That opening statement is Paul’s favorite way to change the subject. That’s his favorite way, either in a positive or a negative format to change the subject. Sometimes he says, “I do not want you to be ignorant,” such as here and in Romans 1:13, 1 Corinthians 10:1, etc. Sometimes he’ll also say, “I want you to understand. I want you to know,” like 1 Corinthians 11:3, Philippians 1:12 and other places. But whether he says I want you to know, on a positive side, or I don’t want you to be ignorant, it marks a change in the subject to a new topic with no direct connection to the one previous. And it’s rather emphatic. “But” marks a change in course, “brethren” is a call to attention which signals something they need to give their attention to. We’re done with that and I’m calling you back again to a new discussion, brethren. It’s a term of affection, obviously, and he had immense affection for them as the end of chapter 2 indicates when it says that he was burdened, bereft really, because of the great desire he had to see their face. And so, he turns the corner with the word “but,” he grabs their attention for the new subject with the word “brethren,” and then he says, “We would not have you uninformed or ignorant.” This then introduces a new subject. This introduces not only a new subject, but in this case new teaching, new revelation indicated in verse 15 “by the word of the Lord,” a revelation that he has received.

So, here he will deal with their ignorance which has led to their confusion and grief, restlessness and lack of comfort. And what is it that he’s going to talk about? “We do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep.” Now, why does he use the word “asleep?” Why doesn’t he just say dead? Because sleep is the unique way to speak of Christians in repose, in temporary repose. By the way, the word “asleep,” *koima* to cause to sleep, is the word from which we get our word cemetery, which it was the early Christians optimistic name for a graveyard. It really meant a sleeping place. It really was a synonym for a dormitory, a place where people sleep.

Now, how is it that Christians are spoken of as sleeping? You’ll notice as I answer that question, first of all, that it’s in a present tense form, this participle here, and it has the idea of those who are continually falling asleep. That is, believers who fall asleep from time to time as a regular course of life in the church. They’re saying, “What about these Christians that just continue to die?” I mean, life

is like that. It ends, right? And they keep dying. And he says, "I don't want you to be ignorant about what happens to people after they die." Now, the word "sleep" in the Bible is used of normal sleep, a recovery process by which the body goes into rest temporarily. John 11:12 uses it in its normal sense. But the word for "sleep" is also used uniquely of Christians, and it's used a number of times for Christians, now listen carefully, and it always refers to their bodies. It always refers to their bodies. The only part of us that goes in to any state of unconsciousness at death is the body. In John, you remember chapter 11 and verse 11, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, Jesus said, but I go that I may awaken him out of sleep. Now, everybody knew that Lazarus was what? He was dead; he had been dead for three days. His sister said, "By this time his body stinketh." Decay had set in, he had been entombed, he was dead. From Jesus' view he was only asleep; his soul was alive not bound in the grave, we don't know where it was or what it experienced 'cause the Scripture doesn't tell us, but it does not pass out of existence since it is eternal and it is eternally conscious. But his body was at rest, and Jesus saw that as temporary. That's why He calls it sleep. Sleep is something you wake up from. If you don't wake up, you're dead or you eventually will die. And so, Jesus sees the death of Lazarus as temporary repose of his body.

Look at Acts chapter 7, just to give you a full understanding of this. You remember when Stephen was being stoned it says in verse 60, "Falling on his knees he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And having said this, he fell asleep." He fell asleep. It was death from the human viewpoint. It was death from the clinical viewpoint. It was sleep because it was only temporary repose for his body. His spirit didn't go in to unconsciousness. If you don't think so, look at verse 59. He said, "Lord Jesus," what? "Receive my spirit." It was only his body that was to be in repose, to be asleep. A sleep, by the way, from which even his body would awaken, and that's the main point that I want you to understand. When in 1 Corinthians 11:30 Paul says of Christians, "Many among you are weak and sick and a number sleep," he again refers to death for a Christian as sleep because it is the temporary repose of the physical body. In chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians verse 6, it talks about Christians who saw the resurrected Christ; many of them remain until now. That is, to the writing of this epistle. But some have fallen asleep. There's that same familiar concept. Verse 18, those who have fallen asleep in Christ. And then, in verse 51, "I show you a mystery, we shall not all sleep." Again, referring to Christians in death. Second Peter 3:4 mentions it, "Where is the promise of His coming for ever since the fathers fell asleep all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." There, it is the wistful anticipation of unbelievers that those who have died have died only a temporary death.

But for Christians the term is accurate, for it is a temporary thing. Even for pagans there will be a resurrection. There is a sense in which the pagan bodies only sleep, for they too will be raised. However, they will be raised to eternal damnation and death. And so, thus it is not appropriate to speak of theirs as a temporary death, therefore a sleep, but as a permanent death and not a sleep at all.

Now, let me go a step further. The term “sleep” or the concept of sleep does not refer to the soul. There is no such thing as souls sleeping. When Stephen was dying he said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And he had the anticipation of entering into the conscious presence of Jesus Christ. Nowhere does the Scripture ever teach that at any time forever the spirit of a person is ever unconscious. That’s what makes hell so terrible. It is consciousness in the absence of God forever. That’s what makes heaven so wonderful; it is consciousness of the presence of God forever. And you remember in Luke 16 as Jesus told the story of Lazarus the beggar and the rich man that when Lazarus died he was immediately and consciously in Abraham’s bosom and comforted. And you remember when the rich man died, he was immediately and consciously in torment and cried out for someone to give him water to touch his tormented tongue. You will remember that in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, the apostle Paul looks at death for a believer, and in verse 8 he says, “To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord.” There’s no purgatory, there’s no intermediary condition, there’s no state of unconsciousness or semi-consciousness, there’s no spiritual coma. To be absent from the body, to be present with the Lord. And in Philippians 1:23 the apostle Paul says, “Far better to depart and be with Christ.” You’re either here or with Christ. There’s no intermediary condition for the saved. They go to be received into the presence of Jesus Christ. There’s no intermediary place for the damned. They go into conscious punishment and torment. But while that spirit of that dead Christian goes immediately into the presence of Christ, that body is asleep, it is in repose, it is in rest, it is in a dormitory, as it were, and a Christian in a graveyard is just sleeping in the dorm, nothing more.

Now, the question comes: well, why is Paul so concerned to tell them about these Christians who have died? Verse 13 says, “That you may not grieve.” They were grieving about it. You say, “Well, now wait a minute, anybody grieves when a Christian dies, that they know and they love and they care about. Don’t Christians grieve, and don’t they sorrow, and don’t they lament, and don’t they shed tears when loved ones die? That’s normal, isn’t it?” Yes, very normal. And certainly the Spirit of God instructs us in Romans 12:15 to weep with those that weep. There’s a normal sorrow, reasonable, sensible release of the pain of separation and loneliness that God has designed for our benefit. He’s not talking about that. Follow along in the verse. He says, “I don’t want you to grieve like people who have,” what? “No hope.” I don’t want your grief to be that dead-end grief, that grief that comes to people because there’s no contemplation of reunion. I don’t want you to think that Christians ever say a final goodbye, because they don’t. That’s a great thought, isn’t it? You never say goodbye to a believer for the last time. There will always be another time. I don’t want you to grieve like the hopeless pagans grieve.

In Ephesians chapter 2, as Paul delineates the character of being lost, the essence of it, he says, “They are separate from Christ, they are excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, they are strangers to the covenants of promise. They have no hope and are without God in the world.” Among those characteristics of the lost is that statement: they have no hope. They have no hope in life after death. They have no hope in reunion. Through the years I’ve had funerals, continue to have funerals

of unbelieving people, or funerals of believing people where unbelievers are in the family and the hopelessness is terrifying. The terrible sense of finality: no reunion, no future, nevermore the touch of the hand, the sound of the voice, never again, finality. To be so consumed in life with a person, and then have the curtain drop so totally, absolutely, and finally is a cause for deep despair. The greater the love, the greater the pain, and it is the pain of hopelessness.

You say, "Well, now wait a minute. Weren't there some pagans who could be numbered among 'the rest' there who taught life after death?" Yes, there were some of the mystery religions that might have espoused that. Some of the ancient cults that would have espoused that. There were some philosophers in ancient times who taught there was an afterlife. But nonetheless, the common teaching was that this was all there was, this was it. Catullus sort of wrote of the common view when he wrote, "The sun can set and rise again, but once our brief light sets there is one unending night to be slept through." End quote. People live with hopelessness for the most part. And I might add, that even people who were believing philosophers who taught an afterlife or who were in to mystery religions that taught an afterlife could never be confident about their wish for an afterlife because they had no indwelling Holy Spirit to vouch safe that reality to them. And so, their hope was subject to the whims of their flesh and a whimsical kind of hope that's dependent upon the flesh is no firm hope, no sound hope, and so it's safe to say they are without hope. Non-believing but religious people who are taught there's a life after death can cling to the wish without having the affirmation of God that it's true. And so, in some cases it may be worse than having no hope because it's hope and no hope, hope and then no hope, and hope and then no hope, and it vacillates. Better to come to finality about no hope and get on with life. So, people live with hopelessness, and the hopelessness, the fear of never being again together, no reunion.

Paul says, "Look, I know you're concerned about those Christians that die from time to time and I know you're concerned that maybe they're going to miss the gathering together and you loved them and you want to see them again and you want them to be there and they're not going to be there. And you're going to wonder: where do they go? And where are they? And how can we recognize them if they're not there in bodily form? And it won't be like it was, and will the reunion happen?" And he says, "Look, I don't want you to grieve like the hopeless pagans who have no comfort in the promise of a reunion." Reunion is here, beloved, it is. It is also in the very terminology of 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 1 when it's called "our gathering together to Him." As we are brought to Him, we are gathered together to each other. There will be reunion. There will be a gathering together. And he says you don't need to fear, and you don't need to grieve about it like people who are looking at a dead end. We need to get that somehow deeply embedded in our hearts, don't we? That is our confident hope. Partings here are just brief.

Now, he says, "I don't want you to be an uninformed people about the Christians who are dying. I don't want you to grieve as the rest who have no hope. Now, in order to eliminate that and to comfort you, I'm going to tell you about the gathering together." And this is what prompts his discussion of this

great event. By the way, this is one of the three passages in the New Testament which are the key passages in delineating this event. John 14, 1 Corinthians 15, and 1 Thessalonians 4, and we'll be intersecting with all three as we go through this great text.

By the way, each time our Lord gave teaching through the Holy Spirit, each time this teaching came on this gathering together event at the coming of Christ, it was in response to certain distress. In John 14 the disciples were distressed and confused and discomfited. Why? Because Jesus was what? He was leaving. And in the middle of their distress, they were wondering what is going to happen to us, and so Jesus said, let Me comfort you, I'm coming back. In the case of Corinth, some were flatly denying altogether the resurrection and denying that there ever would be a gathering together. And the Corinthians were confused. Will there be one? Are You ever going to collect us together? Is there going to be a resurrection? And so, he writes 1 Corinthians 15 about resurrection, and verses 51 to 58 about this gathering together itself. And here you have the same thing. The Thessalonians are distressed and disturbed, maybe because of their lack of information, and also because of some misinformation being given to them. And so, in each case distress, doubt, confusion, even denial has caused the Spirit of God to put this down.

Now, I say that to say in all three cases it comes primarily as comfort. It comes as a pastoral message rather than an eschatological treatise. What is most interesting about it is if you look at the great eschatological passages of the New Testament, Matthew 24 and 25, and the book of Revelation, you don't find a gathering together, this specific event, in either one of them. It's almost like this was reserved as a point of comfort contact. It fits into the whole scheme, but those books which give you sort of chronological flow of eschatological events do not focus on this specific event. Here it comes in a pastoral way. It's almost a very special, very private, very personal ministry of the Spirit of God to comfort troubled believers about their future.

So, this launches Paul then to discuss this event which we call the Rapture. You say, "Now, where do we get that concept, Rapture?" Go down to verse 17, the verb there "shall be caught up," is the verb *harpaz*, snatched. Snatched. It means to snatch up, to seize; it means to carry off by force. And it has the idea of a sudden swoop of irresistible force that just sweeps us up. From a Latin word connected to this word comes our word rape, to give you the idea of the force, the seizure, the snatching concept. And so, there is coming a snatching away, a seizing by force, the swooping us off, gathering us together to the Lord in the future. And Paul says in order to eliminate your ignorance, and your consequent grief, and to bring you comfort, I'm going to tell you about it.

All right, now he's going to tell us four things about it: the pillars of the Rapture, the participants in the Rapture, the plan of the Rapture and the profit, or the benefit, of the Rapture. Let's at least look initially at the first one this morning: the pillars of the Rapture. What is it built on? We've got to have a foundation for this. It isn't philosophical speculation, it isn't religious mythology, it isn't some kind of fable fabricated by well-meaning people who want to make folks feel good because of their sorrow.

What is this great promise that Jesus is coming to gather us all together built on? He gives us three elements, to the three pillars, really: the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the revelation of Christ.

Let's look at the death of Christ, verse 14. "For if we believe that Jesus died." Stop right there. In this case the "if" could be misleading. It doesn't suggest any doubt; it's only there to indicate logical sequence, the logical sequence of believing, if you believe. And in this case that condition is fulfilled so you could say, "Since you believe that Jesus died." Or, "Based on the fact that Jesus died," that's just simply laying down a premise. Since you believe in Christ's death, thus and thus and thus and thus. And he follows with this statement. So, if you believe, or if we believe that Jesus died, that's where it all begins. In order to believe in the Rapture and in order to understand the coming of Jesus to snatch away His church, you have to believe in the death of Christ. But what does he mean by that? Well, it was the death of Christ that paid the penalty for our what? Our sins. So, it was the death of Christ then that brought us into the possession of eternal life. It is because Jesus bore our sins in His own body, it is because He became sin for us, it is because in His death He fulfilled all the conditions that God required to pay the penalty for sin, it is because of that that we can be gathered together by Christ into God's presence, right?

So, we have to start at that point. It was in His death that He fulfilled all the conditions. So, when Paul says if we believe that Jesus died, he's not simply talking about the death of Jesus in some flat one-dimensional martyr kind of mentality. He is summing up in it the whole atoning work. If we believe, as it were, in the full implications of the death of Christ, then we know that judgment for sin has been satisfied, right? We know then that we, by virtue of that, have been made acceptable to God. And if we have been made acceptable to God, then there is a pillar on which the gathering together can occur. If we are not acceptable to God, He's not going to gather us to Himself. If we don't belong to His Son, by substitutionary death and faith in that person and work, then He's not going to gather us together. But because in His death we are saved from death, we believe in the gathering together. In fact, Jesus died, and you notice he doesn't refer to Jesus use the word sleep, Jesus died feeling the full fury of death in all of its dimensions as He bore in His body our sins, in order that He might turn death for us into sleep.

One writer puts it this way, "Death has been changed to sleep by the death of Christ. It is an apt metaphor in which the whole concept of death is transformed. Christ made sleep the name for death in the dialect of the church." End quote. Christ made sleep the name for death in the dialect of the church. Why? Because He paid for our sins. You say, "What does that have to do with it?" The wages of sin is death. If the wages are paid, then we no longer face death, only temporary sleep. The sting of death is what? Sin, 1 Corinthians 15:56. It's like a bee, and when the bee stung Jesus and He died, the stinger was there and there's no sting left. And so, there's no death. We need to say, not So-and-so died, but So-and-so in spirit is alive with Jesus Christ and their body is asleep waiting for the gathering together. That's what happens to Christians when they die. Their spirit goes immediately to

be with the Lord, fellowship. Their body goes in to repose, sleeping. That's the first great pillar. That hope is provided for us in His death.

Second one, verse 14, for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again." There's the second pillar. When Jesus was raised from the dead by the Father, it indicated that the Father approved the sacrifice of Christ and that in raising Jesus He would raise those who were in Him. When God the Father raised Christ from the dead He indicated that Jesus Christ had triumphed over death not only for Himself but for every Christian. And that's why Paul goes on to say if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, "Even so," now there's the bridge, those two words, "God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." See, our resurrection and our gathering together at His coming is predicated on His resurrection.

I like what I. Howard Marshall at Aberdeen, Scotland wrote, he said this, "God will treat those who died trusting in Jesus in the same way He treated Jesus Himself, namely by resurrecting them." He will treat us the same way He treated Jesus. And when Jesus died, where was His soul? Well, it was alive, and it was proclaiming victory and triumph, and His body was in repose. But God raised that body and joined it to that eternal soul of the second member of the trinity, and that's exactly what He's going to do for you. When you die your spirit goes to be with the Father, and with the Son, and your body into the grave but God will take that body out of the grave in the same that He raised Jesus He'll raise you to be joined with that eternal spirit into that final form like Christ. You'll be like Him for you'll see Him as He is, says John.

So, "even so" is the link between the death and resurrection of Christ and what happens to Christians when He comes. The resurrection of us all is linked to the resurrection of Christ. First Corinthians 15:23 says Christ the firstfruits and afterward, they that are Christ's at His coming. As God raised Him up, as it says in Hebrews 13:20, God will raise us up also. You remember John 14:19, Jesus said, "Because I live, you shall live also." First Corinthians 6:14 says it directly. "God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power." Second Corinthians chapter 4 verse 14 says the same thing: "He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and present us with You." That's our hope. The pillar of the gathering together, the death of Christ, the penalty of sin is paid and God is satisfied that we are righteous in Christ and He can receive us to Himself. The resurrection, which is God's guarantee of Christ's perfect accomplishment and the guarantee of our resurrection who are in Christ for He will treat us the same way He treated Christ. Namely, He will raise us from the dead.

And then, Paul specifically says it in verse 14, "God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." What's he saying? He's saying: "Look, dear friends, you aren't going to miss anything. Even the people who die aren't going to miss it. Based on the death of Christ and its perfect work, based on the resurrection of Christ and the Father's will, God is going to bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." With Him means with Christ. When Christ comes in His glory to gather

His people, those who have fallen asleep are going to be there. That's the answer to the question. Now, what is this little phrase, "God will bring with Him?" With Him means with Christ, but what do you mean God will bring? Some say it means that God will bring with Christ from heaven down the spirits of dead Christians to join their bodies. You know, it says later that we meet in the air, and so that God will bring down from heavens their souls to meet the resurrected bodies coming up, and there'll be a joining together at that point. Some people say it means, no, God will bring with Christ back to glory all those gathered together, living and dead. Once they're gathered, God will bring them back to glory.

You say, which is true? Well, probably both. I don't think we need to get carried away and be too technical. Some have even said what it means is God is going to bring the spirits of these believers out of heaven all the way down to earth and they stay on the earth. That's one view. That view doesn't make sense. If you're going to come all the way to the earth, why meet in the air? That's an unnecessary trip if we're going back. Secondly, that doesn't square with what the Bible says. You say, "Well, what do you mean?" Look at John 14 for a moment, verse 1, "Let not your heart be troubled, believe in God, believe also in Me." The disciples again were troubled because Jesus was leaving and they didn't know what was going to happen to them. He says, "I'm going away, that's right, in My Father's house there are many dwelling places, if it were not so I would have told you, I go to prepare," what? "A place for you." Where? In heaven, in the Father's house. "And if I go and prepare a place for you," there is a logical conclusion, "I will come again and take you there." Does that make sense? It does to me. "I will come again and receive you to Myself that where I am there you may be also." I'm going up there to the Father's house and I am going to fix a place for you, and then I'm going to come and get you, and I'm going to take you to the place I fixed for you where I am. That has to be heaven. So, we conclude then that when Jesus gathers believers together, which way are we going? Up. We meet in the air and we continue the heavenward movement. Yes, it's fair to say that our spirits, the spirits of Christians who have died, come down to meet those bodies, but once the meeting takes place, we are gathered together to Christ. He gathers us to Himself, and He takes us to where He is, which is clearly in the Father's house in heaven where He's been preparing a place for us. There has to be, then, some time interval there before to return to earth for the establishment of the Kingdom. And so, when Jesus comes, he says God's going to bring along all the gathered together, including those who have fallen asleep, God's going to bring them all to Himself, along with Jesus Christ. That's the gathering together. That's the event. And he says that those who have fallen asleep aren't going to miss it, so don't grieve for those who are dying, and for yourself should you die.

Again, I remind you, it really is clear that they had reason to expect that Jesus could come in their life time, right? Or all of these questions wouldn't have existed if they thought it was thousands and thousands of years down the road. Paul had given them the impression that it could come in their life time.

One other note that I just mention to you. The end of verse 14, those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, the best way to understand that phrase is a sort of phrase of what you could call attendant circumstance. The use of *día* here can reflect the idea that they died in a circumstance of being related to Jesus Christ. They died in a situation where they were related to Jesus Christ. So, all who have temporarily gone into repose in the graves as to their physical bodies in relationship to Jesus Christ are going to be there at the gathering. I just want to let you know, folks, that if you're ever in Christ, you're always in Christ. And you can be spoken of as being in Christ even though you're asleep, your body is asleep. It's a permanent designation. We have fallen asleep in Jesus, it says in 1 Corinthians 15:18. Those who died in Christ remain in Christ forever and ever, and will be risen in Christ, and collected with the rest who are alive. Now, that's just the first part. The good part is yet to come when we see one more of the pillars and then the plan, the participants and the profit from this, but that will be for next time. Let's bow in prayer.

While your heads are bowed for just a moment, I was reading this week about a little girl, five-year-old girl who was watching her brother die of a very, very painful disease. He was much older than she, and she loved him a lot. And after he died and the funeral was over she said to her mother, she said, "Mommy, where did brother go?" To which her mother replied, "Well, he went to heaven to be with Jesus." She said, "Oh." And that satisfied her little mind. Not long after that, she heard her mother having a conversation with a friend, and her mother was weeping and saying, "I've lost my son, I've lost my son, I've lost my son." Later in the day, the little five-year-old went to her mother and said, "Mommy, is somebody lost when we know where they are?" Well, the answer to that question is no, nobody is lost when we know where they are. We don't grieve as those who have no hope. Those that have died in Christ, their spirit is in His presence, their body is asleep and they will not miss the great event of the gathering together of the church when Jesus comes. That is the promise of Scripture.

Thank You, Father, for such a promise and such a hope. We pray this day that there will be no one in the hearing of this message who does not live in that hope. Father, we pray for those who have no hope, who look at death as a blind alley, a dark hallway, a dead-end street, have no hope of reunion, no hope of resurrection, no hope of eternal joy. God, bring them to the Savior this day. Save them, Lord. Save them with Your grace, that they might have the hope of those in Christ, living and have fallen asleep, that someday we shall all be gathered together to be forever with Christ, to go to the dwelling place prepared for us in the Father's house to be where our Savior is. How we thank You, Father, that that hope is available to all who put their faith in Jesus Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

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