**November 12, 2023 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

**Rest Assured**

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 NRSV

(13)But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so 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 died. (15)For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. (16)For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (17)Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. (18)Therefore encourage one another with these words.

**Notes:**

1. “…We do not want you to be ***uninformed***…”
   1. ***Death*** is not the end of the story.
   2. The great ***hope*** for all believers is the Resurrection.
   3. God continues turning ***tragedy*** to ***triumph***.
2. Everyone will stand before the throne of Jesus for ***judgment***.
   1. Jesus likens eternity in his presence as a great ***banquet***.
   2. Every believer will stand reunited in God's ***presence***.
3. Some will meet Christ face to face through their ***death***.
   1. It will seem as if one has just fallen ***asleep*** and ***awoke*** in his presence.
   2. Death is not a ***setback*** for our redeemed loved ones.
   3. The "dead in Christ" will experience ***resurrection***.
4. Some believers will meet Christ face to face in the ***rapture***.
   1. The word "***rapture***" is a Latin translation of the phrase which means "caught up".
   2. Jesus will ***return***, and those who are ***alive*** in Christ will be raptured.
5. After believers enter Christ’s presence, there will be no ***exit***.
   1. Believers will *“****always*** *be with the Lord.”*
   2. 1st - We'll meet the Lord *“in the* ***air****.”*
   3. 2nd - We'll be in the “***Father's*** ***House***”,
   4. Finally - we'll be in the "***New*** ***Jerusalem***.
6. It is our ***responsibility*** to understand what will take place.
   1. We are but one heartbeat away from ***eternity***;
   2. The power of ***hope*** is our defense against fear of death.
   3. ***stand*** ***confident***, ***walk*** ***boldly***, and ***rest*** ***assured***.
   4. Jesus is ***coming***!!!

**Script:**

Have you ever wondered what it will be like when we see Christ? I have often wondered what that day will be like? In fact there have been times when I dreamt of that day. I have had dreams where I was standing before the Lord and my loved ones who have passed on were there. At the time of some of those dreams, I awake and find myself in my bed. In another, I ask if I am in heaven to which Jesus answers, “yes, but you cannot stay.” In my mind I am wondering what I did wrong, only to hear Jesus follow with, “…your work on earth is not done.” I have had dreams apocalyptic in nature, and He tells me to, “…take care of my little ones.”

But these are only dreams, they aren’t real, right? Some of you may be thinking that I have an overactive imagination. Others may think that these are just dreams. But have you ever wondered what that day will be like? Will Jesus return exactly as it is described in scriptures? Will we need to endure extreme hardship before that time comes? Or will we be delivered just in a nick of time? And, what about our loved ones who live on the edge of salvation? The ones we aren’t really sure about, will they be taken along with Jesus? Will we recognize our loved ones that have died before that time? What about those who have gone before us; are they in the presence of Jesus; or are they in a place awaiting the rapture when they, like the rest of us, will be judged?

What kind of comfort and hope is available for us in scripture. How do we as Christians ultimately enter into His presence? In our sermon passage today, found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; I hope to help you find some answers to these and other questions. J. Vernon McGee refers to this passage as, “…one of the most important prophetic passages in the Scriptures. It teaches the *imminent* and *impending* coming of Christ for His church.” Join me in the reading of our passage today.

*(13)But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so 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 died. (15)For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. (16)For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (17)Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. (18)Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 NRSV*

“…We do not want you to be uninformed…” The Thessalonians were wondering why many of their fellow believers had died and what would happen to them when Christ returned. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that death is not the end of the story. The great hope for all believers is in the Resurrection. We believe Christ died and rose from the dead; and because Christ came back to life, so will all believers, including those who have already died. For this reason, we have no need to fret and worry over loved ones who have passed on, or when world events take a tragic turn, and the future looks bleak. God has been in the business of turning tragedy to triumph, poverty to riches, pain to glory, and defeat to victory; and he has been doing that since the beginning of time.

One day when Christ returns, every person will stand before the throne and face judgment. Every person will stand before the Lord and those who are faithful will receive a crown, but those who are not, those who are sinful, they will be banished from God’s presence to endure suffering and torment for all of eternity. Jesus describes this as being thrown into the outer darkness, the eternal fire, where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

On the other hand, Jesus likens eternity in his presence as a great banquet, others have envisioned a great gathering of all the faithful in the presence of God, singing songs of praise and shouting acclamations to the Lord. Every believer in history will stand reunited in God's very presence, safe and secure.

Paul is comforting the Thessalonians with this promise of Resurrection, and we should be assured with this great hope. But on that day when the Lord returns, what will it be like when we see Jesus face to face? And, what about my loved ones who have gone before and others who are on the edge? What kind of comfort and hope does the scriptures offer us? How will the Christians ultimately enter into his presence?

Some will meet Christ face to face through their death. I have heard some say that our redeemed loved ones are with Christ right now. Others say that they sleep in the grave awaiting his return. But does it really matter if we lie asleep in the grave until His return or if we meet him right away. Listen to what Peter writes, “*But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. 2 Peter 3:8 NRSV”* According to Peter in God’s kingdom for those who have died, it makes no difference how long it will have been, it will seem as if one has just fallen asleep and awoke in his presence. Allow me to say it this way, when one dies their body will fall asleep, and when they awaken they will be in the presence of God.

When Jesus arrives, *“…the dead in Christ will rise first.”* Death is not a setback for our redeemed loved ones, not now nor in the future. There is no particular advantage of being alive when Christ returns. We do not need to worry about our redeemed loved ones on that day, Christ will bring your loved one with Him when He comes to receive the living believers unto Himself*.* After Christ's return, we will enter into the presence of Christ along with our loved ones for eternity. Your redeemed loved one's body will be resurrected on the day of Christ's return! Those who are "dead in Christ" will experience this victorious resurrection.

Some believers will meet Christ face to face in the rapture. Did you know, the word rapture is never found in scripture? We hear so much about this word but it is never written into the Holy Bible. However, it is referred to. The word "rapture" is a Latin translation of the phrase which means "caught up".

Several characters in the Bible experienced a rapture. Paul mentions Enoch was raptured in Hebrews 11:5, *“By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and ‘he was not found, because God had taken him.’ For it was attested before he was taken away that ‘he had pleased God.’”* We read about Elijah being raptured in 2 Kings 2:11, *“As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.”* Philip was briefly snatched up for a return trip from Gaza to Samaria (Acts 8:37).

Nothing else needs to happen before the rapture can happen. Jesus will return, and with the trumpet sound those who are alive in Christ will be caught up with Christ, they will be raptured. Your entrance into eternity by death or rapture can occur at any minute. Are you ready for that day to come? Are you looking forward to the day when we see Jesus?

After believers enter into Christ’s presence, there will be no exit. After the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the rapture of those who remain, we believers will *“always be with the Lord.”* But where will we be?

When we are with the Lord, where will we be? First, we'll meet the Lord *“in the air.”* Second, we'll be in the “Father's House”, John 14:2-3 says, *“(2)In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? (3)And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”* Finally, we'll be in the "New Jerusalem. Revelation 21:1-26 says, *“(1)Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. (2)And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (3)And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; (4)he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’ (5)And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new.”*

We hear a lot about the rapture and end times; and I am sorry to remind you that everyone will not make heaven. God very clearly points out what will take place in the end times, He clearly points out the last days and it is our responsibility to search God’s word and understand what will take place during that time.

We are but one heartbeat away from eternity; nobody knows when our time in this world will end and nobody knows when we will enter eternity. This I know, Jesus promised he would return someday to take his people to be with him. What are you looking forward to? What have you set for goals? What do you put all your hopes and dreams in?

We fix our eyes on a desired future. We invest our time to reach those objectives. We invest our money on things that are important to us. We plan for a wedding. We plan for jobs by getting education and gaining experience. We work toward retirement and the latter days of our lives. If it were not for the power of hope, the hope we have in Jesus Christ, the hope we have in our Father God, the hope we find through the Holy Spirit, we would have no defense against the fear of death.

Knowing these things and planning for the end, we are able to stand confident, knowing the promises the Lord has made us. We are able to walk boldly into the unknown, knowing that the Lord is by our side. We are able to rest assured that the Lord will provide. Even in the most difficult of situations keeping our eyes fixed upon Jesus, remembering the promises he has made to each of us, we can be sure that he will see us through. Be certain that the Lord will provide just what is needed to see you through.

I do not know when the rapture will come; I do not know if it will be exactly as it is described in scripture; I do not know the details of that day. But this I do know; Jesus is coming!!! If we are not ready, it will be our own fault for we have heard the word of the Lord today. If we walk away today with fear of the rapture because we have not surrendered to Jesus it is our own fault. You have heard his invitation, “Come to me…” If we wait and put off asking Jesus to enter our hearts and live in our soul, when that day comes, it may be too late. On that day, I am afraid it will be too late to ask. Personally, I would not want to risk it. If you live in awe of the Lord, if you live in fear of an eternity in hell; invite Jesus into your heart and life. Live in God’s kingdom and enter into eternity with Him, that is his invitation for each of us today.