

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. According to the Lord's own Word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 SS 11/13/11 Isaiah 52:1-6 Matthew 25:1-13 Psalm 33
Hymns: 779, 608, 429, 660

WE'RE GOING TO HEAVEN!

Redeemed, restored, forgiven, through Jesus' precious blood,
Heirs of His home in heaven oh, praise our pard'ning God!
Praise Him in tuneful measures Who gave His Son to die;
Praise Him whose sev'nfold treasures enrich and sanctify.

Now keep us, holy Savior, in Your true love and fear,
And grant us by Your favor the grace to persevere
Till, in Your new creation, our earthly troubles o'er,
Heirs of Your free salvation, we praise You evermore.

(Worship Supplement #779:1, 4)

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Paul begins our text, *"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep."* God wants us to know about what happens to us: 1. when we die, and (as we'll see) 2. when the Judgment Day comes. Paul speaks of *"those who fall asleep."* In the Bible God calls the death of everyone who believes in Him *"sleep."* Once a man whose daughter had just died asked Jesus to bring her back to life. Jesus told the people there, *"The girl is not dead but asleep."* They made fun of Jesus until He 'woke the girl up,' so to speak, by bringing her back to life! (Mt. 9:18f.).

Why does God call the death of a Christian *"sleep"*? Sometimes little children don't want to go to sleep at night because they're afraid of the dark. But they finally go to sleep, wake up the next morning, and they're fine. We can be afraid of dying: *"How will I die?" "Will I suffer?"* And so on. We don't have to be afraid of dying any more than we have to be afraid of falling asleep. Just as we wake up after sleeping, so Jesus will raise us back to life after we die. He has promised us, *"Because I live, you will live also"* (Jn. 14:19).

Another reason God calls the death of a Christian *"sleep"* is that when we're asleep we're not aware of the passage of time. We fall asleep, and the next thing we know we're awake. When we 'fall asleep' in death, the next thing we know we're with Jesus in heaven! As Jesus told the repentant thief on the cross, *"Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise"* (Lk. 23:43).

We're refreshed after a good sleep. Another reason God calls the death of a Christian "*sleep*" is that after our sinful body 'falls asleep' in death, God will raise us back to life and our body will be renewed and perfect! The Bible says that God "*will change our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body*" (Philip 3:21). "*So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.... We will all be changed... So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then will come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'*" (1 Cor. 15:42-43, 51b, 54).

Paul says, "*Brothers, we do not want you to ... grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.*" I have been with many Christians as they were dying. EVERY one of them died in peace. They knew that Jesus died for all of their sins on the cross, and that Jesus was taking them to heaven. When loved ones who believe in Jesus die, we grieve because we miss them. But we also have joy in our heart for THEM. They are safe with God for all eternity! The Bible says of those in heaven, "*God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away*" (Rev. 21:3-4).

Paul says, "*We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.*" Why is it that we sometimes may wonder if we'll make it to heaven? It's because of our sins. But our text has Good News for us sinners: "*Jesus died*" for our sins. John says, "*This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*" (1 Jn. 4:9-10). Jesus died for us on the cross, and took all of our sins away. "*The blood of Jesus, [God's] Son, cleanses us from all sin*" (1 Jn. 1:7b). Jesus promises us, "*My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day*" (Jn. 6:40). Our sins are forgiven. We are saved. We are going to heaven.

"*For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God.*" When Jesus comes again on the Judgment Day, what an amazing sight that will be! The Bible says that "*[Jesus] is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him*" (Rev. 1:7).

Just after the disciples saw Jesus ascend back into heaven two angels appeared to them and told them, "*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*" (Ac. 1:11). Jesus has assured us, "*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*" (Jn. 14:1, 2-3).

Paul says, "*According to the Lord's own Word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.*" The believers who are still alive when the Judgment Day comes will not be taken up off the earth to meet Jesus before the believers who have already died.

Paul says that on the Judgment Day "*the dead in Christ will rise first.*" On the Judgment Day God will bring all the believers who have died back to life again. He will raise all of them up into the sky to meet Him. "*After that, we who are still alive and are left*

will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” Then God will raise all the believers who are still alive up off the earth to meet Him in the sky. Then all of us believers together will go live with the Lord in heaven forever.

In the beginning, God did not make us to die. God made us to live forever. But the Fall into sin changed all that. The Bible says, *“Sin entered the world through one man”* (Adam), *“and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned”* (Ro. 5:12). Because Adam and Eve sinned, and we all come from Adam and Eve, we’re all sinful. Because we’re sinful, we can’t live forever as we are. Unless the Judgment Day comes first, we will die some day. But death isn’t the end for us. Death doesn’t have the victory over us. Christ has turned our death into a victorious new beginning for us. Through death, God will deliver us from sin and this sinful world forever! Once we die, the devil, the world, and our flesh can never tempt us or hurt us again.

It’s sad that anyone has to die. When we hear about the Judgment Day in the Bible, it’s frightening. Don’t be sad. Don’t be scared. *“For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible. ... Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor. 15:52, 54-57).

When Jesus comes again on the Judgment Day, He’s going to put an end to this poor, sin-sick creation. We won’t have to live here and struggle and suffer any more. God will take us into the perfect health and peace and joy of heaven for all eternity. *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us”* (Ro. 8:18).

“Therefore encourage each other with these words.” The Lord brings us back to where our text began: *“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.”* I know a funeral director who is a Christian. I told him I thought it must be hard dealing with grieving families and friends of people who have died. He said that the funerals of unbelievers are hard because their loved ones have no hope. But he said that the funeral of believers are always joyful. Of course the people there are sad to lose their loved one. But there’s also always hope and joy. They know their loved one is safe forever with the Lord, and that they will all be together again.

Don’t be afraid to die. Don’t be afraid of the Judgment Day. **WE’RE GOING TO HEAVEN!**

Soon will the Lord, my Life, appear;
 Soon shall I end my trials here,
 Leave sin and sorrow, death and pain.
 To live is Christ, to die is gain.

Soon will the saints in glory meet,
 Soon walk through every golden street,
 And sing on every blissful plain:
 To live is Christ, to die is gain. Amen.

(TLH #608:4-5)