

**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen**

<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage each other with these words. **This is God's Word for our meditation.**

**Dear fellow saints who are looking forward to a triumphant reunion in heaven,**

Saints Triumphant are those believers who are now in heaven. Have you ever thought about what it would be like if you could talk to one of them? I sometimes wonder what kind of questions people asked Lazarus after Jesus raised him from the dead. Did they ask him about heaven? Did he remember what he had experienced in heaven? Probably not but wouldn't it be neat if we could get an eye witness account of what it is like to die and what heaven is like.

God doesn't want us to worry about what we will experience at the moment of death. He doesn't want us to worry about whether we will be in heaven or not. He doesn't want us to worry about Judgment Day. Rather he wants to assure us that because of the faith we have in our hearts we can look forward to a place in heaven and Judgment Day will be a day when we will be affirmed as a Saint Triumphant – because of our faith in what Jesus has done for us.

So let's rejoice in what we know – the words that Paul gives to us in this portion of scripture. Find comfort and peace in these words and encourage one another with them.

**I.** When Paul went to preach to the people of Thessalonica, he spent just a little over 3 weeks there before he was run out of town because of persecution. He sent Timothy back later but there were a few things that Paul had not been able to talk about and some of these things worried the people. One specific thing was about the Christians who die before Christ comes again on Judgment Day? What happens to them? That's a good question for us to talk about too, because death is something we cannot escape unless Judgment Day comes first. So what happens when we die?

Paul describes death by using the picture of someone who has fallen asleep. He's not trying to paint a rosy picture by using nice words, but this picture reminds us that we are not afraid when we lay down at night to sleep. Sleep is something good and prepares us for a new day. That is how death is for the Christian. We don't need to fear putting our head down on the pillow of death and falling asleep in the arms of our Savior, because Jesus will awake us to a glorious eternal new day in heaven with him.

Even though we use the word sleep, when a person dies their soul does not go off into limbo somewhere. Last week we heard about how the soul faces immediate judgment and the outcome of that judgment is either heaven or hell. Jesus himself said, **“Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16). Faith in Jesus as your Savior takes your soul to heaven, but what about the body?

That’s something that is very easy to see. The body goes into the grave. Solomon wrote, **“and the dust returns to the ground it came from”** (Ec. 12:7). You might say the body sleeps as it awaits Judgment Day because on Judgment Day the bodies will be re-united with the souls.

That is the picture Paul describes in verses 16 and 17 for us when he says, **“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.”**

When Jesus comes on Judgment Day, it’s not going to be a secret. Everyone on the whole earth will know it. There will be a loud command – the voice of the archangel heard round the world – and the trumpet call of God also heard round the world. Those bodies in the grave will come out, be re-united with their souls and they along with the believers who are alive will meet together in the clouds with the Lord and go home to heaven together. Paul points out in his letter to the Corinthians that all this will take place **“in the twinkling of an eye”** (1 Co. 15:52) and those bodies once marred by sin will be raised imperishable as glorified and perfect bodies, no longer carrying the imperfections and weaknesses of sin.

That is what happens when we die and what will happen on Judgment Day. Scripture is pretty clear about that and yet there are so many religions that teach everyone is going to heaven and if you don’t know Jesus, don’t worry about it, just live a good life and you’ll be fine, but that’s not what the Bible tells us.

God certainly wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, but so many people reject that truth that will bring them eternal life. There is only one way to heaven and that is through faith alone in Jesus alone. Those who are in heaven, we call Saints Triumphant. Christ has brought them the final triumph over sin and death and their faith has carried them home to heaven where they no longer have to deal with sin and temptation.

**II.** That is why Paul encourages us to, **“Rejoice in what we know.”** He wrote, **“We believe that Jesus died and rose again,”** and with those words he is telling us that we have everything we need to be a Saint Triumphant in heaven.

We believe that Jesus died. That he paid for our sins on the cross. That he took on the burden of our sins for us. We believe that he rose again. His resurrection proves that his payment for our sins was complete and sufficient. His resurrection proves that he has defeated sin and death for us. Jesus himself said, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies”** (John 11:25). Even though we die a physical death, we will continue to live spiritually until our souls are re-united with our bodies on Judgment Day.

That is why we have no reason to worry. Matter of fact, this knowledge gives us every reason to rejoice – to sing praises to God. We know what is going to happen when we die. There is no uncertainty, just the sure hope of eternal life. Through faith in Jesus our Savior, we have a sure thing.

There are times when we all get depressed – there are days where we wish we could just stay in bed all day because everything just seems to go wrong. On those days, when life seems toughest, remember the sure hope of salvation that you have through your Savior. Remember that the time we have here on this earth is very short compared to the eternity we will spend in heaven with our Savior and rejoice! Because no matter how bad your day is going it will pass and tomorrow will bring a new day.

**III.** What wonderful news we have and that knowledge is so awesome that God doesn't want us to keep it to ourselves. Paul says, **“Therefore encourage each other with these words.”** First he is talking about encouraging our fellow believers with these words – those with whom we share a common faith.

When a loved one dies, we don't always know what to say. If that person was a Christian we can use the words Paul here gives us to encourage and comfort each other. We certainly mourn when we lose a loved one but we also rejoice and celebrate that they are at home in heaven with Christ. That is why we don't grieve as someone who has no hope. We have a sure hope found in Jesus our Savior.

That is why it is so important to share that message of Jesus as our Savior. We don't want others to be ignorant of God's Plan of salvation, but rather we want to express our faith in love by sharing Jesus and in that way we also praise his name. Sharing Jesus gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to work and add to the number of those who will sing praises to his name and who will be with our Lord forever in heaven.

What happens when a Christian dies? God doesn't want that to be a mystery. He wants us to know what happens so we can be ready to join the multitude of Saints Triumphant. So listen to his Word and **“Rejoice in your salvation”** and don't forget to **“Encourage others with what we know and believe.”** Amen.