

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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words. (NIV84)

Theme: Be Encouraged with these Words:

1. Christ will give life to all the dead.
2. All believers will live with Christ forever.

Everyone needs to be encouraged from time to time. When a basketball player misses a big shot, the coach claps his hands and says to him, "Don't worry about it, you'll get the next one." A teacher tells a student to "keep up the good work" when she gets a good grade on a test. You tell your friend, "Keep your head up—you'll find a job soon."

We all need encouragement. Especially as Christians living in this sin-filled world. We need encouragement as we suffer through this world full of pain, toil, and sorrow.

Paul gives us encouragement. He wants us to be encouraged by these words: Christ will give life to all the dead and all believers will live with Christ forever.

The believers in Thessalonica mistakenly thought that only those who were alive at the time of Christ's return would be brought to heaven. They thought that those who had already died would not be given eternal life. To them the dead had no hope of eternal life. So beginning with our text Paul encouraged the Thessalonians about the resurrection of the dead. **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.

The rest of men, are those who don't know Christ. That is why they have no hope. And if they don't know Christ they are unbelievers. They have no Savior. They have no hope of forgiveness. And their sins count against them. They remain **dead in their transgressions and sins**. And they will be punished eternally.

But most unbelievers don't really care about their sins. If there is no God to answer to, why worry about what you do wrong? But, an unbeliever does care about his life. And to him, this life is all there is. He loves his life—he wants to eat, drink, and be merry before he dies. He doesn't live in view of an afterlife. He lives in view of his own life. Which works for awhile; until he suffers. He lives in this sin-filled world just like you and I. He is beat down by sin; people do him wrong. Those who he is close to die; he gets sick and suffers. He wonders this horrible life full of pain, turmoil, and sorrow all there is. He's not sure about the answer. If there is, he doesn't know how to get there. He figures if he is a good person he could possibly be saved. But he knows deep down inside that he has done many wrong things. So more doubts enter his mind. So he hopes that when he dies, that's it. His only hope is that his death brings an end to suffering. But he's not sure. He has no hope, so he grieves.

We too may grieve, but not like the world. But because of this world. Sure, we have some good times. You have friends and family. There are certain things you like doing. You enjoy much about this life. But there is much you don't enjoy. You don't enjoy the results of sin. Pain, toil, and sorrow. Growing old, getting sick, losing the ability to do something you love. People mistreat you. Others let you down. You have a good reason to grieve in this life. But not because you have no hope.

You are encouraged by the coming of Christ. Paul describes that day, **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.** Christ will come on the Last Day in his divine glory. Everyone will see him and know that he is God. He says in our gospel today, **At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in**

clouds with great power and glory. He will come with all his angels. **He will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.** All people will be gathered before the Lord. No matter when they lived, or where they are located. This includes those who had died. Paul says, **Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake.** The Thessalonians had nothing to worry about. In fact Paul says **The dead in Christ will rise first.** Those who are dead will enjoy eternal life. Then those who are alive will follow. **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.** This gives us encouragement. As we live in this sin-filled world full of pain, turmoil, and sorrow we are encouraged that Christ is coming soon. Soon all believers, whether they are dead or alive, will be taken to heaven.

But how do we get to heaven? Well, it's not by what we do. If that would be the case we would fail. For we are nothing but sinners. We were born as enemies of God. We could do nothing to please God. We can't do anything to earn our way to eternal life. If it was up to us to earn eternal life, we would miserably fail. We would get what our sins deserve. We would suffer with the devil in hell forever. But it's not up to us. It is up to Christ. He lived a perfect life for us. On the cross he took away the guilt of all our sins. And he gave us his perfect life. So when God looks at us he no longer sees poor miserable sinners. He sees those who are pure and innocent, just like his Son. Three days after Jesus died he rose from the dead. And because he rose, we too will rise. And we will live with him in heaven forever.

Through the work of Christ alone we will be in heaven. But how do we receive the blessings that Christ won for us?

Only through faith. Paul makes this perfectly clear in verse 14, **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.** Because Christ died and rose again, we know that Jesus will return and take all who believe in him to heaven. Paul says in Ephesians, **it is by grace you have been saved through faith.** Or Jesus in John, **all who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life.** Through faith we receive the blessings Christ won for us. Those who believe in

Christ as the world's one and only Savior will be saved and have eternal life. All those who believe in him have their name written in a book—the book of life. God says in Daniel, **everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.**

These are those that God elected from eternity. Those God chose before the world began to be his own. And those God chose he brought to faith, forgave and saved. Or as Paul puts it in Romans, **those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.** God brought to faith those he chose. We did not choose to believe in God. It was God who chose us and gave us faith. Jesus said, **I chose you, you did not choose me.** Faith comes only through the means of grace. Through hearing the Word and through baptism the Holy Spirit brings us to faith. Through the Word and Holy Communion God strengthens that faith. In Romans Paul connects our baptisms to eternal life. **We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**

But is heaven going to be like? Well it's hard for us to know and understand. In our sinful state we cannot begin to comprehend just how great heaven will be. Often when God describes his heaven to us he mentions things that it is not. In heaven there will be no sin. And no effects of sin. In the book of Revelation, John said God, **Will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.** Everything that affects you will be gone. What causes you trouble and sorrow will be gone. It will be a perfect life in a perfect place.

There will be no sin. And if **the wages of sin is death**, then there is no death. Then this life will be forever. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians, **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 not die in heaven. We will spend an eternity with God. And that is the greatest thing of all about heaven. We will be with God. This is only possible without sin. We are so sinful and God is so glorious and perfect, that if we saw God in his full glory, we would die. Once Moses asked to see God's glory. But God replied to him,

you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live. So instead God let him see a glimpse of his back. On the mount of Transfiguration, Jesus allowed Peter, James, and John to see a glimpse of his divine glory. Just that glimpse was so bright they had to hide their faces. But in heaven, we will be with God in his full glory. We read in Revelation, **Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.** Paul sums up heaven in one simple way in verse 17. **We will be with the Lord forever.** John says we do not know exactly what life will be in heaven, but we do know one thing. **Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.**

We will be like God. That means we will be without sin. We will be perfect. And we will have perfect bodies. To the Philippians Paul said Christ **will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.** What exactly will our bodies look like in heaven? We don't know. We will look like ourselves and people will be able to recognize us. But we will have a perfect glorious body—unable to sin or die.

In heaven we will with all our fellow believers. Side by side with those sitting next to you now. Next to your loved ones. Next to those who have passed away already. Next to Peter and Paul. Next to David and Abraham. All believers of all time gathered together before God. And they will sing praises to him forever. John describes what he saw in heaven in the book of Revelation. **Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing. Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!**

Be encouraged by these words. And as Paul says in the last verse of our text, **encourage each other with these words.** As we live in this sin-filled world be encouraged by a life free from pain and sorrow. A life given to you through faith by the work of Christ alone. We may not know exactly what heaven is like. But we do know that it is a perfect life with our God. What more could we ask for? Eternal life with all believers next to God singing praises to our Savior. Amen.