

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

September 4, 2022



INTRODUCTION

Lead students to name movies or TV shows they have seen that portray life after death in some way. Discuss what those movies and TV shows portray life after death to be like.

Are those portrayals of what happens when you die right or wrong?•How do you know?

What questions do you have about what happens after you die?

Invite students to search their Bibles for a few minutes to try to find any information they can about death.

What did you find? Allow all answers.

Death can be a scary thing. There are many movies and television programs that deal with the spirit world and if we pay more attention to those than we do studying what the Bible says, it's easy to be unsure what really happens when we die. This is nothing new. Early believers had the same kinds of questions. Today's passage helps clear up the confusion we might have.

DISCUSSION

>>>ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-15.

Why do you think Paul used the word asleep to describe Christians who have died?

What does that tell you about death for people who believe in Jesus? Why might a person not have reason to hope as they grieve the death of someone they love? Do you have hope in death? Explain.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident was Paul in saying this (see verse 15)?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident are you that when a Christian dies, he or she joins Jesus in heaven?

It is completely normal to feel sad and grieve death. Paul didn't say we shouldn't feel sad or grieve. Even Jesus grieved the death of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35). But Paul said we shouldn't grieve in the same way that those who don't know Jesus do. Most of the people who lived in Thessalonica held to pagan beliefs and did not have reason for hope as they encountered death. Paul didn't want the Christians in Thessalonica to be confused about death, so he wrote to tell them about Jesus's return.

How can our response to death and loss be a witness to the gospel?

How can it confuse people about the gospel?

Our response to death shows our belief about death. When Christians die, they are not gone forever. Their lives on earth have ended, but not their actual lives—that's just getting started! The return of Christ gives perspective to our loss and grief and helps us apply the gospel to a painful situation. Our grief is not without hope.

How important is it for Christians to believe Jesus literally rose from the dead?

How does that affect your understanding of what happens when you die?

A lot of people are confused about Jesus's return. Why do you think that is?

Paul believed in Christ's bodily resurrection and based many truths on this certainty (1 Cor. 15:14). He emphasized our hope of one day seeing people who have died again. To deny that Jesus has conquered death is to deny the essence of the gospel message (1 Cor. 15:1-4). When Jesus returns, He will bring all those who have already died (or "fallen asleep") with Him.

>>>ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-18.

Based on these verses, what will happen when Jesus returns?

Does any of this surprise you or stand out to you as especially meaningful right now? Explain.

Who are the "dead in Christ"?

When you think about ways to encourage people and to be encouraged by people (v.18) does Jesus's return come to mind? Why should it?

Not everyone will die a physical death; some will be "caught up" together with those who have died in the air at Jesus's second coming. Those who have

already died won't miss out, or just sit idly by and watch, though! The dead in Christ will rise first.

GOING DEEPER

>>>READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-8.

On a piece of paper, draw a chart with the headings, "At home in the body" and "Away from the body".

From these verses, list facts about each in the appropriate columns.

>>>READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-53.

What will happen to all believers when Christ returns, whether still living or already dead?

What is going to change?

APPLICATION

How should knowing that the moment you die your spirit will be with Jesus impact your daily life?

How does a person's level of confidence in what happens after death impact the amount of courage they have to live out God's call on their lives?

How does this section of 1 Thessalonians encourage you?

PRAYER

Thank God for the hope He offers in Christ's return. Pray for those in the church who have Christian family members or friends who have recently died. Ask that God would comfort them with the expectation of His return. Thank God that He has not left us without hope.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study of 1 Thessalonians:

September 4, 2022 --- 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

COMMENTARY

1 Thessalonians 4:13. Paul was about to clear up some misunderstandings regarding death and the coming of Christ that were causing the Thessalonians a good deal of anxiety. Evidently these young Christians felt that those who died before the return of Christ would miss out. They must have thought there was a special advantage to being alive at Christ's return. This meant, in their minds, that there was a disadvantage for those who did not make it. Paul was concerned that the Thessalonians quit sorrowing and grieving like everyone else around them. People outside of Christ have no basis for facing death with hope. In the pagan world death was grim and full of despair. In our own time it is a mystery many people ignore. Consequently, deep anguish and sorrow were often expressed for the dead person. It was this kind of sorrowing that Paul wanted the Thessalonians to stop. The death of a Christian is something very different from the death of an unbeliever. The difference is the hope, the assurance, of resurrection. To straighten out their thinking and calm their fears, Paul went on to describe the coming of Christ and the place of the living and the dead in that magnificent event.

4:14. First Paul made an assertion of faith—that Jesus died and rose again. This is the bedrock of our faith. Paul then tied the truth of Christ to the unknown future. Whatever Christ does, His people follow. Wherever Christ is, His people are there. Christ died and rose again. Christians who die (fall asleep) will rise again. Christ will return again. Those who have died will return with Him. All of this is carried out by God's power.

4:15. Paul next introduced something new, a special revelation according to the Lord's own word. He received direct word from Christ about what followed. Paul's primary concern was not to teach an eschatological lesson but to assure and encourage the young church at Thessalonica. He did this by stating with the authority of Christ's words that everyone who is alive on earth at the time of Christ's coming will not go before those who have died. Paul was pointing the believers away from grief toward hope regarding those who had died.

4:16–17. Paul then handed the readers a program of sorts, an order of service. Christ is coming, and this is how it will occur: The Lord, Christ himself, will come down. There will be a lot of noise. The dead believers will rise first. Christians who are still alive on earth will rise next. Everyone meets together with Christ in the air. Eternity begins! The Lord himself will come down: The rapture of believers is a very personal affair. Christ Himself will be there in His great and shining glory. With a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God: It is debated whether this describes one great sound, or whether two or three distinct sounds will occur. The "shout" or "loud command" could signify the shout of triumph expressed by Christ, the conqueror of death, as He descends from heaven. Whether it is one or more

sounds, the coming of Christ will apparently be a noisy event. It is also debated whether unbelievers will be aware of His coming. This is not clarified. It could be that, like those who accompanied Saul on the road to Damascus, something will be heard, but the source or significance will not be comprehended. The dead in Christ will rise first: The dead believer is still in Christ. Nothing can separate us from Christ once we belong to Him—not even death. Yet, though their souls are with Christ, they are to receive resurrected bodies. It is this rising that Paul spoke of. God will bring with Jesus those who have died (v. 14). The first order of business is their resurrection to glorified bodies. After that, we who are still alive will be caught up: There is probably no great time span implied here, for everything will happen in “the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52). There will be people from every nation on earth when Christ returns, and these will be “caught up.” The word can be translated “snatched, swept up, carried away by force.” The Lord literally “snatches” the bodies of the living, and they are transformed and their bodies glorified. These two groups, the living and the dead, will join Christ in the clouds. This is a great company. All believers back through the centuries will join those who are living at that moment, forming the church united with its head, Christ. And then we will be with the Lord forever. 4:18. Paul’s conclusion: Therefore (in view of this) encourage each other with these words