

1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18; "Until the Coming of the Lord", Sermon # 19 in the series - "A Persevering Faith", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on August 24th, 2008, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

There was evidently a great deal of ignorance at the church of Thessalonica concerning the subject of the Resurrection of the Dead. It was not as bad a situation as the one had been at Corinth where Paul had to write to them and say, as he did there, "If Christ has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" It wasn't that bad in Thessalonica. They did believe in the Resurrection of the Dead. But the problem there, was more a problem of ignorance. There were evidently some persons there who had lost believing loved ones, and they were sorrowing over the loss of them in a way that showed that they didn't understand the future of all Christians. They were sorrowing over their believing loved ones as though they were not going to be raised from the dead, and as though they would never see them again. They didn't understand the great things, the most awesome and wonderful things, that are yet to come for all Christians, for every Christian who has ever lived. Jesus Christ is coming back again. He is going to appear a second time for those who eagerly await Him, as it says in Hebrews 9: 28. Paul did not want these believers to think that they, or those who had died before them, would miss out on all of the glory and the joy and the eternal comfort that will come to God's people when Christ returns. And He does not want Christians in this generation to be ignorant of these things either. This is why the Apostle has given us these truths here. They are given for the comfort and joy of all the Christians in every generation until Christ comes. We are to comfort one another with these words. I want to give you three observations from what Paul states here, concerning what the Lord Jesus will do for His own dear people in the Day when He returns. I will give you these observations, not all at once at the beginning of the sermon, but one at a time so that you might really comprehend the greatness of what he is saying here.

1st of all - The Death of all of God's people, in relation to their body, is a sleep from which Jesus will awaken them. (Verses 13 and 14)

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope." "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." When Paul speaks about those who have fallen asleep, he is not speaking of the soul falling asleep in Jesus, in death; he is speaking of the body sleeping in Jesus until the Day of the Resurrection; the Day of Christ's return. In order to prove this to ourselves we need to go back to John Chapter 11 and to the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead. You will recall that Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha and they lived in Bethany, and they were close friends of the Lord Jesus. Lazarus became sick with a terrible illness and Jesus was away from them at the time, on a preaching trip beyond the Jordan. So the sisters, it says in verse 3, "sent to Him saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.'" "When Jesus heard that,

He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." But having said this, Jesus did not do what Mary and Martha wanted Him so very much to do. He didn't come to them right away. I think that this is why the Apostle John inserts the comment of the next verse for our understanding. "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." "So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was." I am quite sure that both the disciples and Mary and Martha, as well as Lazarus wondered why Jesus did not come to them. And then after 2 days, Jesus says in verse 7, "Let us go to Judea again." "The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and you are going there again?" Perhaps they had thought during those 2 days, that Jesus' not going to Bethany to heal Lazarus because He did not want to die at the hands of those who hated Him there. But that was not at all the case, and later He would prove this by going up to Jerusalem to die. He says this in figurative language in verses 9 and 10, which I won't take the time to go into, and then He says in verse 11, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." "Then his disciples said, 'Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.'" "However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep." "Then Jesus said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead.'" "And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe." "Nevertheless let us go to him."

Now you notice that Jesus is very deliberate about the things that He is going to do, in this passage. He, first of all, was very deliberate in the way that He waited. He waited 2 days, very deliberately, until Lazarus had died before He went to him. He could have gone to him immediately and healed him, but he chose not to do so. The reason was so that He could come to Him later and do a greater thing yet for Lazarus; and that was; that He would raise Him from the dead. The Lord Jesus speaks of Lazarus' physical death, the death of his physical body, as sleep. And He is not only definite in waiting to go to Lazarus, but He is very definite about going to go awaken him from this sleep by raising him from the dead. But the disciples do not understand the spiritual words that Jesus is using here; they think that he is referring to physical sleep, when all the while He is referring to the sleep of Lazarus' body in physical death. In physical sleep we simply lay down for a time because the body is tired and weary. For a period of time, a person sleeps physically and then he awakes and gets up and goes about his business. Jesus is using Lazarus as an example, a great illustration for all believers to look at; so that they will understand that this is what is going to take place in regard to each and every believer who dies before His Second Coming, but we do not understand the implications of His words here, without this passage that Paul gives to us here in 1 Thessalonians. I will say more about this in a few minutes.

The thing that I want you to see at this point is the way that Jesus deliberately uses the word sleep in relation to the state of physical death; the separation of the soul from the body, for a time, in relation to the resurrection of the dead. Physical death for the believer in Christ is a sleep from which only Christ can awaken them. But because He loves them, He will awaken them. There will be a deliberate delay

for a time, a time which seems terribly long to Martha and Mary here in the text in John 11, a time which the disciples do not understand at first, but do come to understand later on, which will make the doing of this great thing that He most certainly will do, seem to be the greatest thing in all the world; the greatest thing in their whole life, when He does do it. I am saying that this wording of Jesus', calling our physical death a sleep, is meant to give great comfort to those who believe in Him. The one who believes in Jesus will lose their body in death for a time, but it will seem like a sleep to them when Jesus awakens them in the Day of the Resurrection. This ought to cause every believer not to be afraid of their death, but to see it simply as the rest from their labors here in this earthly life which will prepare them for the life to come, when their body shall be given back to them on the Day of the Resurrection, the Day when Christ returns. That is the first observation of Paul's in our text as well. Believers when they die, they fall asleep in Jesus. It is not their permanent state; it is a temporary one; it will even be a pleasant one; and there is no need to sorrow excessively, as the unbeliever does, who has no hope.

2ndly- The Resurrection of all of God's people will take place at the hour of Christ's return, and there will be an order in the events. (Verse 15 and 16)

"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep." "For the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God." "And the dead in Christ shall rise first." We can see from these verses that Paul considers this great event of Christ's Second Coming as being something which the whole body of Christ; all of God's saints, both Old testament and New, have a part in. He speaks of all the saints who have died before Christ's 2nd Coming as being raised from the dead first at His appearing. Those believers who remain and are alive at Christ's coming will be raised second in the order of the resurrection. I think that it is important for us to remember that no where in Scripture is there any indication that Christ will come back and appear physically at any other point in human history than at the end of the World. I say this because there are many people who have looked at the Scripture and have tried to make it say that Christ is coming back for His Church first in a secret way, and then publicly and openly at the end of a seven year time period which they call the Tribulation. Then they believe the Millennium will follow those comings; the literal thousand year reign of Christ upon the earth, and then He will come back at the end of the Millennium to destroy those who have rebelled against His reign, those who have believed the renewed lies of Satan; Satan having been released for his little season at the end of the Millennium. All of this makes no realistic sense whatsoever. The point to remember is that there will be only one physical 2nd Coming of Christ; it will be inextricably linked with the Resurrection from the Dead of all of His saints. We saw this in Chapter 2, verse 19 and Chapter 3 verse 13, of 1 Thessalonians, and we are seeing it again now in the verses that we are studying. It does not speak of

"comings" of Christ; only of one coming. There are a number of proofs for this, but let's look at just a couple.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15, verse 20. "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." "For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming." "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power." Christ's kingdom is an Everlasting Kingdom in the sense of God's Elect remaining in union with Him forever. In its mediatorial form, that is in regard to the Elect being saved, this kingdom coming to rule upon the earth, it continues until "the end"; this last Day of the World that we are speaking of, when Christ shall return. Then, the last of God's Elect are saved by faith, and all will be gathered together to Him as one body of his Elect, those who have been saved in all generations. Then Christ will deliver this kingdom up to Father and put an end to all rule, authority, and power among those who lived upon the earth. He must reign, in this sense, it says in verse 25, "until all enemies are put under His feet." "The last enemy that is destroyed is death." Therefore the Resurrection from the dead and Christ's 2nd Coming must be inextricably linked. After His coming it will be too late to be saved, and since the Resurrection from the dead is taking place; there will be no need for a Millennium. How could there be a Millennial kingdom composed of those saints who have been raised from the dead, and those persons unsaved, and needing to be saved, during the Millennium. No; glorification of the body comes at the end of the World, when Christ returns in His glory with His holy angels. All believers will be raised together. The dead in Christ will rise first, and then those who are alive and remain will be changed and translated shortly afterward. No Christian shall be left behind.

Then 3rd - The Lord Himself will be the author of our being gathered together to Him and being changed forever. (Verses 16-18)

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God." "And the dead in Christ will rise first." "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." "And thus we shall always be with the Lord." When the Lord returns, when the Lord appears, we who have believed in Him and have died shall rise from the dead, and we shall rise up into the air to meet Him and to be with Him forever. Surely we will need to be glorified, we will need to be greatly changed from what we once were in this life in order to become as He is. John says in 1 John 3: 2 that, "we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." In closing this sermon I would like you to turn back with me to John Chapter 11 once again. Lazarus has died, and now it has been three days since he died. And now Jesus is coming to see Mary and Martha. And in verse 20, it says, "Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house." "Now Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord if you had been

here, my brother would not have died." "But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." "Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'" Look at what she says to Him. "Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'" Jesus doesn't correct her and say, "Martha, don't you know that the resurrection is not at the last day?" "The Rapture comes first, and then the Tribulation, and then the Millennium, and then my Second Coming." "There will be many days here upon this earth after you and Lazarus are resurrected in the Rapture." No, He simply says to Martha, "I am the Resurrection and the life." "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." (that is, die spiritually or eternally) (Lazarus had already died physically) "Do you believe this?" She said, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." Our text says, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. I believe that Jesus was going to raise Lazarus from the grave as an example of what He would do on that great Day which is coming, the Day that He returns, the Day of the Resurrection. Only; in this resurrection of Lazarus, he was raised up to the same physical life that he had before he died. When Christ returns we will be raised and changed forever. There are different kinds of resurrection from the dead mentioned in the Scripture. There is a physical resurrection to the same life that we had before. There is a spiritual resurrection from our death in trespasses and sins, which changes our hearts and takes away the dominion of sin. And then there is the physical resurrection of all those who have believed in Jesus on the Last Day.

Turn over to John 5: 28. Having just spoken of the spiritual resurrection of passing from death to life in the New Birth, Jesus speaks of the future Resurrection of the dead. "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice"(Note the word "all.") "...and come forth --those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." One Resurrection of all men will take place on the last Day, of the all those who have died. It will happen at the same hour. Two different kinds of Resurrection will take place in that hour. The first will be to life; and the second mentioned, will be to condemnation. He who has been born once will die twice. He who has been born twice, will only die once physically. What an amazing Day it will be when Christ comes back again. Listen to the description that Paul gives of it in 2 Thessalonians 1, verse 6 and following. "...it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." "These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saint and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed." You see, the Thessalonian believers will be there on that Day. Indeed we will all be there

on that Day. But some of us will glorify and admire the Lord Jesus and some will weep and wail because we rejected the gospel. Oh, how I pray that everyone who hears me preach this will believe in Christ for salvation before it is too late! When Christ comes it will be too late. But for those who have believed, they shall be changed forever. 1 Corinthians 15: 50 says, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption." "Behold I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep," (that is die physically), "but we shall all be changed--in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet." (the same trumpet mentioned in 1 Thessalonians in verse 16 of our text) "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." These verses, it should be obvious, go hand in hand with the verses that we are studying in 1 Thessalonians 4. The last trumpet is sounded when Christ returns. The heavens shall open and Christ shall appear coming on the clouds of heaven. Matthew 24: 30 and 31 "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and great glory." "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." All true believers will be resurrected or changed, and all will be gathered to behold the beauty and glory of our blessed Savior. May none of us miss this greatest of blessings in the consummation of the salvation of all of God's Elect.