

# THE LORD HIMSELF WILL COME DOWN

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Key Verse: 4:16

**“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 shall rise first.”**

In the previous passage, we learned how to live to please God. It is God’s will that we should be sanctified and love one another. Then and now, to be sanctified, or live a holy life, is quite challenging. But today’s passage gives us the motivation to do so. This motive is the hope of salvation. However, there seems to be a big gap between this hope and reality. As we go through the struggles of daily life, it is so easy to lose sight of our hope. The renowned Christian singer, Steven Curtis Chapman, just wrote a book titled, “Between Heaven and the Real World: My Story.” He shares how difficult it is to live in the real world with hope. He needed encouragement. We all need encouragement—especially assurance of the hope of salvation. As we listen to God’s word, may the hope of salvation encourage us all. Paul repeats in this passage, **“encourage one another”** (4:18; 5:11). May we encourage one another to live a victorious life that pleases the Lord Jesus until he comes.

**First, We Will Be With The Lord Forever (4:13-18).** In this section, Paul continues to supply what was lacking in the Thessalonians’ faith. While he was with them, he had taught them the truth about Jesus’ second coming: that it would be sudden and unexpected, glorious, powerful and universal. He planted living hope of the kingdom of God. However, when beloved brothers and sisters died, and they had to face the reality of death, they wondered, “What happened to them? Where did they go? Will we never see them again?” Honestly speaking, we have the same questions when loved ones die. According to the CDC, 2,626,418 people died only in 2014 in America.<sup>1</sup> That is 7,196 people per day. People die everywhere all the time. But until it happens to someone close to us, we tend to ignore it. We live as though our lives in this world will never end. So it usually comes as a shock to us when a loved one dies, and we grieve. Some Thessalonian believers may have been grieving over the death of loved ones. Grieving is necessary to some degree. But believers do not have to grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm>

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hope. Those who have no hope view death as the end of everything. How we view death has a strong impact on our daily lives. If we think death is the end of everything, our lives in this world are all that matter. We try to hold on to money, power, family members and friends as a matter of life and death. We try to enjoy a few moments of pleasure at every opportunity. This makes people very selfish and hedonistic. And the grief they experience at the death of a loved one is overwhelming; they are inconsolable. Paul did not want the Thessalonians to be uninformed about those who had fallen asleep in the Lord (13). He taught them to have a Biblical view of death. To believers, death is the gateway to the glorious kingdom of God. It is the beginning of new life. We have a great hope. This week, M. Paul Shin's mother passed away. Before leaving for Korea, he sent me this text: "My mom accepted Jesus as her Savior. Now she is with him in heaven with no sickness or pain. God led my older brother to accept Christ through this. I am thankful to God." M. Isaac Park's mother also passed away. Though I didn't hear from him, I believe his response is similar.

In verse 14, Paul expresses assurance in the form of a fundamental creed. He said, **"For 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."** The phrase "Jesus died and rose again" is the core of the gospel. Jesus' death was not just an ordinary death as the consequence of sin. Jesus lived the most beautiful, holy life in history. It was a sinless life (Heb 4:15). So he did not have to die. But he willingly gave up his life for our sins. His death is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1Jn 2:2). Through his death all our sins are forgiven. We are justified and gain the privilege of living as God's children. Jesus' death was not the end. He rose again. Apostle Peter said, **"God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him"** (Ac 2:24). Jesus defeated the power of death. Believing Jesus' death and resurrection is the foundation of our Christian faith. If we don't believe in these, our faith is useless, and we are still in our sins and under the power of death (1Co 15:14-19). We suffer from guilt feelings, condemnation, meaninglessness and fatalism, despair, fear, and so on. But when we believe, we are set free from all these things and can live a powerful life. Jesus' death and resurrection is the basis of our assurance that God will never abandon those who died in the Lord. We believe that he will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. This

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means that those who died in Jesus are still alive and have gone to be with the Lord.

Paul describes a Christian's death as sleep. This metaphor originated with Jesus (Jn 11:11). Sleep is very important. According to several credible university and medical center studies, there are many benefits to getting proper sleep: improved memory, longer life (getting too much or too little sleep reduces one's life span), stronger health, greater creativity, better grades, sharper attention, lower stress and less depression.<sup>2</sup> A most cruel punishment is to deprive people of sleep. Then, how is death like sleep? This is only true for those who believe in Jesus. In fact, death is God's punishment on mankind for our sin (Ro 6:23). But for Christians, death is not punishment. It is the end of constant groaning due to the misery of our fallen bodies and this broken world, and the beginning of eternal rest in paradise. This is why St. Paul said, **"To live is Christ and to die is gain"** (Php 1:21). Revelation 14:13 says, **"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.'"**

In verse 14, Paul says, **"we believe"** two times. This is not just lip service or mental assent. It is the confession of faith in Jesus from a heart that believes the gospel (Ro 10:9). This has power. When we believe, God does amazing things based on our faith. Jesus said, **"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and *believes* him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life"** (Jn 5:24). When we believe, all kinds of fears, anxieties and worries disappear, and the peace of God fills our hearts and our minds. Then we can live a victorious life. Furthermore, we can do great works. Jesus said, **"Very truly I tell you, whoever *believes* in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these..."** (Jn 14:12a).

In verses 15-17, Paul describes what will happen when Jesus comes again. According to the Lord's word, those who are still alive when the Lord comes will not precede those who have fallen asleep (15). Verse 16 tells us how Jesus will come again. Let's read it: **"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel**

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.health.com/health/gallery/0,,20459221,00.html#more>

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**and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”** Our Lord Jesus will come down from heaven! After Jesus rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. All things are being put under his feet as Sovereign Ruler of the universe. At the same time, Jesus is the everlasting high priest for those who come to him. Now Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. At the last day, this Jesus will come down from heaven. He will not send a delegate; he himself will come down. The day of his coming is the end of this age and the beginning of the age to come. This is the Day of the Lord. It is the day of final judgment.

When we think of God’s judgment on the people of Noah’s time, or on the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, we tremble. But this day will be much more serious. Jesus’ second coming will be much different than his first coming. Nobody will be singing, “Silent Night.” It will be universal, with an authoritative, divine proclamation. It will not be a local event, but a cosmic event. Paul described the power, glory and majesty of Jesus’ coming in three ways: with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. It seems that God’s favorite instrument is the trumpet. These three sounds dramatically express the triumph of Christ over the power of death and all his enemies. Paul described this elsewhere, saying, **“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed”** (1Co 15:51-52). At that moment, we will all be immortal, glorious, powerful and spiritual (1Co 15:42-44). In a word, we will be like Jesus. When Jesus comes, all his holy angels are with him (3:13b; Mk 8:38). **“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”** (Mt 24:31).

Verses 16b and 17 say, **“...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.”** Here the words “caught up” come from a Greek word that means “to grab or seize by force.” In Latin, it was translated “raptus” from which we get the word “rapture.” It is the only place this word appears in the New Testament. Many people are curious about the rapture. They have shared their speculations in books, movies and television shows. However, we need

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to understand this verse in its context. The point is that when Jesus comes, those who died in him and those who are still alive will be united with him. We will be with the Lord forever. The separation from loved ones that happens at death is just temporary. At Jesus' second coming, there will be a most happy reunion and we will all meet again in heaven and live together eternally. The Lord Jesus is the source of eternal life. In fact, all the tragic things such as death came from separation from the Lord. But the Lord Jesus gives us life and sustains us and reigns over us with love and peace forever. This is really encouraging. So Paul said, **“Therefore encourage one another with these words”** (18).

**Second, We Are Children Of Light (5:1-11).** Thus far, Paul encouraged those who worried about loved ones who died in the Lord. Now Paul encourages each of the Thessalonian believers personally. In verses 1-3 Paul reminds them of what he had already taught in regards to the times and dates of Jesus' second coming (1). Paul uses two metaphors to describe its suddenness. **The first is a thief in the night (2).** Thieves do not send notice of their break-in. In fact, they do their best to come at the most unexpected time. They always look for the easiest way. If they see two houses, one locked firmly and the other poorly locked, they will choose the latter as their target. The best way to prevent theft is to always be vigilant. **The other metaphor is of a pregnant woman in labor.** Though she expects labor pains, when they come it is all of a sudden. In the same way, when people are saying, **“Peace and safety,”** destruction will come on them suddenly and they will not escape (3). As God warned the people of Noah's time that his judgment was coming by water, so he has warned the people of our time that judgment is coming by fire. As the people of Noah's time ignored God's warning, so do the people of our time. They say, “Everything is just going on as it always has and it always will. The sun rises and sets as usual; it is a beautiful day; don't talk to me about judgment.”

We Christians are different. Paul said, **“But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness”** (4-5). Why did Paul remind them of their identity? While living in this world, we are engaged in problems and struggles just like worldly people. It is easy to become vague about our identity and to worry about our future. This is why Paul affirms that we are children of the

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light. When the day of the Lord comes, we will not be punished like unbelieving people. We don't need to be scared of the Day of the Lord. We can have the assurance that the Day of the Lord is the day of our salvation. When we have this assurance we can live differently from unbelieving people. In verses 6-8 Paul exhorts us how to live by saying, **“let us not be like others...let us be awake and sober...let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.”** People who have no hope indulge their flesh by getting drunk, using drugs, yielding to various kinds of addiction and immoral behavior. But our lifestyle should be different. We put on faith and love as a breastplate. Breastplates protected the vital organs of a Roman soldier. Faith in God and his love protects our hearts. The hope of salvation guards our minds. We need to put on this armor every day. Then we can look forward to the full redemption that comes when the Lord returns. It is not wishful longing, but certainty that we will be saved.

Verses 9-10 give us the basis for our assurance of salvation. This assurance comes from God and in knowing who he is and what he has done for us. God's purpose for us is not to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (9). Actually, we deserve to be punished by God because of our sins. But God, in his great mercy, saved us. Titus 3:3-5a say, **“At one time we too were foolish and disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy.”** Our assurance is based on God's great mercy. Our assurance also comes from what Jesus has done for us. Verse 10 says, **“He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.”** It is so easy for us to limit Christ's death to a legal transaction that pays the penalty for our sins. But his death has a much deeper meaning. It is to bring us into union with him. This union is not just a future reality that we will enjoy in heaven; it begins while on earth the moment we put our trust in him. In verse 10, the meaning of **“awake”** is to be alive and **“asleep”** is to have died. So whether we live or die, we are united to our Lord. Romans 14:8 says, **“If we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord, so whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”** This union with Christ gives us great assurance of our salvation.

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Paul exhorted in verse 11, **“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”** We need encouragement while we are living in this world. How can we encourage one another instead of discouraging one another? Let us have assurance of our salvation and the sure hope of Jesus’ coming. With these words let’s encourage one another and build each other up so that we may not fall into sorrow or grief or fatalism or be tempted by those who live without hope. Rather, we may have a clear identity as children of the light and shine the light of the gospel of Jesus in this dark world.