

Implications of the Resurrection

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

March 31, 2024

My name is Josh Oedy. I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Church, and it is my joy and really a special privilege for me to be able to open the Word with you on this Resurrection Sunday. This is the day that Christians gather together in churches around the world, and we give special attention to the most significant event in the history of the world, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

On Friday night we came together, and we were reminded of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus Christ, who is truly God, truly man, lived the perfect life that we never could. He never sinned in word or action or even thought. He kept the law of God perfectly. Yet he went to the cross. He took upon himself the full wrath of God that was due to each one of us, each one of us that have been called out and saved through

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Christ. And as we saw in Bret's sermon, Jesus bore our sin and shame. He was punished so that we might have peace with God. He purchased a people for himself through his atoning death on the cross, and those who believe and trust in what Christ has accomplished have been justified. We no longer stand as guilty criminals before a holy and just God, but now we stand as reconciled, adopted sons and daughters of God, who stand confidently in the righteousness of Jesus Christ that has been imputed to us, just as our punishment has been imputed to him on the cross.

And the reason that we say Resurrection Sunday is a celebration of the most significant event in the history of the world is because God raising Jesus from the dead is the proof that God has accepted this sacrifice, that we can in fact be confident, if we have been saved, that we are justified, that we are now adopted children of God. We can be certain because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that God does not see us as objects of his just wrath, but sees us now in the righteous robes of his precious Son, Jesus Christ. Because of the victory of Jesus Christ over the grave, all who are in him are also now guaranteed a similar victory over sin and over the grave. If

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Christ were not raised, then he died in vain. Everything we talked about on Friday night meant nothing. We would have no hope.

And that's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:13-19. He says, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God, that he raised Christ whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. You're still in your sins, and those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."

If Jesus Christ has not been raised, then there's no point in even coming here today. There's no joy. There's no hope. We would have nothing to look forward to on this day that would be any different from the hope of the rest of the world, the way

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the rest of the world celebrates this day. If we're only here because of some religious belief or religious story, a nice fable about a dead man rising from the dead and not the historical reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ, then we might as well just celebrate like the rest of the world, just, you know, bringing about the end of our hopeless physical lives even quicker through those disgusting, glittery, candy-coated marshmallows in the shape of baby chickens. Miserable, hopeless existence. Nothing really to look forward to. This is where we would be. No hope, just living in a constant state of trying the best to distract ourselves with entertainment, distract ourselves with some misguided purpose, everything we can to keep our minds off of the eternal.

But as Paul goes on to say, "In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." And this is why we celebrate this day. It is not just in remembrance of an amazing historical event. It's not like the Fourth of July. No, it's because it is this very historical event that changes everything, a historical event, something that did take place in real space and time, that has an ongoing effect for all of eternity. The reason this is so is because the

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one stark reality for every person in every culture and every time is death. Death is always looming there. It is the sober reality that it is always just beneath the surface of even the best days that we have, even the sweetest moments that we have. It is the one thing that awaits us all.

Everyone lives a life filled with various moments, some good, some bad, cycles of eating and working and resting, attending events, developing relationships, all of these things done with varying degrees of enjoyment or pain depending on the person or the life, but all of it done while waiting for that day, maybe earlier in life, maybe later in life, where the body finally wears out or is prevented from functioning any longer from some outside force. Then it's over. Death is inevitable, and I know that doesn't sound very cheery on a Resurrection Sunday morning. But the resurrection of Jesus really only shines its brightest when it is painted against the dark and grim reality of death. This is why this day is so special, because that which is thought of by most people as the end, or as the end of our physical journey, well, that's put into proper perspective now through the resurrection of Christ.

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So Paul said in that passage from 1 Corinthians 15 that I just read that the resurrection of Jesus is the "firstfruits of all who have fallen asleep." And biblically, that term, "firstfruits," it's an agricultural term that refers to the promise of a full crop. If you have a plant growing in your yard and you're wondering what it is, if it's any good, if it's going to be good or not, and then one day you check it and you find a single raspberry on that, then now the wondering is over because you can be sure that this is a raspberry plant and more raspberries are coming, right? That's the picture of "firstfruits."

That's the picture here. Jesus Christ has conquered the grave. He was dead, but now he is alive; and because he emerged from the grave, we can also be certain that more is coming. More graves will be opened, more dead will rise. And that's what we are going to be looking at today. We're going to be talking about the implications, the fruit, of the resurrection. What does the resurrection mean for us? How should we think, and what should we do in light of this wonderful truth?

So today we're going to look at four implications of the resurrection. We're going to do that by examining this promised fruit of the resurrection of Christ, the resurrection of the believer. And we're going to see that as we look at 1 Thessalonians, 4:13-18. So you can turn to 1 Thessalonians now. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. I'm going to have four points, four implications of the resurrection, and as I was looking at this passage, you guys, this is like a three-sermon passage. I ran this by Bret on Friday, the idea that, "Hey, it's Resurrection Sunday! Maybe we should, you know, go to church more and have a longer service, maybe even fast through lunch." But Bret lacks vision, and he probably has a lot of mercy for you guys, and we couldn't pull that on you at the last moment.

But four points today, four implications of the resurrection that we're going to pull out of this text. Number one, the resurrection grounds our hope. Number two, the resurrection redefines death. Number three, the resurrection secures our future. Number four, the resurrection demands a response. And I'll go back through those as we go. But this section of scripture, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, happens to be probably the most famous passage on the Rapture of the church,

so hopefully it will dovetail well with what we have been looking at in Luke 21.

So for those of you who are visiting, Travis, who was up here earlier, is our our regular teaching pastor, a very gifted preacher and pastor, but he's been going through the gospel of Luke. Right now we're in chapter 21, which is the famous Olivet Discourse, where Jesus teaches his disciples about the coming destruction of Jerusalem, as well as the far future about his Second Coming and the various signs and events that will immediately precede it.

And while the passage before us today is no doubt one of the most significant eschatological passages, and no serious study of the last things can be done without considering it, the reason we are looking at it this morning is because of the connection with the resurrection. In fact, again, even though we can learn a lot about the Rapture, here, the reason that this passage exists, as is clear when you read it, is because of a pastoral concern that Paul has for this young church in Thessalonica and their misunderstanding about the resurrection

of the dead. It appears as though what's going on here is that they are discouraged, these Thessalonian Christians, because of some confusion and concern about what will happen to those among them who have died.

So if you read 1 and 2 Thessalonians, you'll see that they deal actually quite a bit with instructions and teaching and expectations regarding the last things, regarding the day of the Lord. And much of what we have seen in these letters in 1 and 2 Thessalonians seems to be Paul reminding them about and expanding on things that he must have been teaching them when he was with them. And he also seems to be answering questions that have been coming up and being communicated to him over those things that he was teaching.

And just like every pastoral Q & A, a lot of those questions are about end times. The church in Thessalonica was established by Paul and Silas during Paul's second missionary journey shortly after leaving Philippi. You can read about that in the beginning of Acts 17. There's debate about how long they were actually there actually with the Thessalonians. It might

have been as little as four weeks. We know for sure it was at least four weeks, but it might have been as little as four weeks. Some speculate as long as six months, probably a couple months, 2-3 months is probably a pretty safe bet. But Paul had founded this church, and during the time that he was there establishing the church, he had apparently taught them a great deal about the coming of the Lord, about the rapture of the church and the resurrection of believers.

Most commentators agree that the context behind this particular section is that it has now been awhile since Paul was with them, and they have been this whole time expecting the return of the Lord. They're expecting it to be soon. That's what's been communicated to them. He could come at any moment. He could be coming soon. But now, since it's been awhile since Paul was there, and it hasn't happened yet, they're now becoming concerned because believing friends and family among them are dying, and they didn't know what this would mean for them, for the coming of the Lord.

Apparently Paul had communicated just how wonderful this day would be, possibly reminding them of the same words of Jesus from John 14 that Travis just read earlier, that Christ was preparing a place for them, and that he would return for them and bring them to that place to be with him. And so they would have no doubt been excited about this, and they're expecting it at any time, at any moment. In fact, we see this is exactly how they're described. They have a reputation that has sounded forth that this is who they are. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, Paul begins the letter saying, "For they themselves report [this is the report of those around you] concerning us, the kind of reception we had among you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he has raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." They are waiting for the Son. That is the description of them. They're waiting for Christ to return to deliver them from that wrath that is coming, that Travis has been talking about, that Tribulation time.

But now it's been awhile. It's been awhile since they first heard this teaching, and maybe they hadn't expected to lose anyone to death before the event, and this is now just dawning

on them. What's going to happen to these people? What about those who have died? What happens to them when the church is raptured? Do their beloved dead brothers and sisters in Christ, do they now miss out on this glorious event? Paul, in fact, in the section just before this, in 1 Thessalonians 1:4, he's just commended them about their brotherly love for one another, even saying that they have no need for anyone to write to them about this subject. That's how exemplary their love for one another is. And so the concern that we hear, here expressed by Paul, the concern that they have for their dying brethren, this is the manifestation of that love that they have for one another. What? Are they going to miss out on this event? Are they going to miss out on the Rapture? How is this going to happen for them?

So with that brief bit of context, with that in mind, let's take a look at this passage together. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord,

will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

So our first point today, our first point: The resurrection grounds our hope. The resurrection grounds our hope. So Paul starts out this section with a phrase that indicates a shift in subjects. He says, "We do not want you to be uninformed." He uses phrases like that in other places, primarily Romans and 1 Corinthians, to indicate a total change of subjects, that he's completely shifting directions from where he was before, a different subject from the previous section.

Commentators have pointed out that this section right here in 4:13-18, it begins the only section of the letter that appears to contain new teaching, as all of the other teaching blocks that we see in this letter contain reminder language,

phrases like, "For you yourselves know, brothers." Or even when you begin chapter 5, you can see it there: "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you, for you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."

So that kind of language is everywhere present in all of the teaching blocks in 1 Thessalonians. This is the first place that seems to contain new teaching. And here Paul is teaching something that he has not taught them yet; and apparently, again, it's in response to their concern about what's going to happen to the dead. And the reason he gives for this, the reason he gives for giving this teaching, is because he doesn't want them to grieve like others who have no hope. Paul contrasts the way that believers should grieve over believers, with how other people who have no hope grieve.

And notice that this doesn't say that we don't grieve at all when someone we love dies. That's not what it's saying. We do grieve, but Christian grief is different. Christian grief is bound up in the fact that this person will be missed. This

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person will be missed. We won't be able to see them whenever we want to anymore. We won't be able to experience the joy of their company anymore. It's not wrong to grieve in that regard. Paul even says in Philippians 2:27 that if Epaphroditus, who he identified as his brother and fellow worker, if he had died, Paul says, he "would have had sorrow upon sorrow," not because he was concerned about where Epaphroditus would go, but because he would miss his companionship. That's appropriate grief.

We grieve at the loss of a loved one if they are a believer because of the loss that we feel, or because of the love that we have for those who we know will miss that person the most. We do grieve about them, but we do not grieve for them, because we have hope. We're not like those who have no hope. We know that because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that they are currently with the Lord, and they are more joyful now than they have ever been. We know that our goodbye to them, whenever that was, was not a final goodbye. It was just a parting, a parting for an extended period of time. We know that we will see them again.

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So what Paul has in mind, here, is maybe what you would have in mind if you have ever been to the funeral of an unbeliever and compare that to one of the funerals for one of our church members. You know it's a totally different experience, right? I mean, sure, whoever is officiating at that funeral, or maybe the family, they might try and say some stuff about how "they're in a better place now," or "we can be glad that they're no longer suffering." There's no certainty. It's just kind of wishful thinking, not knowing what actually has happened. At these funerals, there's a palpable sense, you can feel it, of doubt, of concern about the unknown. It is a hopelessness, the desire to believe that there might be something else for that person, but no foundation for that desire. At best, it's just a belief in belief, a belief in belief that they'll see them again. No real hope, not like at a believer's funeral.

And when we say "hope," we don't mean it like "I hope that what I want to happen is going to happen, and I hope that this other thing doesn't happen." It's not like that. It's not like we're wishing for something that we just don't know about. We have a confident hope, a confident hope, as in "I have placed my

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hope in something that is certain." That's what we read about in Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Our hope is assured because it is based on the word of God and the promises it contains. We have been promised that Christ rising from the dead is the firstfruits of those who have died. 1 Corinthians 15:22-23: "Just as by a man came death, by a man has also come the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

So this first implication of the resurrection, it grounds us in resurrection hope whenever a brother or sister in Christ dies. It is why it is totally appropriate that when we do funerals for our church members here, it is a worship service. It is totally appropriate for that. Because of the resurrection of Christ, because of what he has done, we know that we are not saying goodbye to this person forever.

A few weeks ago, I was talking to our dear brother Ron Matthews on the phone. I wanted to see how they were doing settling in, getting plugged into a new church. It was an

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enjoyable, Ron Matthews type of conversation, and he's talking, he's asking all kinds of questions in that unique Southern accent, probably at a higher volume than is necessary. All kinds of questions about my family, about the church, about all of you guys. "How are things going? How's this ministry? How's that ministry?" He was joyful and excited about God, about God's sovereignty, about opportunities he's having to share the gospel.

And as I continued asking him how he was doing, after awhile he finally let on that he wasn't feeling quite right, that he was probably going to see the doctor the next day. And the next day they did go to the doctor and found out that his cancer had come back in full force. And in order to not overwhelm Ron and Claudette, we appointed just one person to maintain communication with them. And within a couple weeks he was in heaven.

And the other day I was in the office, and I was either talking to Travis or Bill. I can't remember which one of you guys said this to me. But I was recounting that conversation,

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and I said something like, "I wish I would have known that that was the last time I was ever going to talk to Ron Matthews," to which the quick response was, "It wasn't." That's exactly right. That's exactly right. That is the hope that we have. That's the hope we have. We know that that isn't true. What I said isn't true. I'll talk to him again. That's the hope we have. And it's also similar to the hope that you saw in Ron Matthews when he was dying, walking around this church. He had cancer. A lot of you didn't even know it because he was thinking he's going to die at any time but loving everyone here, so concerned, knowing that it's just a temporary parting when that does happen. That's the hope we have as Christians. We never say a final farewell to one another. We know that the last time we hold our loved ones in this life, if they are in Christ, it's not the last time. It's just maybe going to be a little longer between then and when you planned. Just a little longer gap than you had thought.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ grounds us in this hope, this certain hope, and it leads right into a second and related point: The resurrection of Christ redefines death. The resurrection redefines death. Look at verses 13, 14, and 15. Look at the language there. "But we don't want you to be

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uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do, who have no hope for. Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep."

Each verse refers to the Christian dead as "asleep." And "sleep" was actually a common way that death was spoken of metaphorically, even among unbelievers at that time, and it still kind of is today, because it kind of takes the sting out of it. It does become something truly sweet, truly special when the very word of God uses it in reference to those who are dead in Christ.

And before we continue, I need to make sure that we know that this is not teaching "soul sleep," what some have termed just "soul sleep." "Soul sleep," that's the wrong belief that some have, that when you die, your body and soul both sleep so that the next thing that you experience is the resurrection of

the dead that we see in these verses that we're looking at today. The Bible clearly teaches that upon death the believer is immediately with the Lord in heaven, not physically, true, but their spirit or their soul, it definitely is. This is what Jesus says to the thief on the cross, right? "Today, you will be with me in paradise," though both of their bodies went into the tomb that day.

Paul is not confused about this, either. In Philippians 1:22-23, he says, "If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet, which shall I choose? I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." You see that, there: To depart is to be with Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:8, he says, "Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." Those are the two places your spirit can be, either with your body or with the Lord. To be absent from the body, to depart, is to be with Christ, is to be at home with the Lord. This is where every Christian you have ever known who has died now is: with the Lord. Their bodies might still be here, they might be decomposing somewhere, but they are described as "with the Lord."

And we get a picture of this, it's a really cool picture in Acts 7. You can turn there if you want. In Acts 7, at the end of this section where Stephen has famously kind of preached this summary of the Old Testament, and he's been pointing towards Christ through that, and also rebuking the Jewish leaders at the time. We see this at the end, Acts 7:54-60: "Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he [that's Stephen] full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven, saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' But they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses lay down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,' and falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

He fell asleep. That's not a comment on the weak throwing arms of the people there. It means he physically died. He's

trusting Christ. He's trusting the Lord to receive his spirit as his body falls asleep. That's what's going on there. Stephen understands that his spirit is about to be received by the Lord even as his body goes to sleep.

In the Bible, sleep is only ever used in reference to what the body is experiencing, never the spirit. This is just a wonderful picture of encouragement for the believer that points us to the real implications of the resurrection of Jesus in this text back in 1 Thessalonians. For the Christian, death is really nothing more than waiting for Jesus to wake our bodies up while we are already present with him.

And then also notice the distinction that he makes in verse 14, 1 Thessalonians 4:14: "For since we believe that Jesus died." Paul does not use the metaphor for sleep when it comes to Jesus. Jesus died in every sense of the word. He physically died in his body, but he also faced the true death that we deserve in taking the wrath of God on himself that we should have all faced in a spiritual death for all of eternity in Hell, spiritual and physical death for all of eternity in Hell. Jesus took on

himself, Jesus bore our sins on the cross so that we could be dead to sin and alive in Christ.

So there is a sense, when you think about this, in which the death and resurrection of Christ transforms death into sleep for the believer. Because Jesus died and rose, when the believer comes to the end of his life, he just goes to sleep. And the sleep of the body also implies that it's going to wake up, the reminder that this is a real, bodily resurrection, not just merely opening our spiritual eyes in heaven. And this really does go against the way that most unbelievers, and even some who claim to be believers, think about the entirety of the afterlife. This is almost always just seen in terms of our disembodied souls just living on forever. But we are talking about a real, bodily resurrection, just as Christ experienced, a real, bodily resurrection in our bodies flowing out of the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. This is in verse 14 exactly the ground that Paul uses to prepare to transition to the next point. He grounds it in this.

But before we get to that, we need to explain verse 14 a little bit. We need to spend a little bit of time on that because this verse makes a claim that is elaborated on in verses 15-17, and there are disagreements over its translation. But there are not disagreements over this: It is a first-class conditional sentence, meaning that the reality of the first clause necessitates the reality of the second clause. So "for since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so he will bring with him those who have fallen asleep." Some translations say "if" at the beginning, "if we believe." But that's not implying that there's some sort of uncertainty. Rather it is being used more like an if-then statement. "If this is true, then this other thing is true also." So the translation of "since" might be more helpful because it does better communicate the certainty that Paul is displaying. "But since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him."

You notice what I did there because there is some difference of opinion among translators about whether or not the verse should read like the ESV does, like I just read, implying that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep

through Jesus; or if he is saying, like the LSB reads, that he will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. And although there's truth to both statements, the LSB probably is the better rendering here. So we should read it something like this: "God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus."

So what is being said, here, is in reference to the resurrection. Don't get confused, don't stumble over Paul using the word "bring," here. Don't read it, as some have, as something that chronologically precedes verse 15, kind of giving the idea that Jesus is bringing the souls of those who are in heaven with him when he descends from heaven, even though there is kind of a sense in which that is true also. But verse 14 is a statement that's meant to stand on its own, and then verses 15-17 are an explanation of what that looks like. So you should think of the word "bring," here, as kind of a synonym for "raise."

The idea is he brings them from the grave. So the idea is that God will raise those who have fallen asleep in Jesus just

as he raised Jesus. God will treat Christians the same way he has treated Jesus, by raising them from the dead. And pretty much all of the commentators pointed out that the reason that Paul might use the word "bring," here, instead of "raise" is to help to shift the focus away from the individual event for each of us and into more the corporate event that we see pictured in the verses below, where all of the dead in Christ are brought up along with the living believers to meet him in the air. But as we look at the best way to render this verse and why it is the way it is, I don't want us to get too off-track, here. But what is essential for us to see, and why that is important, is because it's essential for us to see that God intends, like I just said, to treat believers the same way he has treated Christ. Just as Jesus died and rose, even so, it's that condition there, even so, believers who die will also rise.

And that ground leads us to our third point: The resurrection of Jesus secures our future. The resurrection of Jesus secures our future. So as we just said, verse 14 serves as the ground, it serves as the foundation for what comes in the rest of the passage. Because Jesus died and rose again, those who believe in him will also rise from the dead. And now we see

in verses 15-17 the glorious truth about what verse 14 will look like. And so as we read verse 15, we understand verse 15 now serves as a thesis for this teaching in 16-17. Paul makes a claim in this verse and explains it in 16 and 17. Look at verse 15 again: "For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep."

So Paul says, "For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord." Paul is saying that what he is about to share, here, is teaching that he received from the Lord. This is not as some have thought, this is not Paul reiterating other teaching that we have from Jesus in the gospels somewhere. So some have tried to make the claim that Paul is just teaching the same thing as, as Jesus in the Olivet Discourse, particularly in Matthew 24 or Mark 13. But, and we don't have time for this, but just a quick comparison would show you that while there may be a couple of shared words, the two events have far too many differences, like the thing that Travis has been calling us to do when we're examining these passages. Don't just look at what's the same, look at the differences, also. Far too many differences, the two events have far too many differences for them to be talking

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about the same thing. This is a special word from the Lord, now through Paul, teaching on the Rapture of the Church.

And by the way, Paul pointing out that this is "a word from the Lord," it's not to minimize everything else he has said, like, "This is a word from the Lord, and you can ignore the other four and a half chapters of this book." That's not what he's saying. It's just adding strength. It's just adding confidence. It's just adding comfort, adding to that comfort that he is trying to extend to these believers, that this is the plan of the same Lord who died and rose again, the same Lord who will come in the clouds. This is his word on this subject. And notice also that Paul includes himself among those who might be alive when Christ returns.

And again, this isn't Paul saying, I saw some liberal commentators say that this is why we shouldn't believe anything Paul says, this isn't Paul saying that he believed for certain he was going to be alive at the return of Christ. It's merely saying that since he is still alive at this time, he places himself in the category of people who might just get to

experience it. He did believe he could be among them, because any believer who is alive should be believing that. And this points again to the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ, that Paul believed that Christ could return at any moment. By including "we," here, Paul is saying that the Rapture that he's about to teach on could happen at any moment. Maybe you won't have to sit through the rest of this sermon.

The doctrine of the imminent return, this is one of the evidences that points us to the understanding of a Pre-Tribulational rapture. As we've seen in the last few weeks from Travis' sermons from Luke 21, there are all these massive cataclysmic signs that must take place before the Second Coming of Christ, where he comes and actually sets foot on the earth and establishes his Kingdom. But the Rapture, what Paul talks about here in verse 16, that can happen at any moment. There are no signs needed for that to take place. Believers had the understanding, and you see this all throughout the New Testament, believers had the understanding that Christ could return at any moment, and this is the return they are talking about.

It seems evident that these Thessalonians seem to be actually surprised that they're still here. They were expecting to be gone. They're surprised to still be here, contemplating what happens to those who have died while waiting to partake in this wonderful event. And then here at the end of verse 15, Paul lets them know why they don't have to concern themselves with that anymore, because "those who are left alive at the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep." That's the answer to their question, to their concern at the end of verse 15.

And now look again at verse 16: "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." They'll arise first. Our risen Lord Jesus Christ will descend from heaven. The Lord himself will descend from heaven. Jesus Christ in his resurrected, glorified body descends from heaven where he has been since ascending there in Acts 1. And we can remind ourselves of that passage. You don't have to turn there, but Acts 1:6-11. "When they had come together, they asked him [they asked Jesus], 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to

them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.'"

By the way, notice that he doesn't say that's not a thing anymore. He doesn't say, "We're not restoring the kingdom of Israel." This is kind of dovetailing on what Travis has been talking about, that a day is still coming, that still seems to fall into the category of a day that has been fixed by the Father's own authority. But he says, "'It's not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria into the end of the earth.'" And when he said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold two men stood by them in white robes and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'"

So he is taken from their sight in a cloud, and they keep looking up, they keep looking up trying to see him, and suddenly two men who are angels show up and ask, “Why are you still standing looking around?” as almost as a rebuke to them, maybe even to us. Just like to stand around looking in the sky when Jesus has just given them a charge, given them work to do. And then these men tell his disciples, these angels tell his disciples that “this same Jesus will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

And here in this passage in 1 Thessalonians 4, this is Paul speaking of that day. He is giving more information about what that will look like, more information than the disciples originally got from the angels. And notice the emphasis is on the Lord himself, the Lord himself descending and gathering his people. It's personal. “With a cry of command, with a voice of the archangel and the sound of the trumpet.” There are varying views on whether or not these are three different things, or if the voice of the archangel and the sound of the trumpet was what's meant by the cry of command. But no matter what, the idea is that this is a powerful, authoritative summons. That is what the word translated as “cry of command” is. It means a summons.

It's a strong military term. It's an official order. He is summoning his people to himself. Jesus commands and summons those who belong to him to come to him, to meet him in the air.

And now, to the delight of these Thessalonians, we see that far from missing this event, far from missing the event, "the dead in Christ will rise first." They'll rise first. Here we finally see the term "dead" instead of asleep, again to remind us of the miracle that this truly is. But even though we see it here instead of "asleep," we also see in that phrase the significance of this event. The reason that these dead respond to this is because they're not just any dead. They are the dead in Christ. They are those whose earthly lives came to an end while in union with the resurrected Lord. Because they died in Christ, they have also been raised to live a new life in Christ, and the resurrection is promised to them.

And now we see in this verse the culmination of the significance of what we celebrate on this day. We see it fully here as the promise of the firstfruits of the resurrection are seen in the glory of the full harvest. Because Jesus has risen

from the dead, this is the future for every one of us who die in him. We are united in him in his death and in his resurrection. So the resurrection of Christ secures the future of all of those who die in him, but also for those who are still alive on that day.

Look at verse 17: "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord." "Then we who are alive will be caught up together." The word for "caught up," that's the Greek word *harpazo*, *harpazo*. And that's the Latin word *rapturo*, *rapturo*. This is where we get the word "Rapture" from. So when we say "Rapture," this is what we're referring to. It's this event. Everyone who believes the Bible is the word of God believes in the Rapture, because it's right there; it's in the Bible. It's right here in this verse. There might be differences in what you believe about it, but it's right here.

And that Greek word *harpazo* is a forceful word. It means "to seize by force." It means to seize by force with the purpose

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of removing, seize by force with the purpose of removing, to snatch away. On this day, all who are asleep in Christ and all who are awake in Christ will all together meet the Lord in the air. And those who are alive at this time, we don't miss out on the benefits of the resurrection for ourselves.

Write this down, again we won't turn there, but but look at the corollary passage on this event. In 1 Corinthians 15:50-55, we read this: "I tell you this, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery," as in something that was once not known now being revealed. "Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep." There's that "sleep" again. "But we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'"

Both dead and alive in Christ are changed in the twinkling of an eye. Those who have fallen asleep and those who have not, from a body that is dying to a body that now cannot die. That's what we're changed into: from a perishable body to an imperishable body. You will on that day instantly go from the "before" picture in those diet-pill commercials, those skin-wrinkle commercials, you go from the "before" picture to the best "after" picture imaginable in an instant.

On this day, God will raise the real, physical bodies of every Christian who has ever lived into their imperishable, immortal resurrection bodies. It doesn't matter what state of decomposition they might be in. It doesn't matter if their ashes have been spread across the entire earth by this point. The one who invented the atom will bring every atom back into the proper positions for every person who has ever died in Christ. He will do it. Just lacking the curse. The cancer will stay dead. No disease will find a home in that body anymore. The scars, the pain, the slipped discs in the back, crushed vertebrae, every imperfection. No more. That does not rise. Every remnant of the curse gone from our bodies forever.

On this day, everyone who is in Christ, present tense but still referring to the living and the dead, we will all be caught up together and meet him in the air. We will meet him in the space between heaven and earth, and then all of us, all of us now together with those same disciples, think of that, those same disciples who heard from Jesus' own lips the comforting promise from John 14 that we read earlier. We get to experience the fulfillment of that promise together with them. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may also be."

He comes again and brings us up to himself, that where he is now, there we may also be, and that leads so nicely to that last promise for our future that is secured for us in the resurrection of Christ. Again, look at the end of verse 17. Rejoice in these words, beloved. On the day when we are caught up together, whether we are alive or dead on that day, those who are in Christ will meet him in the air. And from that day onward

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this will be true for us. "And so we will always be with the Lord." This is the certain future that has been secured for all who are in Christ, been secured for us through his resurrection.

And that brings us to one final point: The resurrection of Christ demands a response. And that's true whether you're a believer or an unbeliever. First, if you're here today, and I'm sure there's some of you, and you're not a Christian, maybe you know for sure you're not one. You don't deny that; you're here as a favor to a friend or a family member, that the promise to go to lunch afterwards was to sit through this. Maybe that's you. Maybe you're not sure about it. Maybe you just don't even really care about these things, yet.

Probably, there's a good amount of you who are here that think you're a Christian. I don't know what you base it on. Maybe you base it on the fact that you said a prayer at one time in your life. Maybe it's that you can intellectually assent to some of these things that we're saying. Maybe you live a life that seems to stack up, you know, morally pretty well to other people. I don't know what your reason is.

And there's some of you young people in here, middle-schoolers, high-schoolers, kind of here because of your parents, maybe not really taking much that is said up here seriously. Maybe you've been messing around on your phone the whole time I've been talking. This is about the time when you're probably looking at your watch, looking at your cell phone, wondering when this is going to be over, when you're going to get lunch. "It's 12:09. How long does this go?" Maybe that's you.

If you fall into those categories, please, please, if you haven't been listening at all, please listen now. It's almost done. Just look again at the beginning of verse 14: "For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again." Everything that we have said today, all the promises, all the benefits that come from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they're only for those who believe that he died and rose again. And again, I know there are a lot of you in the category who would answer, "Man, I do believe that!" I want to say to you, do you really? Do you really? Do you really believe all that is encompassed in the Christian creed, that Jesus died and rose again, the reason for both things?

Because if you're going to say that you truly understand that you're a sinner before a holy God, that you recognize yourself to be guilty before him, that the just payment for your sin is an eternity in hell, and that's why Jesus had to come to die for me to, live the perfect life in my place because I failed miserably. And then that he took the penalty, that he took the penalty of an eternity in Hell on himself, on the cross on your behalf; and that this God-man truly died and then was raised to life in a new glorified body, demonstrating that God has indeed accepted his sacrifice, so that now if you will turn from your sin, if you'll repent and truly believe this, then God completely takes away your sentence of an eternity of a literal Hell, an eternity of literal Hell; and he gives you, in addition to that, he gives you the gift of a union in Christ, which is the promise of freedom from the power and penalty of sin in a glorified body in paradise for eternity, where you're with him forever.

If you're going to say that you truly believe that, and the result is a life of minimal commitment to this Lord, at best; if you're going to say, "I believe all of that, and what it looks

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like for me is coming to church every once in a while, trying my best to pay attention; mainly, you know, pretty much doing what makes me feel good throughout the week. I mean for myself, entertainment, my own happiness. I'm disciplining myself every once in a while, but in the end, being my own boss."

Friend, if that's how this belief is manifested in your life, you don't believe. Truly believing that Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead transforms you. Your life is totally changed. It's one thing to say that you believe an airplane can take you to a certain destination, but that belief means almost nothing if you sit in the airport and watch it go to the destination you have no intention of being a part of. It's not belief. Those who have no hope that we talked about earlier, those who have no hope, that's not just a feeling that many unbelievers have. It's also a category that everyone who does not truly believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus lives in all the time. You are one with no hope, whether you feel that way or not. Apart from this gospel, you have no hope. Oh, friend, please do not let this day go by without truly believing this gospel. And you can talk to any member in here, and they

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will fast for lunch if they have to, to talk to you about this great truth.

But the resurrection of Christ also demands a response from all those who do truly believe and rejoice in it also. That's seen right there in verse 18: "Therefore, encourage one another with these words." That's a command for us. Christian brothers and sisters, as we go through this life gradually losing friends, losing family along the way, every couple of years a few less of us, we don't grieve as those who have no hope. We don't grieve as those who have no hope. We know that because Jesus died and rose again, it's really just a long sleep that awaits us. And the one who sleeps will wake up at the proper time.

As Christians, we will never truly say goodbye to one another. All of our goodbyes, every single one of them, it's just a farewell for now. All the hands that we once held, the necks that we once hugged, the voice that would bring a smile to your face every time you heard it after a long period of time, all those people that we love, one day, all of us, every one of

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us, we're going, together, to remove the perishable, put on the imperishable. And on that day we will meet him in the air. And as Jesus reigns forever, as we're about to sing, so we will also be with him forever. "Encourage one another with these words," beloved. The only reason that we can joyfully and longingly say "Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!" is because we can also say together with full hope and confidence, "He is risen!" Let's pray.

Father, thank you so much, thank you so much for your word. Thank you for this word from the Lord as we read that Paul talks about, that you gave to Paul, so that we could know these truths, these things that we need to hear to remind us of the wonderful benefits that come through what we celebrate this day, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, I pray that you would be gracious to any unbelievers in here today, those who know that they are and maybe those who are self-deceived, that you would open their eyes and they would see where they truly stand, that they have no hope, that they would repent and believe this gospel.

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And I pray for the members of Grace Church, God, that we would live these truths out, that we would encourage one another in these things, that we would live and abound in resurrection certainty, knowing that this is our future, that this is certainly what awaits all who are in Jesus Christ, and that would motivate us properly to live for you now. There'll be time for sleeping later. While we are awake, while we are here, that we would do the work of discipling, of evangelizing, growing your church; and Father that may that be true of us. It is in the name of the risen Lord Jesus Christ that we pray all of these things. Amen.