

## **Are you ready for your resurrection?**

1 Thess. 4:13-18

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The scripture says of Jesus (Phil. 2) that in humbling himself and dying on the cross, God has highly exalted him (he raised him up!) and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of our highly exalted, resurrected, King Jesus every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There is NO OTHER name...no other person that is as worthy as Jesus, and we give him praise this morning.

His resurrection – what we celebrate really EVERY day as believers, but especially on this day - his physical, bodily resurrection – THIS is THE event that has earned him the right to be called, Lord AND it is THE reason that the scripture says one day every knee WILL bow before him.

And that's what I want to talk to you about this morning. Did you know that the Bible teaches that every single one of us – both believers and unbelievers, when we die WILL like Jesus experience a physical resurrection.

Did you know that? It's why I'm calling this message today...I'm asking in the form of a question:

## **Are you ready for your resurrection?**

In the book of 1 Thessalonians, the apostle Paul (a key follower of Jesus in the New Testament) is writing to a church that has a lot of questions regarding what happens on what the Bible terms as the “last day” or the “Day of the Lord”.

There was some confusion surrounding these events that are predicted in and spoken of in scripture.

**illus. Sunday School Story** – Speaking of confusion, I'm reminded of the story of the Sunday School Teacher who was serving in her church's children's ministry on Easter. She wanted to see how much her class knew about the true meaning of Easter.

One of the little girls quickly raised her hand. “Go ahead” the teacher said. “Easter is when all of my aunts and uncles come to my house to eat turkey, watch football, and take naps,” she said.

“No, that's Thanksgiving.” Another child, this time a little boy raised his hand. The teacher called on him. And he said, “Last Easter, we decorated a tree, sang songs, and got lots of presents,” he answered.

“No, that was Christmas,” she replied. Now the teacher was getting a bit nervous...it was Easter after all, and so she thought. I’ll ask one more time, “Does anyone know what Easter means?”

“I know,” a little girl said, confidently standing to her feet. “Easter is a special day to remember that Jesus was hung on a cross, died, and put in a tomb for three days.”

“Very good” the teacher said with excitement and a sigh of relief. And then the little girl continued. “And on the third day, everyone gathers around the tomb, and they wait to see if Jesus comes out, and if he sees his shadow, that means six more weeks of winter.”

Little bit of confusion there! And there was certainly some confusion in the early church about the last days and the events that surrounded it.

And so, Paul writes to clear some of the confusion up. He wants to set their heart at ease. He wants to encourage them...he wants to infuse them with hope.

In fact, this is how the passage we’re looking at today is book-marked. It starts with hope and ends with encouragement!

Let’s look at this passage of scripture together:

**1 Thess. 4:13-18 – “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep (that’s a metaphor for death – in the Christian worldview, death is merely viewed as sleep – more on that in a moment!), that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again (this is the bedrock...the foundational confession of our faith! Jesus died and rose again), even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.”**

Now, typically I read this passage of scripture at gravesides...funeral services.

In fact, I was just presiding over a funeral two weeks ago and I read this exact series of verses right before the family said their final goodbye to their loved one who in a matter of time, the body would be lowered into ground, covered with dirt and marked by concrete headstone.

Interesting, isn’t it? That a passage that is read at funerals is the passage we choose to read and look at on Easter! What’s that all about?!

Shouldn't we be talking about life today instead of death? Well, yes and no! I mean, we're here worshiping and celebrating a resurrection on Sunday precisely BECAUSE there was a death on Friday!

So, we can't really avoid talking about death...it is a reality. The statistic hasn't changed! One person out of every one person dies.

Happy Easter! Ha! I believe it was the actor, Woody Allen that said, "I'm not afraid of death, I just don't want to be there when it happens."

It's true. We don't like to think about death...especially our own death, but death is a certainty...it's going to happen. The Bible says in:

**Heb. 9:27 – “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”**

It was this “after that” that the Thessalonians had questions and doubts and all kinds of fears about. And so, Paul writes to clear some things up AND in doing so he believes that what he is sharing with them will be the source of hope AND provide a great amount of encouragement.

He first shares with them the need for them to: **Look Back**

**1 Thess. 4:13-14 – “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. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”**

Now, the basis for hope IS the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Look at how concrete the statement is that Paul makes there in (v. 14). He says, “This is our belief...our conviction...this is the foundational truth of our faith – that “Jesus died and rose again”.

What we are celebrating today – the resurrection – if it's NOT true...if it didn't happen, then we are wasting time. As Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, we don't have hope, but are hopeless!

**1 Cor. 15:16-20 – “For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. <sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”**

So, Paul encourages these believers...he wants them to know that if they have loved ones who have died (i.e., fallen asleep) God is going to one day raise them up!

He is going to bring them back to life – they will experience a physical resurrection just as Jesus did...and it's Jesus's own resurrection that guarantees this!

Our hope of beating death rises and falls on the historical event of the resurrection.

Now, there were a lot of questions that surrounded the resurrection at the time of Jesus. There were a lot of opinions out there about what happened after death.

The Greco-Roman world believed there was an after-life, but never really believed that the dead physically come back to life.

Do you remember the religious sect known as the Sadducees? They held a majority in the Sanhedrin and were extremely political in nature— they were often the ones working with the power-brokers of Rome to keep the peace between the Jews and the Romans.

They held in high esteem the first five books of the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy), but not much more than that.

One doctrine they were certain in their mind about was the afterlife, denying that it even existed! They FOR SURE didn't believe in a physical resurrection – that's why they were so "Sad-you-see"? (you're welcome, I'll be here next week!)

The Pharisees, they were different. They made up a minority of the Sanhedrin. They were known for their piety. They were the "uber-religious of the day" – and if you are familiar with the Bible, Jesus had his biggest "run-ins" with this group.

The Pharisees believed whole-heartedly in what we refer to as the Old Testament, and so they believed there was an afterlife and they believed in a physical resurrection at the end of time.

They believed this because of passages in the Old Testament like:

**Daniel 12:1b-2 – "...But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. <sup>2</sup> And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."**

**Isaiah 26:19a – "Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!"**

**Job 19:25-27 – "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. <sup>26</sup> And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, <sup>27</sup> whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!"**

Now, these Old Testament writers were obviously extremely limited in their understanding of the future resurrection, but you can see why a Pharisee like Paul, when he encounters the resurrected Jesus and has studied passages like this his whole life – you can see how the scales could come off!

The resurrection of Jesus TOTALLY rocked his world – THIS is what a physical resurrection looks like?! THIS is what Daniel and Isaiah and Job were talking about!

**Illus. Puzzles** – my wife LOVES putting puzzles together. She says it lowers her stress in being married to me! I don't know that that's true.

But, I do know on vacation, during holidays, in the middle of a random ice day here in Houston where we're forced to stay indoors (we're going to be wanting those ice days again here pretty soon!).

I do know the décor will be removed from our coffee table in the living room and a puzzle will begin to be put together.

Now, I am the guy who does not participate in the puzzle (they frustrate me...I don't have the patience for it!) UNTIL there are about oh, I don't know – 10-20 pieces remaining – THEN I get real interested...I'm that guy! Burns my family up!

Well, this was Paul. The physical resurrection of Jesus was the last piece of the puzzle. Once it was revealed to him, he got it!

And he realized that it was the physical resurrection of Jesus that made the physical resurrection of his followers after death possible.

So, the point he is making is “look back” at the physical resurrection of Jesus. If he was raised (and he was!) then don't be discouraged by those that have died because they too, like Jesus will be raised. And if we die, we too will be raised.

Are you ready for YOUR resurrection?

Now, the question becomes, well...what happens if we are alive when Jesus returns? What if we aren't dead? What happens to us?

This is where Paul writes and tells the believers to: **Look Up**

**1 Thess. 4:15-17 – “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. <sup>17</sup> 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.”**

Just as the physical resurrection of Jesus is a FACT of history. It happened. Hear this: The return of Jesus is a FACT of future history. It WILL happen.

Jesus promised this! After his resurrection, he had a final conversation with his disciples and then ascended physically into the air.

According to the scripture, the disciples who were already trying to wrap their mind around his resurrection were understandably perplexed with his ascension...so much so that they are just looking into the sky – doing exactly what all of us would be doing!

And listen to what the Bible says: **Acts 1:9-11** – “**And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.<sup>10</sup> And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men (we assume these are angels) stood by them in white robes,<sup>11</sup> 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.”**

Over and over and over again, the Bible teaches of the second coming of Jesus. Speaking of “hope and encouragement”, that’s what Paul calls the return of Christ – he calls it, (Titus 2:13) our “blessed hope”.

The very last words of Jesus, in the very last book of the Bible are found in: **Rev. 22:20b** – “**...Surely I am coming soon.**”

You say, “Come on, Pastor...you really believe this? People have been talking about the return of Jesus for 2,000 years...you really believe it’s soon. I’ll tell you this, its sooner now than it was when he made this promise all those years ago!

It’s the **ONLY** prophecy in scripture that has **YET** to be fulfilled. And just consider this...put this under the headings of “fun facts”. Did you know:

- One out of every thirty verses in the Bible speaks of the return of Christ or the end of time...
- Twenty-three of the twenty-seven books New Testament books speak to the Second Coming of Jesus...
- There are 109 prophecies in Scripture that refer to Jesus’s first coming – it happened! There are 329 prophecies that speak of Jesus’s second coming – it’s going to happen!

What Paul writes here in 1 Thessalonians is that **SHOULD** we be alive at the return of Christ - which could happen at any moment – It’s immanent, and the scripture, whenever it speaks of the return of Christ, it **ALWAYS** emphasizes the fact that we are to be ready!

It could happen at any moment! If Jesus returns before we die we will not be resurrected, but we will be (v. 17) “caught up” into the sky.

Evidently, it's going to be loud. There will be a "cry" for the archangel...there will be the sound of a trumpet...it's going to be noticeable. The Bible says "every eye will see him" (Rev. 1:7), and the dead will rise first, and then we IF we are still alive will be caught up with him and will be transformed forever.

Paul writes about this in his premier passage on the resurrection of Jesus and his return:

**1 Cor. 15:51-56 – "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup>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. <sup>53</sup>For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup>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." <sup>55</sup>"O death, where is your victory" O death, where is your sting?" <sup>56</sup>The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup>But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."**

Do you see why Paul says, you can have hope today? You can be encouraged today?

Because of the resurrection of Jesus...because he came out of the tomb and beat death ALL those years ago – DEATH – it no longer holds us captive...it's not a threat anymore!

Paul says, "Look Back" – the resurrection of Jesus should always give you hope! He says, "Look Up" – the return of Jesus could happen at any moment and when it does, that's when we (if we die)...this is when our loved ones who have died will be raised up and we will be with the Lord and our loved ones forever and ever.

It's why Paul says in: **1 Thess. 4:18 – "Therefore encourage one another with these words."**

You know, when I preside over funerals, and I read this passage...I always share the outline that I've shared with you today, with a slight change.

We're there in the cemetery and I tell the loved ones gathered there and grieving, you will come back here and do three things:

1. Look back and remember your loved one...
2. Look up because where else do you turn in times like this...
3. Look ahead to a future reunion where you will be with Christ and your loved ones never to be separated again.

It's that third point I want us to consider as we bring this message to a close: **Look Ahead**

Can we just play this out? Let's just say that our greatest enemy, death comes to get us before Jesus returns. We've already stated that we will ALL be resurrected – Jesus's resurrection is that powerful!

It will raise ALL who have died – the saved and the unsaved...the believer and the unbeliever. The question is NOT whether you will be raised, the question is where will you spend eternity AFTER you have been raised?

**John 5:25-29 – “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.<sup>26</sup> For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. <sup>27</sup> And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and come out, those who have done good (i.e., those who have believed and their life bears it out) to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”**

“Look ahead!” Paul’s words only provide HOPE and ENCOURAGEMENT if you know Jesus...if you have placed your trust in Jesus!

ONLY THEN do you experience the resurrection of life. If you don’t know Jesus, you’ll still experience a physical resurrection, but it’s a resurrection to judgment and eternal death.

It’s why I called this message today...I’m asking the question: **Are you ready for YOUR resurrection?**

Would you bow your heads in prayer with me. Are you ready? You say, “I’m not, but I want to be? How can I be ready? I want to be resurrected to eternal life?”

If that’s you, I want you to look right here. Christians, I want you to be praying because you have no idea who may be wrestling with this right now, and your prayer could be what helps them crossover to faith in Christ.

If you are NOT certain you are ready for your future resurrection, I want you to just look at me. To be ready, we say around here, it’s as simple as you’re ABC’s.

### **A – Admit your sin**

**Rom. 3:23 – “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”**

That’s not hard...we’ve all sinned. Every single one of us.

### **B – Believe in Jesus**

**John 11:25-26 – “Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die...”**

### **C – Confess Jesus as Lord**



**Rom. 10:9-10 – “because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”**

Confession is a prayer with the lips that moves to your life. And if you want to pray and ask Jesus to be the Lord of your life...you want to be ready for your resurrection, I'm going to invite you to pray with me right now.

Now, to be clear, these words don't save you...it's the posture of humility in your heart and confession of faith that saves you.

**“Jesus, I believe. I want to be ready for my resurrection. Come into my life and save me. Forgive me of my sin. I believe you are the Son of God. I believe you died on a cross for my sins. I believe you were raised to life on the third day, and I am asking you to live in me. Thank you for hearing my prayer, saving me, and help me to live for you every day. Amen.”**

Now, if you prayed that prayer with me, it's the greatest decision you will ever make...you made the right choice!

And now I'm going to ask you to make another decision...and that is to make your receiving of Jesus public and in just a moment, I'm going to ask you to stand.

We do this each year at Easter and here's what is going to happen. Our church wants to celebrate your decision.

**Illus. Dad's Birthday this week (81) –** So much excitement! The Bible pictures heaven as a big party. It even says that when one comes to know Jesus all of heaven rejoices!

And right now, there is a BIG party going on in heaven. And today because of you asking Jesus to live in your heart we're going to join in on that heavenly a party!

And so, for those of you who prayed with me that prayer...you repeated in your heart and meant it – You are now ready for your resurrection – it is your spiritual birthday, and we are going to celebrate!

So, here's what I'm going to ask you to do. I'm going to pray and then after that prayer – I'm going to count to three and I'm going to ask all those that prayed with me to stand...and by standing you are saying, I prayed with you, Jarrett and gave my life to Jesus, and this church is going to celebrate like crazy.

You ready? Let's pray.

So here we go...on the count of three. No waiting...no looking around...we're not asking you to stand to embarrass you, but to celebrate with you! So, on the count of three, here we go!

Ready? 1...2...3...Stand!

Church, stand with them...Bible, balloon towers (card), next week.

Let's sing a great anthem of our faith as we dismiss – "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today!"

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*Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.*