



THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

October 21, 2012

‘Wherein Is The Christian’s Comfort At Death?’

SERMON TEXT: First Thessalonians 4:13-18

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Fellow Redeemed in Christ Jesus,

What happens to us after we die?

The Roman Papacy would have those held captive by its anti-Christian doctrine believe that the recently deceased must spend time suffering in purgatory, until such time as they have made ‘adequate penance’ for their sin or a certain number of good works or a certain amount of charitable giving by the surviving relatives are made; at which time a priest will tell the surviving relatives their loved one has made the “jump” into heaven. This is an *unscriptural* teaching and grants no real peace to anyone.

Then there are the many who believe that this life is ‘all there is’.

They believe humans are no more than animals, living only to satisfy the basest of human instinct.

They believe that once you are dead, you are dead, and that's it.

In their carnally foolish minds, they believe there is neither eternal reward in heaven to look forward to, nor eternal punishment in hell to fear. In fact, they reject and ridicule the very idea of life after death, much less, a heaven or hell.

For it is an impossibility to them that the dead shall live again. These surely do not know the Lord our God. For they reject the Truth that He is the Almighty, the Creator and Preserver of the whole universe – of all creation – and that with Him *all things are possible*.

Of course, such a dead-end philosophy of life can naught but lead to the sin of idolatry, for it belies a sinful attitude of complete selfishness towards life. No matter what the cost to others, their attitude is one of *'me first'* and their single preoccupation – a constant striving for the material goods and pleasures of this world. For it is only the worship of self, the getting of material things and seeking after worldly pleasures which hold any value for them.

Because these reject the Gospel – and thus eternal life – of their own volition, they possess absolutely no hope of a blessed life after death. And so, at the death of a friend or relative, they struggle in vain to find any real comfort. Many times their grieving continues unabated until such time as they are able to drive such sad depressing thoughts from their sinful minds either by repeated submission to the brainwashing of popular humanist psychological treatment, or by further clouding their sinful minds with the numbing effects of alcohol or drug abuse.

But what does God's Word say about such worldly philosophies which espouse such a bleak imagined finality of death?

In John 5:28,29 we hear Jesus say:

"...the hour is coming in which all that are in the grave shall hear His voice And shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." and in Matthew 25:46, Jesus says of those who reject Him: *"... these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."*

These words of the Son of the Living God give abundantly clear witness to the foolishness of all worldly philosophies which deny life after death. For there WILL indeed be a resurrection of all the dead. God has promised this!

Those who have rejected the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation offered to the whole world in the Gospel of Jesus Christ have rejected the robe of Christ's righteousness and so remain clothed in the filthy rags of their sins. These shall rise at the last day to receive God's Holy and Righteous Final Judgement of eternal punishment in the unquenchable fires of hell.

Those who by Grace Alone through Faith Alone in Christ Jesus believe – *whether they sleep in Christ Jesus or are yet alive on the earth* – and are thus clothed in the pure white robe of Christ's righteousness, shall rise in glory to everlasting life in the kingdom of heaven with the Lord Jesus.

Yes, Dear Christians, Our glorious resurrection to everlasting life in bliss shall begin with our Lord God returning to earth. And He will not come next time as a poor humble human baby, nor will he bear the form of a servant. No, Dear Friends, When the Lord returns, He shall do so in *all* His heavenly glory as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Our text says that:

"The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: And the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

So shall the Almighty Lord God come in all His radiant glory and majesty to take His children Home!

For the dead in Christ – *those who have fallen asleep in the faith, having placed their full trust and confidence in the Forgiveness of sins, Life and Salvation worked for the whole world in Christ Jesus* – these shall come forth first out of their earthly graves at the sounding of the loud trumpet of God.

Regardless of where they may be, at His Omniscient command; whether on land, in the deepest depths of the ocean, or even the vast reaches of space, they shall rise and be gathered together. At His command, *regardless* of what condition their mortal bodies – whether in ashes, entirely eaten of worms, or otherwise – they shall rise and be gathered together.

Though we do not know the day or hour of Christ's return, yet we know because of the redemption from sin and death we have in Christ Jesus, that even if we see death before His return, we shall be raised to be with Him. And, we can say with Job, in *all* confidence: “...*I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold; and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.*” (Job 19:25-27)

Then, we who believe and are yet alive on this earth at His coming shall be caught up with *all* the children of God to meet the Lord in the air. Though we shall have the same bodies we have now, they shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye. The unfailing Gospel promise of God tell us in Philippians 3:21 that though our bodies are sown in corruption, they shall be raised *holy and incorruptible* by the Omnipotent power of Almighty God!

Yes, Friends, our bodies shall be glorified, even as our Savior's glorified body!

And there shall be no more pain, no more crippling disease, no more deformity, no more tears of sorrow, no more death – only tears of joy. For we shall be received into the kingdom of heaven with a magnificent rejoicing of the whole company of heavenly angels. And there - at the great long awaited wedding feast – we will share with Christ Our Redeemer the full undeserved inheritance, which His sinless life and complete victory over sin, death, and the grave have won for us.

Knowing this, then, we need not fear our own deaths.

Neither must we – *nor should we* – mourn the death of our loved ones in like manner of those who through their own unbelief reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ, deny the resurrection and therefore have no hope of eternal life in paradise.

Does this mean that sorrow at the loss of a loved one is sinful or somehow inappropriate?

No, of course not.

For as we read in verse 35 of the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus *Himself*, with a deep groaning of spirit, wept tears at the death of Lazarus. So. Dear Friends, we may indeed *rightly* mourn the passing of those we love. For there is no shame – and no sin – in such deep sorrow, nor in the shedding of tears at the loss of a loved one.

However, the Christian's sorrow is *not* to be born of doubt in the resurrection, but rather tempered with the same sure faith and heart-felt comfort from the Holy Spirit that Martha exhibited at the death of her beloved brother, Lazarus. The death of our loved ones should cause us to reflect upon *Christ's* resurrection and upon the sure hope of eternal life in Christ.

So that at the death of someone we have loved so deeply, we may also take comfort and say as Martha did to Jesus: *"I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."*

And so take this message of God's Holy Spirit to heart, dear Christians, that you may be comforted – *and that you might comfort others* – as you run the race you have been given in this veil of tears.

Yes, it is, *indeed*, a glorious comfort of which we can be most certain. For in writing to the Thessalonians, Saint Paul was not simply voicing his own opinion nor the vain speculations of any fallible human being. Rather, this comfort is founded – as is the saving faith of *all* believers – upon the unfailing promise of God in the Gospel, as we read in verse 15 of our text, *"...this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord."*

It is then, the solemn Word of our Lord Himself, which invites and bids us cling to this most certain truth of our resurrection to life. For as we can believe with all certainty the Gospel message of Jesus Christ – namely, that through the innocent suffering and death of Jesus, we have the unmerited forgiveness of our sins, and are by faith wholly reconciled to God. We also know *with all certainty* that, just as Christ died and rose again, so *we also* shall rise again to be reunited with Him and all the saints in heaven.

Thus, victoriously we declare :

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ..."

And in the Spirit of God, Dear Christian Friends, comfort and encourage one another that you might surely be: *"steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."* (1 Cor. 15:55-58)

AMEN

And now may the Peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in your Resurrected Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.