

“13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 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. 15 According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left til the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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 will rise first. 17 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. 18 Therefore encourage each another with these words.”

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How do you react when you hear of a close friend or acquaintance who is diagnosed with stage 4 incurable cancer at a young age? Like we experienced with Desiree Naumann 2 years ago who died just months after her first diagnosis; and now Pastor John Hein who is only 56 years old.? How does that affect you? It really caused me to think about my own future. This could happen to me too. We have no idea how long we will be here.

Does that seem like a depressing, even frightening view of our future? It doesn’t have to be. Moses prays, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Ps. 90:12 That is exactly what God is doing. When we know the frailty and uncertainty of life, that keeps us from setting our heart on worldly things and keeps us looking to the Lord for all things, especially for our forgiveness and salvation. Then we know that our future will be glorious.

This past Summer at the Convention Pastor Hein had a wonderful sermon on Jeremiah 29:11 “I know the plans that I have for you says the Lord, plans of peace and not of evil; plans to give you a future and a hope.” He introduced his sermon by saying that things don’t always go according to our plans. But God’s plans for His children always come to pass and they are always good. I can tell you with certainty that being diagnosed with stage 4 cancer was not a part of pastor Hein’s plans for his future. That is the last thing that he wanted, but God has a different plan for him. It is yet to be revealed what that it is.

We don’t know God’s immediate plans for our lives or how long we or our loved ones will live, but our text today tells us exactly what God’s long term plan is for us. And the future is glorious. God gives us a first hand look at

Our Glorious Future

-I- Paul begins, “We do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.” Everyone in the world has to deal with death. And so everyone tries to find some source of comfort at time of death. Some believe in reincarnation. The person that dies isn’t really gone, they come back as someone or something else until they get it right and become one with the universe. The American Indians thought of their loved ones going to the happy hunting grounds. Many today comfort themselves by thinking that their loved ones are looking down on them and guiding them. Most people believe their loved ones are in a better place. Even the atheist finds his comfort in thinking that death is the end of everything. There is nothing to fear.

So they all have something they place their hope in, yet Paul says that they “have no hope.” That is because they are placing their hope in lies, imaginary dreams. It is a hope that will be greatly disappointed. Paul doesn’t want us to be ignorant about what will happen. He is giving us the genuine hope that will not disappoint. **It is Certain for** Paul says, it is “According to the Lord’s own word.” We can count on this. It is absolute truth from God who does not lie and

never fails to keep His promises.

-II- It is also certain because **It is based on Jesus' Death and Resurrection.** Vs. 14 begins, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again." Our glorious future is based on the historical fact that Jesus died for us and rose again. Jesus conquered death. He paid the final price for all the sins of the world. Then He rose again giving us the victory over death. Because Jesus died and rose again, we don't have to live in fear that we might get cancer or die of some other disease. We can be certain for our loved ones and ourselves, "that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him."

Notice that Paul says Jesus died yet we fall asleep. Jesus truly died under the curse of God for all the sins of the world. He died for you. If you believe that you will not die. That's what Jesus tells us. "Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." John 8:51 There is great comfort already in that. As God's children our body will sleep in the grave, but we will not die in the sense of ever being separated from God.

-III- **Therefore Death Cannot Deprive us of our Glorious Future** for "God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." If Jesus is going to bring with Him those who have fallen asleep, that implies that your loved ones who died in the faith are with Jesus now. There's Great comfort in that.

The Daily Rest devotions this past week talked about how many people like to think of their loved ones looking down on them. That is a very sentimental thought and I can understand the appeal of it. We want to feel close to them and want to think we still have them around. But it is not based on reality. When you think about it, do we really want them to be watching all the turmoil of life and be troubled by it. Do you want them to see everything you do? What the Bible tells us is so much more reassuring. They have been delivered from all the misery of this world and they are with Jesus. That is the absolute truth. Jesus told the repentant thief on the cross next to Him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:43 The Apostle Paul looked ahead to his own death and said, I "desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." Phil. 1:23. And again he said, "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." 2 Cor. 5:8 That is truly comforting. So rather than looking to a lie and think your loved ones are watching over you, think of them as being in the presence of the Lord which is true and so much better for them.

Look at verse. 15, "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left til the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep." Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that their loved ones who fell asleep, won't miss out on anything. They apparently had a mixed up idea about death and the resurrection. No doubt the truth was still confused with the heathen ideas of their day. That still happens today. The ideas of the world get confused with the truth of God's word. That always diminishes our true comfort. We need to keep straight what is according to Jesus' own word.

Also notice how the Apostle lived his life with the anticipation that he will see Jesus' coming during his lifetime. "We who are still alive, who are left til the coming of the Lord." He didn't know if he would be alive or not, just as we don't know. But we should all live with that expectation. Pastor Hein often uses the saying, "*Live every day as if Yesterday was Christmas, Today is Easter and tomorrow is Judgment Day.*" In other words, live everyday with the certainty and joy that Christ has come to save you. Live with the joy and confidence that our salvation is accomplished. Jesus is risen and has conquered sin and death. And live in full expectation and anticipation that tomorrow is Judgment Day. That could mean one of two things: it could mean Jesus will return tomorrow, or it could mean that our life will end tomorrow. Either one could happen and they both have the same result. So live in repentant

faith, ready to meet Jesus.

-IV- The next few verses reveal that **Our Glorious Future involves Several Amazing Events**. These are things to truly look forward to.

Look at verse 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 will rise first.” What an amazing day that will be. The Lord Himself will descend from heaven. This will not be anything like His first coming as a little baby born in a quiet manger. His coming will be accompanied with three very loud things:

When God came down on Mt. Sinai, the sound of a trumpet grew louder and louder, so Christ’s second coming will also be announced by the trumpet of God. Michael the Arch Angel will speak with his mighty voice.

When it says, “the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command,” we take that to be Jesus Himself shouting out a command. What is that command? Apostle John tells us “The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.” John 5:28-29 Christ will give the command to rise and so the very first thing that will happen is “The dead in Christ shall arise.” Millennialists want us to believe that there will be a separate resurrection for unbelievers. No, John clearly says, “ALL who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.” Jesus will raise all the dead on the last day.

Paul is not concerned with the unbelievers at this point. He is comforting the believers about their believing loved ones who have died. They are not going to miss out on anything because the very first things that will happen when Jesus comes is He will raise the dead. Years ago, a young child in Julie’s kindergarten class had seen Michael Jackson’s music video to *“The Thriller.”* And he didn’t want to be raised on the last day because he didn’t want to be a zombie. Another example of how the false ideas of the world can corrupt our joyful hope. But of course we will not be zombies, God says we will be raised with glorified bodies. Perfect in every way. No ailments, no weakness, no deformities, no disease or injuries.

It just keeps getting better. First we will see Jesus coming down out of the clouds in all His glory with ALL of His holy angels. Then all the dead will be raised to life. No matter how they died or what happened to their bodies, they will come alive. Then Paul says, “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.” Three tremendous truths.

“We will be caught up together with them.” We will be together with our loved ones again. Not just in spirit or in our thoughts. We will be together with them in the flesh, face to face, alive body and soul. What a grand reunion.

My fondest memories are from going on a trip with my family, like we did last summer camping in the Tetons. Just look at the what we are going to do together. “We will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” Yes, we will meet Jesus—we will see Him in all His glory.

“And so we will be with the Lord forever.” That will begin our eternal life in paradise, with Jesus forever. Basking in the light of His love forever.

“Therefore encourage each other with these words.” These absolute truths are meant to comfort us not only in regard to our loved ones who have died, they also lift us up because they show us **Our Glorious Future**. This is what we have to look forward to. When I was in Sunday School as a child and heard that Jesus could come at any time, I remember thinking, “I hope He doesn’t come before I get to do this” whatever I was looking forward to at the time. That seems silly now, but I have to admit, I had similar thoughts as we heard the news about Pastor Hein. As you know, Julie and I are trying to make some plans for our later years. I found myself thinking,

Oh Lord, please let those plans work out. Such thoughts are still just as silly and foolish. It is good to make plans and to look forward to them with the Lord's blessing, but we should always be thinking, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." James 4:15 If God in His love and wisdom decides to take us from this world before our plans work out, that is all the better, because there is nothing more glorious than to be forever with the Lord.

That is our glorious future. May we always set our mind and heart on that goal and pursue that goal above all. Then we can also enjoy whatever earthly blessings the Lord has in store for us here as we await our eternal home. There is no greater comfort and strength for our life than to know and believe our glorious future in and with Christ.

May we truly live our life as if Yesterday was Christmas, living with the joy of the shepherds who had to tell everyone the glorious news. Live as if today is Easter. Yes, He is Risen! He died for you and has conquered sin and death. Now He lives for you and in you. And He promises that He will come for you. Therefore live as if tomorrow is Judgment Day. It very well might be. Live every day for your Savior, with confident and joyful faith and service to God. Because we have **A Glorious Future** with Him.

Amen.