

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

End Times: Christ's Second Coming

October 5 & 6, 2014

¹⁵ According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till 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 other with these words.

What words do you think of when you hear the words: "End Times" or the "End of the World?" *Destruction? Terror? Pain? Fire? Alone? Love?*

Love is usually not one of those words that we associate with Christ's Second Coming or the End of the World. Yet, that is what the Apostle Paul is telling the Thessalonians in our text today. He wants us to know the answer to the questions: *Does he love me? Does he love me not?* If we can't answer the question, "*Does he love me?*", with a confident "*yes*," then the Second Coming of Christ is not an event of comfort at all. Paul does not want the Thessalonians to be afraid or confused at all about Christ's return to this world. Instead he tells them to "**encourage each other with these words.**"

Scripture tells us again and again that there will be an end to this world of suffering and sin. There will be a judgment of all people. There will be an eternity in heaven and hell. There are often many questions that people have in regards to the topic of End Times. What happens when we die? What will our bodies be like in heaven? What will heaven be like? Where is hell? What role do angels play on Judgment Day? What will Christ's second coming be like? Today, we begin a new sermon series taking a look at these questions and many other. As we do, let us "**encourage each other with these words**" and answer with absolute certainty the question: *Does God love me?*, with a loud "*yes*." During this new series on End Times, we will take a look at these and other questions.

Aristotle was a very famous Greek philosopher with many credentials. Back in about 350 BC, Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher, stated that "*the spider has six legs*." No human doubted what this great man of philosophy said, so, for the following centuries people went along with his statement. Then, out of nowhere a common man by the name of James Lamarck arose on the scene. He was curious about insects and spiders. As he was looking closer at spiders, he discovered that they have eight legs, not six. For hundreds of years, no one had actually counted the number of legs of spider to see if the statement, "*the spider has six legs*," was true.

Unfortunately, today there are people who either read something or have someone tell them something about death and dying, they will believe it without looking any further into what God says in the Bible. Therefore, if you were to look at the religions of the world, you wouldn't be able to count the number of different beliefs about death that people have. It wasn't much different at the time of the Apostle Paul. Listen to just a short paragraph about what the Romans believed about death:

Yes, the ancient Romans did believe in an afterlife. They believed in the immortality of the soul and had a complicated belief system about life after death. The ancient Romans believed that when one died, one was met by Mercury, the messenger god and son of Jupiter and taken to the river Styx, that flowed nine times around the underworld. There they paid the ferryman, Charon, a fee to cross the river where they were met and judged by Minos, Aeneas, and"

It is no wonder these Thessalonians were all confused about death and what would happen after this life. Did Paul not have quite the right amount of time to teach them while he was there on his missionary journey? Were they taking all these different beliefs of the afterlife, and try to combine them with Christianity? We are not sure. One thing is certain: They didn't understand death and Judgment Day. They were unclear about the End Times of the world.

So, in these verses he tries to lay it out to them as simply as he can. **“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.”** There is one thing that death will bring – sorrow. There is nothing wrong in being sad about someone dying. We miss that person. Death is about love. It is about God’s love. Jesus’ death on the cross took away everything that makes death something to be feared. We have hope in Jesus. For the Christian, death is simply the door into heaven which is far beyond anything we can imagine in this world. Even though we are sinners and we deserve eternal death, we trust that God took away the punishment for sin as Jesus died on the cross. There is hope for the Christian in death.

“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.” Paul speaks about death like a sleep. It’s like closing your eyes to sleep. You close your eyes in physical death, but you wake up in the joys of heaven. What comforting words these were for the Thessalonians. They were terrified that they would never see their loved ones who had passed away. Death is but a sleep from which we wake immediately in heaven. When Jesus returns on Judgment Day, all those who have died will rise to life again – their bodies will join their souls in heaven. There is nothing to fear.

“According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.” In other words, when Jesus returns on Judgment Day, we won’t go to heaven with Jesus before those who have already died. **“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. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”**

Paul wants to make this teaching as simple as possible for the Thessalonians:

- Those who have died in faith are not loss.
- They will rise to join those who are alive on Judgment Day
- All believers will be with the Lord forever in heaven.

Can there be anything more comforting than that? In the relationships that we have in this world, we may ask the questions: *Does he love me? Does he love me not?* We may not be certain as to the answer to that question, at least at first. There is no uncertainty in that question about Jesus. He does love us. He laid down his life for us on the cross. He will return to take us to home forever. Amen.