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## Growth Group Spring 2020

### *Would You Explain Heaven and Hell?*

Week 3 – May 3, 2020 - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

**Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at a church. In this time of Corona19 and “social distancing” please don’t meet in person, but do continue to check in with each other. If your growth group would like to meet online or if you are aware of needs that the church can help fill, please let us know at [connect@ljpres.org](mailto:connect@ljpres.org). Thank you for loving and caring for each other.**

### Setting the Context

Paul writes this letter to the church at Thessalonica around 50 AD. It is more than likely written from Corinth while Paul is on his second missionary journey. Most scholars believe this is the first known letter that we have from the apostle Paul, though some have argued that Galatians was written first. In this passage, he is writing to the church about the believers who have died and what happens to them at the second coming of Christ.

The term “falling asleep” was often used in the Greek language to describe those who had died. It is interesting that, in verse 15, Paul makes it clear that what he is sharing with the church is not his teaching, but it is the word of the Lord.

The sequence of events of this “second coming of Christ” is presented in four steps. First, the Lord will descend, and then the dead will rise (v. 16). Following that the living will be caught up, and finally all believers will be together with the Lord forever (v. 17). While numerous theological perspectives have been written around these verses (see rapture, premillennialism postmillennialism, amillennialism etc...) it is important to remember that what Paul was really trying to do was comfort the believers in Thessalonica about their loved ones who had passed away. They would all be reunited one day.

Verses 15–17 use language that describe the arrival of a grand dignitary. Trumpets announce the arrival. The crowds move out to welcome and celebrate the arrival of this person. The dignitary doesn’t take the crowd with him or her, but instead gets escorted back into the city to rule. Paul is not likely describing people being taken up into the heavens someplace, but instead Jesus bringing his kingdom here on earth, much like what we read in Revelation 21.

As Paul moves into chapter 5, he moves from words of comfort to words of encouragement and challenge. The Thessalonians need to be alert for they do not know when Christ will return. Paul uses images of a thief in the night and the labor pains of a pregnant woman to make his point. He tells the Thessalonians they need to continue to care for one another and encourage one another, just as they have been doing. They are to model faith, hope and love.



# Exploring the Text

## Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

<sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For 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. <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words. <sup>5</sup> Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, <sup>2</sup> for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. <sup>9</sup> For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>10</sup> He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

## Questions

*If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.*

- 1) Think for a couple of minutes about a loved one who has died. If you are with a group share something about them with friends/family/your growth group to keep their memory alive.
- 2) What's your favorite joke about what happens after we die? When you think seriously about the afterlife, what comes to mind about heaven and hell?
- 3) Paul speaks about those followers of Jesus who have already died before the expected return of the Lord, as if this has caused concern among many. What's the issue he's addressing, and what is the "hope" that Paul reassures the Thessalonians about?
- 4) Paul appears to be describing the 2nd Coming of Jesus. Putting that scene into your own words: how would you describe it, and how do you feel about it?
- 5) When you think about Jesus' final return, what images do you have? Are you comforted or worried about the phrase "the Lord will come like a thief in the night"? Against the backdrop of the Coronavirus, do you feel as if we are living in the end times?
- 6) What does Paul mean about Christians being "children of light & children of the day," as opposed to those "of the night or of darkness"? What is Paul saying when he uses the metaphors of "sober" and "drunk"? What "wrath" is Paul speaking of?
- 7) Why do "faith," "hope," and "love" appear in v. 8? Explain the destiny God holds out to his followers.
- 8) Describe the salvation you now have in Christ, and how that might grow/expand when you are in heaven, face to face with Jesus.