

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

*You Must be Born Again!*

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## The Great Reunion

*April 30th, 2023*

**Sermon Text:** 1 Thessalonians  
4:13-18

### Scripture Reading:

As we see evil increasing at a rate we could call “exponentially” (not just 2x2 but 2x2x2x2), Christians cannot help but think that the time of Christ’s return must be near. Perhaps every generation of Christ’s people have believed this – the world has always been very wicked – but our own nation now is in a spiral of wickedness. We have wicked people ruling in many ways as tyrants and essentially every decision they make is anti-Christ. Lines are being drawn between good and evil.

And so we look for Christ’s return. He is coming to judge the world in righteousness:

Act 17:30-31 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, (31) because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

And so this is what Christians call “the blessed hope.” Seeing Christ. Being with Him in a new creation where sin and evil are no more. Where death no longer exists.

In writing to the Thessalonian Christians, the Apostle Paul instructed them – actually he

reminded them – about the return of Christ. They lived in an evil world as well and they had been subjected to false teachers who had tried to delude them with the lie that Christ had already come. First and Second Thessalonians contains much teaching on this subject we call *eschatology – the biblical doctrine of the last times*. Second Thessalonians, for instance, contains a central and key passage about the Antichrist – the man of lawlessness.

This morning we will look at just one example, this one from 1 Thessalonians and I passage we cannot read too often -

1Th 4:13-18 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.

(14) For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

(15) 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. (16) 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.

(17) 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. (18) Therefore encourage one another with these words.

### Those who are Asleep

I won't spend lots of time on this subject right now, but it is very plain from numbers of other passages in Scripture that "those who are asleep" refers to Christians who have died and gone to be with Christ. The doctrine of "soul sleep" is a false doctrine which claims when we die we are in an unconscious state until the resurrection. Absolutely false.

When the Christian dies, he/she immediately is with the Lord.

Being “asleep” just has reference to the Christian’s body after death and before the resurrection.

Paul, then, is instructing the Thessalonians regarding some kind of error that must have been circulating among them regarding the state or even the eternal destiny of those believers who had died. For example:

2Th 2:1-2 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, (2) not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

What about our brothers and sisters in Christ who have already died? What can we know about them, and about our own future? Well –

1Th 4:13 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.

One of the sharp dividing lines between Christians and the unsaved is that believers have HOPE and unbelievers are HOPELESS. Paul says, *that you may not grieve as others who have no hope*. And he is about to remind these believers of this hope.

Let’s think some more about this matter of hope and hopelessness. What is the context? *Death*. Hope in the face of death, or hopelessness when death strikes.

Death is an enemy. It is the result of sin. Christ has conquered death so that His people will one day be raised to glory in sinlessness. The grave has lost its power because of the Lord Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection.

But the unsaved person has no hope in the face of death. As a result, they grieve as people who have no hope – because they are in fact hopeless. They invent lies as a

false comfort of course – “he is in a better place,” “she will live forever in our thoughts,” but this is all a cover. The truth is that they have no hope that they will ever see their loved one again. And they won’t. There will be no great reunion for them, no eternal life in heaven for them.

And we need to let this grievous truth sink in. If you are not in Christ, when you die, you will never see your loved ones ever again. If your loved ones are not in Christ, then when they die, you will never, never, never see them again. Death is the great divide, the final end of any familial or friendship relations who might have now.

Luk 16:27-31 And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— (28) for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ (29) But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ (30) And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they

will repent.’ (31) He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Here is a great test of whether you are in Christ or not – whether you truly believe His Word or not. Namely, *how do you face death. The death of a loved one who is not in Christ, for example.* Are you grieved over the fact that you have family or friends who are unsaved? Does that grieve you? Do you urge them to come in faith to Christ and be saved? Or are you one of the many people today who simply say “well, to each his own. Live and let live”? “We don’t want to cause division.”

Let this sink in deeply. If you are not in Christ, if your loved ones are not in Christ, then when you die or when they die – that’s it. You will never, never, never see them again. And largely that is what Paul means here when he speaks of people who have no hope.

Is anyone listening this morning to this and responding with something like – “Oh, that’s just way too harsh. We shouldn’t talk this way.” If so, then show me from your Bible that these things are not true. “

“that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

Who are these “others”? Obviously they are the unsaved. Everyone who is outside of Christ. They have no hope.

Have you ever been in a home where death has struck and the family wanted nothing to do with Christ? I have. Numbers of times. And in most every case what was the response – they began to curse God, sometimes even raging and screaming against God for this death. Immediately upon receiving word of the death. So that you see this raging against God was present in them all along. Now it spilled out. “God, you’ve taken my child, curse you, curse you!!”

They have no hope, because they would not have Christ.

### But We are not Like them

If you are a Christian, if you have been born again through faith in Christ, if you therefore see this living faith operating in you and God’s Spirit present in you leading you, if you know and confess there is nothing good in you to obligate God to save you, if you hear His Word and love it – even when He rebukes you by it – if you are a Christian, then Paul says to us that *we do not and we must not grieve as those who have no hope*. Why? Because we do have HOPE! What is it? Here it is. Listen to it once more:

1Th 4:14-18 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (15) 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. (16) 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. (17) 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. (18) Therefore encourage one another with these words.

*For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again....* That is a condition, is it not? Hope is only for those who believe that Jesus died and rose again. But for those who do believe here is this certain promise:

1. Christ is coming again. Visibly. Just as He ascended. He comes on the clouds. Every eye will see Him.
2. And He isn't coming alone. He is bringing with Him ALL of His people who have died before and have been with Him in heaven. ALL of them. And myriads of angels too. It

is going to be the noisiest event the world has ever seen and it will be fearful for the wicked – they will call for the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb.

3. But for Christ's people, it is this tremendous reunion. *“God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”*

4. *The dead in Christ will rise first.* This means that the Lord will raise the bodies of every believer who has died. It will be a “Lazarus, come forth! Event. It will be this:

Rev 11:7-12 And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, (8) and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. (9) For three and a half days some from the peoples and



tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, (10) and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. (11) But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. (12) Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.

"That Apostle Paul, that troublemaker Elijah, that Martin Luther, that John Wycliffe, that John Calvin...all those we thought we were rid of....and now they are back! And that Jesus is with them!!" Where are the Popes??

5. 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.

This is the great and final Exodus of Christ's people from this wicked Egypt. A second resurrection will follow:

**Rev 20:5-6 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. (6)** Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

**Rev 20:11-15** Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. (12) And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had

done. (13) And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. (14) Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Do not miss the fact that hell is a real place where the wicked will spend eternity *in real bodies, as real persons, knowing they will never see anyone again, knowing they have rejected Christ for the last time and will never, ever get out of that place of torment. They have, in fact, exactly what they wanted. No God.* But for Christ's people-

and so we will always be with the Lord. (18) Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Notice the "one another" phrase here. This is a very common subject in the New Testament. One

of the fundamental reasons we gather together on the Lord's Day is this:

Heb 10:24-25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, (25) not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another**, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

We need to encourage and we need to be encouraged. Do you notice that word contained there – *courage*. We meet, be it in person or by letter or other communication, to instill courage in one another, reminding ourselves that the Day of the Lord is drawing nearer and nearer. It takes courage from the Lord to persevere in Christ in this wicked world and even more so as the time draws shorter and shorter.

I hope that as we are growing older in Christ, the reality of these truths becomes clearer and clearer so that when our time in this world is ended, we will agree with good old



Thomas Brooks, *The Saint's Last Day is His Best Day*.