



JANUARY 24, 2024 WEDNESDAY - DAY 17

PRAY THAT WE WOULD COMFORT ONE ANOTHER

1 THESSALONIANS 4:18

WHEN WILL JESUS RETURN?

The church in Thessalonians was becoming increasingly discouraged. They were all first generations believers and lived with the strong conviction that they would see the return of Jesus. Each day they arose with the eager expectation, "Perhaps today." But the Lord delayed his return (and still does). Worse still, these new Christians had suffered the grief of seeing friends and loved ones slip over the brink of eternity as life and death took its natural toll. What about those who have died ("asleep")?

When Christ returns, what will happen to them? So Paul wrote his first epistle to them to give them hope and comfort in the face of the last enemy to be defeated death itself. Paul does not tell them to stop their grieving. Those who would short circuit the natural, God given process of working through our sorrow by some sort of Pollyanna denial, end up with far more emotional and physical problems.

The God who created our tear ducts encouraged us to "weep with those who weep." God doesn't expect us to refrain from grief or mourning, but to "sorrow not as others who have no hope."

Then Paul explains the basis of our "blessed hope." Christ will return. When he does, the bodies of those who have died will rise incorruptible. We who are alive and remain shall be "caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." It will be glorious; it will be forever.

No more good byes. "Therefore," Paul says, "comfort one another with these words." He would repeat these words in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, adding the admonition to "encourage one another."

These words are not just soft, vacuous cooing or whistling in the dark. The believer's hope is rooted in the historic fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because he lives, we too shall live. He conquered death and hell to demonstrate that the grave no longer has a hold on those who live and believe on him (John 11:25, 26).

JESUS WENT FIRST

As children, we loved to challenge each other to daring feats. Who would be the first one to jump in the river in the spring? Who would take the challenge to dive off the high dive at the city park? Who would dare to go down the slide standing up? Somehow, it was always easier to do anything if someone else did it first (and lived to tell about it). Jesus drank the bitter dregs of Calvary's cup and descended into the grave, where he remained for three days. Then, on that first resurrection morn, he broke the shackles of sin and death and ascended to glory. Thus the grave was robbed of its victory; Death was stripped of its sting.

The worst this old world can do to us is kill us, and that only ushers us into the presence of the Lord in glory. We live in a society that longs to hear, "It's OK." We long for comfort and hope. But for those who know not Christ, it will not be OK forever. However, for the body of Christ, an old hymn says it best: "Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal."



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And no matter how good things may get, the best is yet to come. What comfort! The tragic shooting at Wedgwood Baptist Church occurred only two days after the funeral of the Pastor's mother. As therapy for processing this grief as well as that for his mother, a counselor instructed him to return to his childhood home in Michigan. There he walked from empty room to empty room, haunted by the sounds of laughter and tears, good memories and bad. He bade his mother and father "goodbye" and began to weep at the sense of their loss. An old Isaac Watts hymn flooded his mind.

When I can read my title clear to mansions in skies. I'll bid farewell to every tear and wipe my weeping eyes.

He was smothered by the sense of loss, not only of parents, but also of the seven young people who were murdered in our sanctuary. Grieving, he sang on:

Let cares like a wild deluge come and storms of sorrow fall

Then he broke down into sobs. "They've come, Lord. Such a Storm of Sorrow! How will we ever bear it all?" He asked God. And then the last line came.

May I but safely reach my home, my God, my heaven, my all.

God, in his infinite mercy, sent waves of comfort through poetic words of encouragement written centuries before, having their root in the eternal promises of God. Pray that we would comfort one another.

**Therefore comfort one another
With these words.
1 Thess. 4:18**

PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER

1. Take time to meditate on the joyous greeting you will receive in heaven from loved ones who have gone on before. Best of all, envision the Lord himself with open arms saying, "Well done." take comfort.
2. Do you know of someone needing comfort? What could you do in the next few days to comfort them?
3. Do you know of someone who is confused over the events of the end times? Why not replace their confusion with comfort?
4. Pray for comfort for the families of those listed in today's obituaries.

**It's hard to function, especially
in the body of Christ without
the encouragement of others.**

**Affirm others for who they are,
not for who you want them to be.**