

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

What – Paul wrote the letter to the Thessalonians for several reasons. Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica quickly as we see in Acts chapter 17. With new converts from paganism left behind in this new church, Paul undoubtedly wanted to inform them of much that he would have taught could he have stayed longer. In the section we are studying today, however, Paul spoke about the second coming of Christ. This appeared to be for two reasons. First, the new Christians were being persecuted and the return of the Messiah was a comfort. Also, however, Paul was answering for the Thessalonians a quintessential question that we still ask today. What happens when we die? Paul reminded the new converts that we worship a risen Lord who has promised us to rise. The second coming Paul described, so debated and pondered even today, was really simply a reminder that we are secure in Christ.

Why – This letter is important because all of us wonder what will happen when Jesus returns. The church begins with a messenger from God reminding the church of the imminent return of Jesus.

Acts 1:11 (NIV)

¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Ever since the church has wondered what this will be like. Revelation gives us a bit more of a clue, but God is careful not to give us all the details. He does this purposely so that we will not become complacent in our faith. Faith is made to be exercised, not stagnant. In the same way, Paul gave us a glimpse into the future without revealing all of the pieces to the puzzle. He said that at the end a trumpet will sound (see also Matt 24, 1 Cor 15, Rev 11) and those who have died before us will rise with Christ first, then we will follow. While this does not give us a total picture of the last day, it gives hope, both for us and those who have gone before us.

WOW – It never ceases to amaze me how scripture interprets itself. Trumpets abound in several books, and Jesus returns in a glorious march that God includes us in. The WOW here is that we get to be part of the procession. The Greek word *parousia* (used here in Vs 15) means a procession. It is like a parade for a returning, victorious king. We are part of the celebration. God has not only saved us, but His goal is for us to help Him celebrate and conquer sin on His Earth. What an amazing privilege. Perhaps the biggest WOW in this scripture, however, is found in the two smallest words in the section. In verse 14, there are two tiny words connecting the parts of that sentence and the concepts of this entire section of scripture. The words are “and so”. Jesus died, Paul said, AND SO we have hope. All of what will happen, all of what has happened, all of our hope, all of the glory of God, all of the power of our future victory over death and God’s victory over the devil is tied to what comes before those two small words. Jesus died and rose again. EVERYTHING hinges on that fact. Nothing else matters. Jesus died, AND SO, we have all that we have. Now that’s a reason to celebrate, even before Jesus returns.