

## THE MISSION – TO WATCH AND KEEP THE LIGHT SHINING!

1 Thess. 4:13–18

“In the dark about something?” What does it mean to be in the dark?

Literally, the lights are off. There is natural darkness. God created day and night. There is such a thing as spiritual darkness. Walking in darkness means to go astray. The Scriptures reveal to us that spiritual darkness does not understand the light. In fact, it wants to resist the light in this life. This is called sin. The darkness is also referred to the sinful world that we live in. Evil. Wickedness. Harm. Chaos. Paganism. Hell is referred to as the place of darkness, separation from God for all eternity.

There is such a thing as eternal darkness. This is the realm of the spiritually and eternally dead. This eternal darkness is connected with destruction. It is referred to as the Day of the Lord - Judgment Day. This is what we heard read in Amos 5, from our Old Testament Lesson today. We heard that the day of darkness, the day of judgment, for the unbeliever, is to be in the pitch-dark. This complete darkness will fall upon the unrighteous, the unbelievers – those who are secure in their own sins, and deaf to God’s call and purpose. Jesus referred to them as “the foolish virgins” in our Gospel lesson.

There is another kind of darkness that I wish to address today. This kind of darkness means those who are clueless; don’t understand; unaware; ignorant about God’s purpose of life.

The Apostle Paul uses the word ‘ignorant’ in our second reading today from 1 Thess. 4:13 **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.** Ignorant means to not recognize or not know, to err with wrong information, uninformed.

Today, I will address two questions: 1) What happens to loved ones who have died in Christ? 2) What about those of us in Christ Jesus who are left here?

The first question is this: *What happens to a loved one who has died in Christ Jesus?* Some people conclude that when a loved one dies, they will somehow miss the victory and glory of the Lord's return on the Last Day. Some people conclude that their body is in the ground and they are not conscience of anything after death. Some believe that their loved ones are in this kind of state of being put on hold, until the Lord comes.

The Apostle Paul chooses, very carefully, the phrase, “those who fall asleep.” ‘Those who fall asleep’ are seen as death's temporary hold on the PHYSICAL body of the Christian until the bodily resurrection on the Last Day, when Jesus returns.

NOTE: This sleep refers to the physical body and not to a person's soul or spirit. It's not "soul sleep." Rather, the soul is not unconscious, dead or sleeping. Rather, the soul is consciously being with Christ. Paul told the Corinthians, in his second letter, that upon our death, it means being with the Lord. **Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.** (2 Cor. 5:6-8) Clearly, upon the moment of our physical death, our soul is with Christ Jesus. We know that this is so true, because just before Jesus and the thief on the cross next to Him died, Jesus said to that man, **"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."** (Lk 23:43)

God is not the God of the dead. He is the God of the living. Jesus taught this. He said, **But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, <sup>32</sup> 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.'**" (Mt. 22:31-32)

In Mt. 17:1-3, we learn about what happened on the Mt. of Transfiguration. ***After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.***

Acts 7:59 ***While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."***

The soul WITH CHRIST means there is CONTINUED relationship with Christ IN HEAVEN. Listen to what the Apostle John tells us in Rev. 6. He has this view of heaven, and describes Jesus, the Lamb, opening the fifth seal. The opening of the seal means that something has already been revealed or already happened. What has happened? John says **"...I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. <sup>10</sup> They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"** (Vss. 9-10). YES! There is conversation of the souls in heaven going on right now, with Christ Jesus, the Elders and His angels. John goes on and says, in verse 11, **Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.**

When the last day, Judgment Day comes, when Jesus comes, what will we all see?

IT IS NOT GOING TO BE ABOUT DARKNESS. Listen, again, to these words from our text: 1 Thess. 4:14 & 16 **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... 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.** When Jesus comes, He brings all those souls with him. Then all the bodies in Christ will rise, that were once physical bodies, and will be raised glorified, spiritual bodies. For we read in 1 Cor. 15:42-44 **The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.**

We are to encourage one another with these words of the Lord. Our loved ones, who have died in Christ Jesus, their souls are with Him in heaven.

This now brings us to the second question that I will address: What about those of us in Christ Jesus who are left here now? Our text says in 1 Thess. 4:15 **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.**

O.K. Here we are. We are still here. Our bodies and souls are still here. What's our mission? WE ARE TO KEEP WATCH. This is the message Jesus gave us in our Gospel lesson today.

The Greek meaning of the word 'watch' means to "be alert; be awake; rise up; to arouse; to set up." We don't want to be like the five unwise virgins – unprepared. Instead, we want to be like the wise virgins, not only bringing oil in our lamps but an extra supply of oil in separate jars. Why? Because obviously, for most of us, Christ's coming is delayed. Spiritual preparation cannot be bought or borrowed at the last minute. This watch means to be faithful and trust the Lord every day until He comes.

We are to have this watchful mission attitude like that of the Apostle Paul. Listen to what he said: **For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I **remain in the body.**** (Phil. 1:21-24) TALK ABOUT BEING PREPARED.

What we learn from our Gospel lesson, we are to be like the wise virgins. We are to KEEP OUR LIGHT BURNING and SHINING IN THIS DARK WORLD FOR ALL TO SEE. What does this mean? Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 4:5-6. **For we do not preach**

ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

THIS IS WHY YOU AND I ARE HERE. TO WATCH AND KEEP THE LIGHT BURNING UNTIL JESUS COMES. While we are watching and waiting, we are to let our light shine. What Light is that? The hope of the resurrection in Christ Jesus. We are reminded of this, by what the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians. For he wrote – **Jesus died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.**(2 Cor. 5:15)

WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN? CHRIST JESUS IS ETERNAL LIFE. Jesus said, **Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.** (Jn. 17:3)

JESUS GIVES US ETERNAL LIFE. THIS IS ENCOURAGING GOOD NEWS!

Three times, in the Gospel of John, Jesus says we ALREADY HAVE eternal life.

**"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life."** (Jn. 3:36)

**"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned."** (Jn 5:24)

**"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."** (Jn. 6:54)

Since we already have this promise of eternal life, in this life, the mission is to live for Christ Jesus. How are we to do that? The Apostle Paul put it well, when he said, **I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.** (Gal. 2:20) Christ lives in us. He is in us now.

What happens in the end? Our text ends with this: **...we who are still alive (in Christ) 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.** (1Thess. 4:17-19)