

παρουσία

parousia / coming; advent; presence

Erasmian Pronunciation

LOGOS



1 Thessalonians 4 - The "Parousia" (The appearing, the arrival)

Believers Who Have Died

*¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming (**parousia**) of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, NIV).*

When I was much younger, I didn't really think a lot about dying. I realized that I would die someday, but it was a day far off in my mind. I have now come to the point in my life to where it doesn't seem so far off. On a more humorous side, I realize that the obituaries are the first things that I look at in the Navasota Examiner each week. And often, it's the only thing that I bother even reading. I see my behavior changing. When people asked me a few years ago why I was selling off all my cattle and much of my equipment, I told them that it was time to scale back.

Others have come to me seeking guidance regarding illnesses that make death seem much closer, and my counsel usually includes the words, "Prepare to live and

prepare to die." Unless the event we're reading about in this subject passage happens in our lifetimes, we will all pass through that dark veil of earthly death. As believers, we have a blessed hope that we will have a glorious eternity beyond that veil, and that we will be with other believers in eternal fellowship with Jesus.

The key phrase that I've said here is that we will all pass through "earthly death." Paul's little church in Thessalonika euphemistically referred to human death as "falling asleep." In verse 14, Paul refers to those who have "fallen asleep in Jesus." Let's talk for a minute about "earthly death." I'd like to make some observations from scripture:

1 Death is part of the human experience. It is something that is just common for all of us. It is part of life. Many of us who love life, find the most difficult part of death to be the losing of something that we enjoy so much and find so glorious. Probably near the end of his life, King Solomon talked about the cycle of life and the rhythm of our existence. He said, *"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2a, NIV).* Solomon then gives a glorious laundry list of the activities and experiences we all have in our lives. It is an interesting read. He basically ends it by saying we should enjoy what we have and enjoy those with whom we have friendships. That is much of what matters. Perhaps he is saying, like Paul, that we should learn to be content in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

2 Death will come to each of us in its own time. I believe your time is appointed by God. Scripture says, *"And it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27, NKJV).* The Book of Job relates this same thought to us, saying, *"Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass," (Job 14:5, ESV).*

What I'm now going to say isn't really convincingly supported by scripture, but neither is it contradicted by the entirety of scripture. Solomon tells us, *"Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?" (Ecclesiastes 7:17, ESV).* I believe this supports the idea that when you participate in some sort of self-destructive behavior you can willfully thwart God's perfect plan for your life. You can cut your own intended life short, "dying before your appointed time." (ie... if you commit suicide or engage in drug addiction, alcohol addiction etc.) However, God is not willing you to die a young death. You are making a choice to cut short the beautiful days and the abundant life that He intends for you.

3 God is sovereign concerning events that might take your life. King David said, *"My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!" (Psalm 31:15, ESV).* If harm or death overcomes you and it is not of your own doing, God knows about it and He is sovereign concerning that event. *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28, NKJV).* This might even include someone's seemingly premature death.

4 Earthly death IS NOT THE END. It does not separate us from the love of God. *"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39, ESV).*

5 We should not obsess and fear our imminent earthly death. Scripture tells us, *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." (Psalm 23:4a, ESV).* Worrying about our approaching death robs us of living in the moment and living an abundant life.

6 Use your limited time on earth doing the will of God. Life is precious and we shouldn't waste our lives doing things that are foolish. So what sort of things might be foolish? I think living your life in front of a television is foolish. I think living your life always trying to accumulate "a little more" is foolish. I think not enjoying your spouse, family and friends is a waste of the precious time we have on earth. Paul tells us to *"make the best use of our time." "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." (Ephesians 5:15-17, ESV).*

The little church in Thessalonika wondered what would happen to them after they "fell asleep." Paul was writing this epistle to encourage them to plan to live and to plan to die. He was telling them to stay active and busy with things of significance that mattered. He was telling them to keep on working, planning careers, and living life. We are NOT called to sit around waiting for Jesus to return and to use that as an excuse to not get on with our lives. Christians are supposed to be LIVING LIFE AND LIVING IT ABUNDANTLY.

In our text Paul tells us to be informed about what is going to happen to us after we die. He says we should know about this so we don't grieve like the rest of mankind

as we as believers are people who have hope. He goes on to talk about what that hope is.

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The Belief that gives us hope

¹⁴ 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. (1 Thessalonians 4:14, NIV).

This is the joyful news that God will "bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him." The good news is that this refers to us as believers! When we've put our faith and hope in the finished work of Jesus on the cross for our salvation, we will not be abandoned. We will be taken with Him!

Paul continues with a description of the final events that will affect us.

*¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming (**parousia**) of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, NIV).*

It will look something like this. At a point in time, Jesus will return/come/appear (Parousia) to the earth. It may be morning. It may be nighttime. It may be noon. I suppose it will depend on where you live on the earth. But there is coming a day when He will appear somewhere between heaven and earth. When He comes, He will give a "loud command." I suppose it to be sort of a "global command" such as when He called Lazarus forth from the tomb. In a loud voice, Jesus Himself will give that command to RISE...RISE FROM THE DEAD... RISE FROM THE GRAVE. This command will be accompanied by the voice of Gabriel or Michael, the two archangels of God. And, simultaneously to all of this, there will be the sound of trumpets (perhaps shofars) joining in the heavenly blast. The great mystery will happen.

In a way that only God knows and in a way that only God understands, bodies of the dead in Christ will be reconstituted. Anyone who claims to know how such a thing will happen is merely speculating. We only know sort of what will happen, but nothing about *how* it will happen. The renewed bodies of those who have died will come out of the Whitehall graveyard, Oakwood Cemetery in Navasota, out of the bottom of the ocean, and out of the ruins of places where natural disasters have happened. These believers will be called to the side of their Savior. Then, those of us who might be still alive will be transported to be with them and Jesus in the air. And what will happen then? WE WILL BE WITH THE LORD FOREVER!

So dear friend, what are we to do with this information today? We are to COMFORT ONE ANOTHER WITH THESE WORDS. At this point, some of you may be wanting to ask me, Pastor Faber, "Do you really believe all of this stuff?" My answer will be a resounding YES. I am staking and banking my life on it! I have had it etched in my tombstone which already stands at the Whitehall-Fairview Cemetery. I comfort myself with these words and I want to comfort each of you today with these words. Now you're asking me, "What should I do in the meantime?"

I would answer that you should prepare to live and you should prepare to die. Get your life and your things in order. Don't leave a nightmare of chaos behind. Ask God today to show you what you should be doing. If you are wasting time doing nothing, repent of that, and start asking God to show you His general and specific plan for your life. Start where you are and work your way out. Get your eyes off of yourself and start ministering (being a servant) to those in proximity to you. Remember the words of Jesus, *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* (John 10:10, NKJV). Satan steals your life one day at a time, one television program at a time, one hour at a time on social media. He steals it when you neglect to spend time in prayer and when you neglect to read a portion of scripture daily. He steals it when you choose instead of that eternally good thing, to waste time doing those things I've mentioned. START LIVING! Today truly is the first day of the rest of your life. Now, go live your life for Christ! *'And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to man.'* (Colossians 3:23, NKJV). Let's Pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868.

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