

Clarity - Sunday 18th October, 2015 – Memorial Service

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.”

1 Thess.4:13-14

Beloved in The Lord,

God desires for us to have clarity in the big questions of life, and that is one reason for the Bible. Many people are confused in life, simply because they are ignorant concerning the teachings of the Bible.

Many people grieve inconsolably when someone dies, simply because they do not know the truth about life and death. This is nothing new. Paul in writing to the Thessalonians addresses the big question of death, because many in the Church were confused and grieving without hope. They were ignorant of God’s ways and His truths.

At the time Paul wrote this letter, Christians were eagerly and expectantly awaiting Jesus return – The Second Coming. They knew that Jesus had said that He would return soon and they expected Him at any moment. The problem was, that the longer Jesus tarried, the more Christians had died. There was confusion in the Church as to what will happen to them at the return of Christ. Will they get left behind? In order to answer these questions, Paul wrote this letter. These words were written to comfort them and to reassure them.

The first thing that we need to look at today is that Paul likens death to sleep. Death is by no means the end of existence. Sleep is associated with awakening. One who goes to sleep wakes up again after a period of time. The one who falls asleep in Christ – i.e. who dies in Christ, awakes to a new life with Christ in the Fathers House.

Jesus taught:

“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:1-3)

Please note that it is Jesus Himself who has gone to prepare a place for us. He has room for all who would believe and come to Him. This is why He came into the world in the first place. He came to save us from eternal death, which is the wages of sin. Put simply: The one who believes on Him, will live with Him in eternity in the Father’s House. This is why it is so important that we believe in Jesus. That we place our trust in Him.

When we believe in Jesus, then the sting of death is tamed. It loses its power. Oh, yes it hurts us, but we can overcome it, because we know the truth. Of course the death of a loved one is painful. It is always hard to farewell a loved one, but the death of a Christian is not a loss in the light of eternity.

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones.” Ps.116:15

When a Christian dies, they go home. At that moment all their troubles end. All doubt and fear and trouble is gone. Illness is gone. Death is no more.

As it is stated:

“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him.”(1 Cor.2:9)

To fall asleep in Christ is to go to our real home. We are strangers and sojourners here on earth. This is not our home. We read:

***“For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.”
(Hebrews 13:14)***

and again:

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” (Phil.3:20-21)

If we truly belong to Jesus, then our citizenship is not of this world, our citizenship is Heaven. The time we spend here is short. It is like we are staying in a Motel. We are passing through on our way home. That is why repeatedly the Bible teaches us not to cling to this world, to this life too strongly.

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.(1.John 2:15-17)

It is important to live a full life, but it is important to understand that that means to live for Jesus and to understand that this is not home – home is in Heaven.

This is why Paul likens our physical body to a tent. A tent is a temporary dwelling. It is the temporary home for our eternal soul and spirit. When the time comes the tent is taken down and our soul and spirit fly away.

Paul puts it like this:

“For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— for we walk by faith, not by sight— we are of good

courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” (2.Cor.5:1-10)

You see, all of these Scriptures testify to the same truth – life after death is far better for the Christian. That is why we should not grieve too sorely over the death of a Christian. We should be grateful that by God’s grace they have gone home to be with Jesus.

The important factor is faith in Jesus. To have faith means to fully trust in Him. To entrust all to Him. To understand that your place in Heaven is only possible because of Him and through Him. He gives free passage to those who believe and trust in Him. When we believe in Jesus our eternal home is secure.

We read the Gospel message:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:16-18)

Today as you read these words, look into your heart and see if you truly believe. If the answer is yes then all is well and all will be well. Stay in this faith and keep your focus fairly and squarely on Jesus, and be assured that nothing or nobody can separate you from His love.

But maybe you have doubts. You are not really sure. Jesus is waiting for you with outstretched arms. He is inviting you to come to Him. He loves you. He has a place for you. He has paid your sin debt in full and the door to heaven stands open. All you need to do is come and receive it from Him. Come and receive His gift of grace. Come. He says:

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.” (John 6:37)

Come to Him.

For those for whom the death of a loved one is still a constant source of grief and pain Jesus has a word for you. He lovingly says:

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Mt.11:28-30)

When we come to Jesus, He eases our burden and gives us His peace. He also gives us true clarity as we learn the truth and the truth sets us free.

May we all come to Him today. Amen

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.