

We Know.

We Believe.

Week 12 in Our Weekly Study of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

Orchard Park Wesleyan Church

Week of November 25, 2018

Day 1

A Necessary Reminder

"I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said."

1 Corinthians 15:3 NLT

This week's study in 1 Corinthians 15 is packed with treasure for us. In fact, there is so much that we can pursue in greater depth that I've been especially prayerful for God's clear leading as we hone in on certain parts together. We'll have plenty to chew on from an eschatological perspective; we'll discuss our fleshly inheritance from the first Adam and our spiritual rebirth through Christ as the last Adam; and then there's the matter of truly understanding and holding onto what we believe. It is with this last topic that we'll begin our study this week, and this theme is foundational to the rest of the chapter. As followers of Christ, we need to know, understand, and confidently hold onto what *God* says is true.

I continue to be amazed at the similarities between ancient Corinth and our culture now. Since the

very beginning, humanity has struggled with the same insecurities, doubts, fears, and failures. Our tendency is to cling to what we can see and touch—and to ignore or forget that which we can't. It's so easy to ignore truth that doesn't look us in the eye. That's the problem Paul was addressing with the Corinthian church in chapter 15, and this same theme permeates all the others that we'll study within the chapter. Everything Paul will talk about stems from the question, "Do you know what you believe, and will you hold onto it no matter what?"

Please read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

- Re-read verse 1, and write down why you think Paul says all that he does in the following verses, through verse 11.

- Fill in the blanks for verse 2:

"It is this Good News that saves you ___ you _____ the message I told you— unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place."

Paul begins this section of his letter with a reminder. The Corinthian church needed to be refreshed with the basic truth upon which the rest of their faith was built. Nothing Paul says in the remainder of this letter holds any water unless those to whom he wrote believed the Gospel of Christ and understood that their belief was rightfully based on truth. Paul needed to remind the Corinthian church of the surety of their faith to establish the grounds for what he would say next.

Sometimes we all need a reminder, don't we? Sometimes we just need to return to the Cornerstone of our faith by taking in the beauty and strength of the Rock and refreshing our minds as well as our spirits with the assurance that our faith in Christ is real, true, and worth holding onto. Belief in the Gospel—in Jesus Christ—is what saves us. But we must purposefully choose to continue believing it, renewing our minds by relying upon Christ as the Reliable One upon whom everything else is built. Not only do we live in a culture that continually challenges and even mocks faith in Christ. We're told that seeing is believing; but God says differently. God tells us that we must acknowledge Him first by believing, and then He will enable us to see...just as He did with Paul on the road to Damascus.

There is another reason that we all sometimes need to be reminded of the fundamentals of our faith, and it applies to the situation with the Corinthian church as Paul wrote this, too.

Please read Jude 3-5.

- About what was Jude "eager" to write?

- About what did he feel compelled to write instead?

- Why?

Jude wanted to write about salvation--the core of the Gospel and the motivation behind everything God promised and accomplished through Christ--but he found it more pressing to address the necessity for his readers to hold onto their faith. Why? Because ungodly people were infiltrating the church *undetected*. We, too, need to continually defend and contend for the purity of our faith. Even if we are thriving and utterly in love with Christ, we need to remain protective of that which God entrusts to us. Nothing is more threatening to the enemy's plans than a thriving church, and he will try anything to take it down.

From what we've seen of the Corinthian church however, many weren't exhibiting a thriving and passionate love for Christ and His ways. This church struggled with worldliness and conceit—all the more reason for Paul to remind them of the very simplest foundation of their faith. They needed refreshment that can only come by way of knowing Christ. It is in Him that their (our) faith rested; and what they believed, Paul said, was grounded in solid evidence and undeniable truth.

Verses 3-11 are so encouraging because here we see God's mercy through Paul. God inspired Paul to encourage and remind His people that what they believed was (and is) true. Paul gives three significant reassurances for the validity of faith in Christ: fulfilled prophecy, eyewitness accounts, and his own testimony. Following Christ does require faith, but I am so thankful that our heavenly Father doesn't ask us to step out in *blind* faith. Our faith is grounded in factual reality—enough that we can know that what we believe is solid and true but not so much that we have no need for God-pleasing faith. We still have to trust God and believe what we cannot see.

So let's also be reminded and encouraged as Paul assures the Corinthian church that their faith is grounded in the truth of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Prophecy Fulfilled. Prophecy makes up a large percentage of God's Word, and many of the Old Testament prophecies were written for one purpose: to enable the world to recognize the Messiah when He came to earth the first time. Paul uses this to remind the Corinthian church that what he had taught and they had believed—the Good News that Jesus is the Savior of the world—was and is true.

Paul only references two major prophecies that, in their fulfillment, prove that Jesus is the Christ: He died for our sins (Isaiah 53), and He was raised on the third day (Hosea 6:2, Matt. 12:40). There are dozens more throughout scripture, all of which were perfectly fulfilled during Christ's life, ministry, death, and resurrection. But Paul chose these two in particular because the Corinthian church had a fundamental error in its belief concerning the resurrection of the dead. (We'll talk more about this tomorrow.)

By reminding them that Christ died and was resurrected—in perfect fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy—Paul builds and encourages the faith of this church by emphasizing that God is always true to His

word. Some in the Corinthian church was deviating from essential doctrine by denying that there would someday be a bodily resurrection of Christ's followers. We'll study this more tomorrow, but by specifically reminding the church that God raised Christ from the dead *just as He said He would do*, he is laying the groundwork for further correction.

We are right to apply this to ourselves, too. God's promises are as good as done. We hold fast to them and *expect* their complete fulfillment because our God is faithful. Let's keep this in mind as we study the rest of this week.

Eyewitness accounts. Had there been just one or two people that saw Christ after God raised Him from the dead, Christianity could still hold to the truth of such, but God made sure that we had more. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to Peter, all 12 apostles, 500 of His followers in one large group, James and all the apostles, and finally, to Paul. Most of these people were still alive at the time Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian church, and their story could be corroborated. With over 500 living eyewitnesses who testified that they saw the risen Lord, how much room was there to doubt that Jesus died and was actually resurrected? This is the same truth upon which our faith is built.

A life turned upside-down. This is perhaps the greatest—yet easiest to overlook—proof of our faith: change, redemption, freedom from sin. Such change was easy to see in someone like Paul because it was drastic and monumental. But God still writes His Name on believers today when He changes the deepest parts of us to conform to the image of His Son.

Even those with rosy childhoods and easy teen years cannot come into adulthood unaffected and unscathed by this broken world. We all have chips, cracks, and dusty corners in the hidden depths of our souls. God may not strike us blind to get our attention and change our lives; hopefully He doesn't have to! But His power is *real*—and it is *still* transformative. Someone with low self esteem can be lovingly restored to knowing his or her worth because of Christ; a hot-tempered friend can be brought to gentleness and self control under God's tender hand; your perpetual worry can melt away because of Christ's peace that passes all understanding. God is still working in His people, and when we willingly surrender to His transformative power, He will display His glory to the lost we encounter. *He wants to*. The question, then, is not will *God* but will *we*? Will we cooperate? Will we choose to look for His work in our lives, and will we acknowledge it faithfully and with thanksgiving?

Consider: What is the hardest thing for you to believe about your faith? What is it that encourages you most as you consider the reality of Christ's life, death, and resurrection? How does this fortify your belief? How does this build your trust in everything else God says?

Pray: Thank God that He is sensitive to your need for reassurance. Ask Him for that if you need it now. Pray that He will build your faith and trust in Him and His Word—all of it.

Day 2

Risen Indeed

“But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.”

1 Corinthians 15:20

Paul spent verses 3-11 laying the groundwork for what we will study today and even throughout the rest of this week. In order to believe everything that Paul writes next, we need—and the Corinthian church needed—to be fully confident that our belief in Christ is based on rock-solid truth. With the confidence that comes from knowing that our faith is rational; that our Savior lived, died, and rose again, we have the assurance and the confidence to believe all that Paul teaches in the rest of this chapter. I say this because the Corinthian church faced a similar challenge to what we face daily.

Please read 1 Corinthians 15:12-20.

The Corinthian church was experiencing one of the same pressures that we face today: mockery from the unbelieving world. Among the educated in ancient Greco-Roman society, “the concept of a physical, embodied existence after death was known mainly from popular fables and was thought laughable....”¹ This spilled over into the church, too, as some were denying that God would someday raise the bodies of believers as He did with Christ.

Does this sound familiar to you? It does to me. In our culture, it’s hard to go through a day without encountering some mockery of Christ, God, or those who hold strongly to the Christian faith. I can’t count how many times I feel a mix of grief and righteous anger because I hear the name of God insulted, Jesus mocked, and Christians ridiculed. This attitude from the world presses in on us sometimes; it can threaten our boldness and steal our security as we shrink back and cling quietly to the faith that has been entrusted to us. I’m sad to admit that I’ve been there; I have shrunken back in fear and insecurity and wondered how to share Christ with those who consider my faith a sign of weakness, naiveté, or worse, stupidity. I have feared what others think of me because I know and love what they can’t see. I have doubted aspects of my own faith and beliefs, wondering if maybe I had understood some of it wrongly; maybe God didn’t mean some things so literally.

- What about you? What intimidates your witness? Challenges your belief? Where do you find yourself wanting to compromise the solid doctrine entrusted to you?

I am sad that our brothers and sisters in ancient Corinth faced the same challenges, but I am so thankful that we're not alone. I am thankful that God inspired Paul to write this down, admonishing the Corinthian church for compromising and denying the truth that they once believed. Paul swiftly corrected their error and reminded them that their faith hinged on believing in the resurrection—Christ's and theirs. Why?

If we deny that God will raise Christ's followers, we deny that He raised Christ, and we're lying about God. That's a serious claim. Paul says that if we deny the resurrection of the dead," we're denying Christ's resurrection, too. If we deny Christ's resurrection, then we've actually been lying about God.

Similarly, if we believe the truth of the Gospel and recognize that God raised Christ from the dead but refuse to believe that He'll do the same for Christ's followers; if we believe that God fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies but won't believe what He says He will yet accomplish; then we deny God's faithfulness and accuse Him of not fulfilling His promises. What God accomplished through Christ is what He promises to do for all of His people: to give us eternal life with Him. The Corinthian church—and we—need to believe that as much as we believe that God raised Christ.

Without the resurrection, our faith is useless. The entire hope of the Gospel is eternal life for anyone who believes that Christ died for our sins and accepts His sacrifice on our behalf. If we let go of essential doctrine like the resurrection and eternal life; if we let it be watered down to fit better with the world's view; then we're giving up the power and hope of the Gospel.

Furthermore, if our only hope is Christ on this earth, Paul says that makes us pitiable!

Please read 2 Tim. 3:10-13.

Anyone who serves Christ will endure suffering. What a sad existence we have if we have no hope of being raised with Him but only the assurance of suffering. Why would anyone risk spread the Gospel? Why would Paul have risked his life? Why do missionaries risk theirs? Why reach out in love to a family member, neighbor, or co-worker? To entice them with suffering? No!

Instead, we need to *wake up*, as Paul says. We need to recognize

that our faith is founded on what God says—not what other people say. God says that He sent His only Son to die in order to save the lost world He loves. God says He raised Christ from the dead and that He will someday raise us, too. God says that we will live forever in His loving presence. So instead of letting the world around us steal that joy from us, we need to fortify our beliefs by understanding who God is and what He says. We need to seek Him with all of our hearts in order to know Him. We need to hold each other accountable to doctrinal truth, seeking God *together*, so that we can stand up under the pressure of those who would mock Him and cause us to shrink back. The eternity of the lost depends on us holding to a pure faith in Christ. We need to know Him and what He says. We need to believe it and know it so we can teach it and pass it down. We need to take it to the world and not let the world steal our joy from us.

We *have* to hold onto the fundamentals of our faith, no matter how the world hates and mocks them. Why?

Please read 1 Timothy 3:14-16 and 6:20-21.

We, as Christ's church, are the foundation of truth in this world. We have a heavy responsibility to proclaim and hold fast to the truth of Christ so that that truth continues to reach and save the lost until the day of Christ's return. Though we can't answer every question or explain every mystery, God has entrusted His people with the responsibility of displaying His glory and proclaiming His Son for the salvation of the world. We do not take this charge lightly; we uphold and stick to truth because to depart from it is to depart from Christ.

- What does Jesus say will happen if we deny Him before others in Matthew 10:32-33?

Some in the Corinthian church were dying the truth of the future resurrection of God's people. They watered down their faith, possibly because they felt like the world around them considered them less intelligent because of it. But to deny what Christ says is to deny Christ Himself. Yes, we will face opposition; we may face ridicule; we will suffer somehow on His behalf. But to share in His sufferings is to know Christ (Eph. 3:10), and the very truth for which we suffer also promises our reward. Our reward is not tied to this earth but is set for us in resurrection and life with Christ.

Consider: How hard is it for you to believe *everything* God says? How does society influence your belief in God's promises? There's not one of us who doesn't struggle with this to some degree. Perhaps this is why faith is so pleasing to God. When you believe Him, God counts it to you as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). He knows the challenges of this world; Christ Himself faced all of them. Rest assured that God loves you and will strengthen you as you stand for Him. He will increase your faith if you ask Him to.

Pray: Thank God that He has reward in store for you! Ask Him to give you more faith to confidently believe all that He says—and that you can't see. Ask Him to help you rely on the steadfastness of His love and promises.

Day 3

The First

“But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.”

1 Corinthians 15:23

We’re going to cover a lot of ground in a little time between today and tomorrow. The topic of our study over the next two days deserves much more attention and depth than I can give to it. We’re essentially touching on the subject of the fullness of Christ, and I’m feeling unworthy to even approach it. No matter how much we learn today, we’re only grazing the surface. God is infinitely more than we can ever fathom; Jesus, though He came to earth as a man, is also fully God. No matter how tender, loving, familiar, and approachable He is, He is still *I Am*. So let’s approach this humbly and ask God to speak what He wants us to hear.

Please read 1 Corinthians 15:20-29.

- According to verses 20 and 23, Christ is the “firstfruits” or “first of a great harvest” of what?
- Write out the order of events as they are described in verses 23-24.

Paul describes Christ as the “first of a great harvest of all who have died.” Jesus’ bodily resurrection was the preview of what we all will experience when we belong to Him. This is the great hope of salvation through Christ—that death has lost its power, its destruction, its hold on life. Our hope is Christ and that we will be resurrected for eternity as He was resurrected and lives forever at the right hand of His Father.

Let’s take a moment to consider that the sadness and permanence of death really are defeated. This is why Paul breaks out into the saying, “O death where is your victory?” in verses 54-55. What a comfort to those who have lost loved ones. We often take comfort—and rightly so—in the fact that we’ll see them again in heaven; but do we consider often that we’ll see them *raised to life*? Through Christ, all things will be restored and made right.

Death could not hold Jesus. He was raised to life again, recognizable and scarred—but in everlasting, incorruptible, never-decaying splendor. So will we be, my friends. This is the promise of eternal life. It's not a vague promise of an intangible spiritual existence. It is *life*. Our bodies will be raised; we will be as beautifully varied for eternity as we are now but better.

I love that Paul explains the order according to which the resurrection from the dead will occur. Anytime we get detail like this in the Bible, we ought to pay it careful attention. Jesus was the first; by His death and resurrection, all of humanity is given eternal life (those who accept eternal life by believing in Him as Savior). Next, when Christ returns, all those who belong to Him and have died will be physically and literally raised from the dead. After that, Christ will reign and defeat every enemy that raises itself up in opposition to Him. He is the first raised to life and the final Victor.

- What is the last enemy that Christ will defeat?

Once and for all, Christ will defeat death and establish everlasting life. He will complete what He set out to do: to restore all things to His Father. Jesus will establish God's kingdom as God intended it and will restore God's treasure to Him.

Please read Isaiah 62:1-5.

- What will God's people be in God's hand (v. 3)?
- What will God's people be called (v. 4)?
- What is the metaphor in verse 5?

I can't get over the honor God gives us—the undeserved, overflowing, gushing honor. We who so often turn astray are the objects of His unrelenting affection. We are the reason God released His only Son to humility, shame, and death. We are the reason He raised Him to life again. Christ, the One who defeated sin, will return to raise His people to eternal life, to reign, and to subject everything to Himself—death last of all.

At that moment, earth and everything in it will be restored to the life God intended for it. At that moment, we will be forever alive in God's presence, living in His holiness as a beautiful bride who causes her husband to rejoice over her. Jesus, as the First, will cause everything to return to the beautiful splendor God gave it at the beginning.

Please read Isaiah 62:6-12 and Revelation 22:12-20.

- What is the job of the watchmen in Isaiah 12:6-7?
- Why did Christ send His angel to testify to John (Rev. 22:16)?
- What do the Spirit, Christ's Bride, and the one who hears say in Revelation 22:17?

Christ revealed all that He did to John in the book of Revelation because He wanted His church to know what to expect. Furthermore, He wants us to watch and to pray for His return. Similarly, in Isaiah, we see the watchmen praying for God to fulfill His promise. They "take no rest," and "give the LORD no rest until he completes his work." Do you hear that longing in these verses? This longing is not just directed from God's people to God; God also longs to bring His promise to completion. He wants His people to pray and petition Him to return and restore all things—to deliver according to His promise. He wants His people awake, watching, and praying in accordance with His Spirit. He longs for us as we long for Him.

- According to Revelation 22:12, what will Christ bring with Him?
- What is Christ's recompense in Isaiah 62:11-12?

The Lamb will return and bring reward with Him for those who have endured and persevered in His Name. But notice what Christ's own recompense is in Isaiah 62:11-12: it is His own holy people. We are Jesus' reward, and we will come with Him to reign as He puts all things under His feet in

subjection to His own authority and restores the world to God's intended and desired state. Jesus rewards His own, and His own are His reward. Oh my, the honor to be called the reward of the King of kings. Indeed, the Spirit and the Bride say "Come, Lord Jesus."

Consider: We marvel at the power of Christ's resurrection—and rightly so. But what is even more amazing is that that is just the beginning. When Jesus returns, He will finish what He started and raise all of His own to life again. He will bring final restoration, righteousness, and rule to this world and to the people for whom He longs. Our hope is not in this world or in those within it. Our hope is in Christ Jesus alone, for He is First—and He was raised to eternal life to give us hope for what we have *in* Him.

Pray: *Maranatha, Lord Jesus. Come quickly.*

Day 4

The Last

"The Scriptures tell us, 'The first man, Adam, became a living person.' But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit. What comes first is the natural body, then the spiritual body comes later."

1 Corinthians 15:45-46

- Fill in the blanks for Revelation 22:13:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the _____, the Beginning and the _____."

Certainly Christ is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End as it applies to all time and purpose. Yesterday we studied how He is the "first of a great harvest of all who have died." Jesus was the first One raised to life, and all those who belong to Him will one day rise triumphantly over death as He did. Today we'll see a little of how Christ is also the Last.

Please read 1 Corinthians 15:35-49.

- What is the question that Paul addresses in these verses?
- Why do you think Paul thought it was important to discuss the reality of the resurrected body? Why is it important for us now?

Christ is the first of all who will someday rise to eternal life. But what does it mean that He is also the Last?

Christ is the last Adam. There are two types of birth a person can experience. The first is natural birth we all experience as it was set forth in Genesis. All humanity is physically descended from Adam, and when he sinned, he passed that on, too. So to be born in the natural state is to be born of the flesh and to be inherently sinful.

The second birth is as described in John 3:3-8. Please read it.

Most of us are familiar with the account of Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus. Christ explains spiritual rebirth, experienced only by those who accept God's gift of salvation through Him. In this, a person is born of the Spirit and is no longer bound to the rule of the flesh. He or she can therefore inherit spiritual things. Paul says as much at the end of 1 Corinthians when he says that no one can inherit the Kingdom of God with a natural body.

Spiritual rebirth gives us a new ancestor from whom all in the family of God are descended: Christ. Just as Adam represented all of sinful humanity who descended from him, so Christ represents all of those who accept His salvation and are reborn into the family of God. He is the last Ancestor—the last Adam—from whom all in the human race may be reborn. From Him can descend a new people—those born of the Spirit of God who stand righteous before God because of the blood of Christ.

Christ has the final say. When Jesus returns, He will triumph over the last enemy—death that was brought by sin. We studied this yesterday as it pertains to the finality and closure He will bring to all of God's creation by restoring it to its intended condition. God subjected everything to Christ's authority (except, as Paul says, the Father Himself) so that Christ can restore the order that God wants and bring glory to the Father, raising Him above all else. Christ is God's Final Word.

Now let's briefly consider why Paul thought it so important that the Corinthian church would understand the bodily resurrection of believers. I really had to pause to think about this because Paul gives it quite a bit of sharp-witted attention! I think we can confidently say that at least part of the reason is because, as those who will experience resurrection like Christ did, we need to know and be confident in that for which we hope. God never keeps His children completely in the dark; He wants us to know His plans and be confident in them. We are ambassadors of the hope of salvation to the world—and we can't share it if we don't understand it!

Furthermore, I think Paul thought it was important for the Corinthian church to understand that their (and our) bodily resurrection will be a glorious display of the fullness of Christ's power over death. If our natural bodies were completely forfeited to death, Christ would not have fully defeated death. But we will be raised with Christ, and we will be made *like* Christ (Rom. 8:29, 1 Cor. 15:49). So what will these bodies be like, according to 1 Corinthians 15?

- * **Our bodies will be our own—but better.** Paul almost laughs at the Corinthian church in verse 36 when he raises their question of "What kind of bodies will they have?" Our bodies, he says, will be in like kind to what they are now. In death, the body is a "bare seed," that will give way to the glory of the full plant when God raises it from the dead. It won't be an entirely new species but will follow according to the seed that died.
- * **Our bodies will retain differences and variety.** As Paul lists all of the different types of bodies that belong to other species, we can remain confident that our bodies will retain their human "standard," so to speak. But even more exciting is that they will remain unique and identifiable. When Jesus appeared after His resurrection, He was recognizable—and He even retained the scars on His hands, feet, and side. Such gives us confidence that we will still be distinct displays of our Creator's creativity.
- * **Our bodies will be glorious.** Paul uses the word "glory" six times in verses 40-41. Our bodies will be raised with a glory that is unique to the heavenly body. I think the lack of detail about that glory is exciting; our imaginations can't do God's glory justice anyway! But I think we can confidently know that whatever He glorifies will be breathtakingly beautiful.
- * **Our bodies will not decay.** Part of the glory of the resurrected body is that it will never again decay. This doesn't just pertain to death but to all breakdown and deterioration. The older we get, the more thankful we will be for this promise!

Consider Christ as the First and the Last. He is the absolute fullness of God; there is nothing lacking in Him; and there is nothing that can stand against Him. Consider also that He wants you to be encouraged about your inheritance in Him—eternal life in a heavenly body.

Pray: Thank God that He cares to leave you details to fuel your hope and encouragement. Thank Him that He has such wonderful plans for you, His beloved child.

Day 5

Caught Up

“But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed!”

1 Corinthians 15:51

Yesterday, I asked why understanding the resurrection of believers is important for us. We answered that question with several reasons, mostly stemming from the fact that we should understand the hope we have in Christ. Today, we’re starting our study with another answer to that same question.

Please read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.

- Why is it important that our bodies be changed and resurrected to *life*?
- This is so necessary that even those who haven’t yet died will be (choose one):

justified

forgiven

changed

When Christ returns, He will put an end to death, decay, and all corruption. As those who will inherit the eternal kingdom and rule by His side, we need to be brought into the same glorified state as our King and His Kingdom. This is one of the great mysteries of the Bible, and sparks no lack of conversation and debate. I’m talking about the differing points of view concerning the rapture of the church, the tribulation, premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. Now that we’ve identified the elephant in the room, I’ll simply say that we’re not going to enter into any debate here. I don’t think it’s an unworthy conversation, but this is not the place for it; nor am I the one to lead that conversation. For us today, we’re going to concentrate on the promise of being “changed” as Paul excitedly shares that “wonderful secret” with his readers. To better understand that change, let’s also read some of 1 Thessalonians.

Please read 1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11..

- What will be the signal, so to speak, that Christ has come to raise His people to eternal life and transform the bodies of those still alive?
- How quickly will it happen?
- Fill in the blanks for 5:2, 4

“For you know quite well that the day of the Lord’s return will come _____, like a _____ in the night.”

“_____ aren’t in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you _____ when the day of the Lord comes like a thief.”

- What are we, as Christ’s people, to do then (vv. 6, 8, 11)?

Those who are alive at the time of Christ’s return will indeed be changed—and so quickly that it’s virtually imperceptible. They—or *we*, because we don’t know God’s chosen day—will hear the shout of an archangel and the blast of the last trumpet, announcing the return of Heaven’s King. The dead will rise from their graves, and those who are alive will be changed in an instant; all will be caught up into the clouds to meet Jesus. The Greek word for “caught up” here is *harpazō*, and it indicates a forceful “snatching.” Christ will come to decisively claim His own. We will never again be separated from Him but will be with our Lord forever. That’s something to look forward to! But as Paul found it necessary to encourage the Thessalonians with this truth, many of us could also use some encouragement.

I love what Paul says next in 1 Thessalonians 5. While that day will come as an unwelcome surprise to those who do not believe, it will not be such to those who are in Christ. Although we don’t know the day or the hour, our security and our safety are in Christ; His return is occasion for joy and anticipation because His return means our salvation and eternal life. Its imminence is our encouragement, not our fear.

So, Paul says, as children who walk in the light of Christ and not according to the darkness of this world, we ought to be living as children of light. We must be “alert and clearheaded,” living under the protection of our faith and love in Christ. So also we have to protect our minds with the confidence of our salvation. As we see this world continue on in darkness, our hope is in the salvation that Jesus brings. It is not

here; it's not in our own knowledge or understanding of our culture and world events. It's in Christ and His salvation. Without *that* knowledge to protect our minds, I don't think anyone who has the Spirit of God and lives in the wickedness of the last days could persevere to the end. So we take confidence in our salvation and in God's loving, sparing, saving hand of grace toward us. He has not designated that we fall under His judgment but that we rather are saved and raised in glorious splendor like His Son.

In closing this week, let's understand that our responsibility as we look forward to being united with Christ is to encourage each other; remind each other of what is to come. Our future is eternal life, an imperishable body, and an everlasting Kingdom with the King of kings.

Consider: We've studied a lot concerning God's eternal promises to us. How do you feel about these? How should—and how does—the surety of God's plan affect your day-to-day?

Pray: Thank God for His promises and His faithfulness that ensures their fulfillment. Ask Him to awaken you completely to His voice, enabling you to live "alert and clearheaded" as you look forward to His Son's return.

By Jennifer Skinner