

## **The Ministry, Message and Majesty of Christian Comfort.**

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

**The text is the fullest and most detailed description of Christ's Advent in this epistle.** Chapter one touches on it briefly, highlighting the fact that the hope of His coming is born in the believer's heart the moment he is saved. The last verse of chapter two speaks of the consequence of Christ's coming for the fellowship of the saints. It preaches the doctrine of re-union.

**The end of chapter three shows us that there is a consequence now for the children of God of what is yet to happen.** Growth in grace is a preparation for Jesus' return. It is also encouraged by that hope. Compare ch.3:12&13 with the opening words of 1 John 3: "And

every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure.”

### **Illustration:**

Donald Grey Barnhouse tells how in 1917, when the United States entered into the Great War, there was a young couple in the West who had made their plans to be married. They had a little house which they had been furnishing for weeks, and all their resources had gone into the preparation of that home. Their plan had been to be married and to move into this new little home, but the war was declared, and the young man, who was a reserve officer, was immediately called to the troops. His company was ordered to go to the Mexican frontier to train before coming to France.

The young lady said to him the day before he was due to go on: "It is not quite the date for our wedding, but you might be ordered overseas immediately; you might be killed, and thus I might never see you again. I would a thousand times rather go through life bearing your name than go through life always explaining that the man I loved had been killed in the war. So let us go through with it and be married right now." So they were quietly married, and for their honeymoon he went with the troops and she went to the little house.

She was very lonely. Day after day he wrote to her, and the letters began to accumulate. He sent her gifts. Months passed, and there came an afternoon when she felt especially lonely. She took the box with all her husband's letters, she

settled down to enjoy herself with his letters and with thoughts of him. But, as she began reading the letters and thinking of him, suddenly there was a step on the porch, the door opened, and he was there. He had sent a telegram and it had been delayed in delivery, as so frequently happened in those war days.

When she saw him and the realization came to her that he was there, she jumped to her feet; the letters in her lap were scattered all over the place, some of them falling into the fire; but she was in his arms, and that mattered more to her than all the letters and all the gifts he ever could have sent her. He had returned. She had him, and having him, had all.

**Application:** When we are occupied with Jesus, we are ready for Him.

**Let us come now to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.** The apostle intended the brief discourse to be a blessing to the whole fellowship at Thessalonica, for the believers there had burdens and griefs in common. So we read in the last verse – “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

### **The Ministry of Comfort.**

**We miss so much if we only take the Word of God personally.** Of course it is important that the child of God encourages himself in the Lord. But your comfort is not for you only. It must be shared. Others are in need of it. Will you keep it to yourself?

**Now the Thessalonians had suffered bereavement.** Paul speaks in V.13 of those who were “asleep in Christ” and the “dead in

Christ" in V.16. The two phrases are synonymous. Death is an enemy. It is an enemy to mankind in general. It is an enemy to Christians, and to churches. It has been an enemy to us. The apostle does not say how the Thessalonians had been bereaved. It may have been as a result of persecution. Or it may have been just as a matter of course that the Thessalonians had been bereaved.

**Spirituality does not harden men but makes them sensitive to loss.** Paul does not say, "Ye sorrow not," but "ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope." They had hope. But their hope did not make their sorrow any less real. Never forget the Lord Jesus, who though He was the Resurrection and the Life, still wept at the grave of His friend. Don't put on airs and graces.

Don't pretend you do not feel when you really do. We all need comfort. And we all need to comfort one another.

### **The Message of Comfort.**

“Comfort one another with these words.”

The inspired description of death is comforting. “Sleep” is a common term for death used by the Scripture writers. We find it in the Old Testament as well as in the New. For example, Daniel 12:2 speaks of an awakening for those who “sleep in the dust of the earth.” The figure is appropriate. In sleep our members are motionless. We rest on our beds from toil and pain, and awake. It is the same in death. It has been put this way – “When the toil of life's long day is ended, the great and good Father draws the dark curtain

of night and hushes His weary children to rest."

**"Sleep" suggests refreshment as well as rest.** When one wakes, the body's powers are renewed and he is ready for work. We go to rest with the expectation of waking well and strong. So the bodies of the saints to the earth in sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection.

**It is of particular comfort to know that the word "sleep" is limited to the body.** It is not designed to represent death as a state of unconsciousness. This false notion is refuted by the story of the rich man and Lazarus, by the promise of Christ to the dying thief, and by Paul's confidence in and desire for the "gain" of dying and being with Christ.



**So the souls of those who die in Christ are in His Presence and their dust is guarded by His wisdom and power.** They cannot be lost. They are gainers by death. They leave this world for a better one, a heavenly one. This sets them apart from the generality of mankind and in so doing accentuates their comfort. How privileged Christians are, who "sorrow not even as others who have no hope!"

**As well as speaking about the believer's rest, the words of comfort speak about the believer's resurrection.** What happens at resurrection is an instantaneous re-union of the glorified soul with a glorified body. "Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" refers to the departed souls of Christians. It cannot refer to the body. When

Jesus returns He is not bringing the bodies of the departed with Him - they are asleep in the dust. But not any longer when He appears, because V.16 says that they shall "rise." Resurrection involves the soul returning to the body. It is absent one moment, present the next. And this happens, as the Bible says "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump" (1 Corinthians 15:52).

**Even those who haven't passed the veil of death shall undergo the same physical change as those who did.** The apostle writes, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed...This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:51, 53). In a word, the souls of all the children of God will be made perfect in holiness and

they will all have a body “fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

### **The Majesty of Comfort.**

**Christian comfort has good ground and great glory.** The ground of hope is this – “Jesus died and rose again” (V.14). He took up the body prepared for Him, went forth bearing His cross, and when He had suffered all gave up the ghost, having cried, “It is finished.”

**Three days later, by His own volition and in keeping with His promise He rose again.** Resurrection does not mean a permanence of the influence of Jesus or a mere spiritual existence of Jesus beyond the grave. But according to His word He re-built the temple of His body and three days after dying

left His grave-clothes and the tomb behind.

*Death, awful sound! the fruit  
of sin,  
And terror of the human race;  
Who, except Jesus smiles  
within,  
Can look the monster in the  
face?*

*Jesus, the mighty Saviour,  
lives,  
And He has conquered death  
and hell;  
This truth substantial comfort  
gives,  
And dying saints can sing, 'Tis  
well!'*

**As for the glory of our hope, this is Christ Himself:**

He is coming **visibly**. Hence the personal pronoun in V.16.

He is coming **audibly**. He will "descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God" (V.16).

The descent, the shout and the trumpet blast also tell us that He is coming in **glory**. See Exodus 19:16, 17; Joshua 6:5; Judges 7:21, 22; 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 10.

*"How mean and contemptible soever our Lord Jesus Christ might appear heretofore on earth, yet there is a day coming when He shall make a glorious figure in the sight of men and angels. How little soever the saints be esteemed in our day, and look poor and despicable in an ungodly world, yet there is an hour approaching when they shall be glorious beyond all imagination, and Christ Himself shall be glorified in them," (Isaac Watts).*

He is coming **purposefully** – i.e. to take us to be with Him. The living shall not share the blessings of the advent sooner than the dead in Christ. V.15-17: “We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep...the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

*“Oh, how sweet is that word ‘ever’!  
Ever to be happy, and ever-happy;  
to enjoy Christ fully, immediately,  
and everlastingly! Certainly, as the  
word ‘ever’ is the hell of hell, so it  
is the heaven of heaven. Frailty is a  
flaw in the best diamond of nature,  
and abateth its price; but eternity is  
one of the most precious jewels in  
the crown of glory, which increaseth*

*its value exceedingly.'* (G. Swinnock,  
M.A.)