

# Further up, Further in

## Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT  
MOUNTAIN  
Presbyterian Church

### “THE RETURN OF THE KING”

For individual study or group discussion

From our studies in 1 Thessalonians, we learn that Paul’s letter aims to instruct believers on how to live as they await Christ’s coming. Because the church at Thessalonica experienced severe persecution (2:14–15), they begin to wonder whether those who have died will miss out on this future hope. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, Paul comforts and encourages them that their friends and loved ones will share fully in the great event they all anticipate—the return of the King.

**Because Christ is risen and returning, believers grieve with hope (vv. 13–14).**

Unlike the pagans around them, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians not to grieve death without hope. While Gentile beliefs about the afterlife varied, they generally rejected bodily resurrection and offered no expectation of reunion after death. If this life is all there is, then death brings deep sorrow. But for followers of Jesus, Paul says, this shouldn’t be the case. Although grief is natural (Jesus himself wept. See John 11:35.), it does not have the final word.

- Three times Paul describes death as sleep (vv. 13, 14, 15). John Stott explains Paul’s use of the metaphor, “*As sleep is followed by an awakening, so death will be followed by resurrection.*”<sup>1</sup> Read Luke 8:51–55 and John 11:11–15. Discuss how Jesus draws attention to the analogy of death and sleep.
- The Westminster Shorter Catechism 19 states that “*All mankind by their fall lost communion with God.*”<sup>2</sup> The great Christian hope, as described by Paul in verse 14, is that our removal from God’s presence will be rectified. According to Paul, what guarantees this restored communion?

**Because Christ is risen and returning, believers rest secure in our future together (vv. 15–17).**

The phrase “*will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*” is often misunderstood to mean that Christians will be taken to heaven with Christ. However, Paul is drawing on the imagery of a king returning from victory. As R.C. Sproul explains, “*He [Christ] will not be taking us out of the world to stay. He will be lifting us up to participate with him in his triumphal return.*” For context, Sproul points to Roman tradition: When legions returned from long campaigns, they stopped outside the city and sent word ahead. The people would prepare a welcome, then, at the sound of a trumpet, go out to meet the army and join in the victory procession back into the city. “*This is exactly the language that Paul used,*” Sproul says. Believers—both dead and alive—are “*caught up*” not to remain in the air, but “*to join His return in triumph, to participate in His exaltation.*”<sup>3</sup>

- Read Mark 13:26–27 and Matthew 24:30–31. On what basis does Paul place his confidence of Christ’s return?
- Read Revelation 21:1–5. What does this passage teach us about God’s dwelling place with man?

**Because Christ is risen and returning, believers encourage one another as we wait (v. 18).**

Paul doesn’t suggest that believers will leave this world behind. Instead, other passages like Romans 8:21 and Revelation 21:1–4 point to a future where God restores creation and invites his people to dwell with him on a renewed earth. As Paul reassures the Thessalonians, “*Therefore encourage one another with these words,*” he points them to the joy and future hope of a restored creation and communion with God.

- Read Romans 8:21 and Isaiah 65:17–25. How does Paul’s encouragement connect to the broader biblical hope of a renewed cosmos?

DATE: September 28, 2025

SPEAKER: Wil/Chad

SERIES: 1 Thessalonians

PASSAGE: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

## Family Dinner Table

### Grieving with Hope

John Donne, a Christian poet from the 17th century, penned the sonnet, “*Death, be not proud.*” In his poem, he mocks death, calling it nothing more than a short sleep before waking to eternal life. Donne points out that death is not the final victor; instead, it is the doorway into the presence of Christ. Like Donne, Paul reminds us that death has no lasting sting. For believers, grief is real—but it is not hopeless. We mourn the absence of those we love, yet we cling to the promise that Christ will raise them, and us, to everlasting life. That is why we can say with Donne, “*Death, thou shalt die.*”

*Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;  
For those whom thou think’st thou dost overthrow  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and soul’s delivery.  
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,  
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well  
And better than thy stroke; why swell’st thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally  
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.*

- When people wonder about life after death, what questions come up most often? How does 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 help us answer them?
- How can our hope in Christ’s return bring comfort both to us and to those around us who mourn?

### PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

Mercy Presbyterian Church,  
supported church plant

### PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Ryan and Caitlin Potter, supported  
international partners

<sup>1</sup>Stott, John. *The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*. 1991, Downers Grove, IL. Inter-Varsity Press. 96–97

<sup>2</sup>The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. 2207, Lawrenceville, GA. Committee on Christian Education of the OPC.

<sup>3</sup>Sproul, R.C. *What is the Rapture?* July 16, 2012. <https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/what-is-the-rapture>