

The Quick and the Dead

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[0 : 0 0] well for those of you who are visiting with us today we have lent our organ to tell us place for the great cup and i just want you to know how talented our musicians are to get the jungle drums going out of the organ when the organ's not here so very talented indeed i wonder if you would turn up to 1 thessalonians 4 987 at the back of your bible and if you would like to on the front of the bulletin there's a slightly revised translation which is is not as good as the esv it's just a little more literal and i've circled some of the words if you'd find that helpful now you can't always tell a christian from an average canadian just by looking at them christians get up in the morning like the average canadian and i've been looking at the statistics this week the average canadian is satisfied with life has been to a doctor in the last year and is but is dissatisfied with their body but won't go under the knife to have any corrective surgery that's the average canadian average canadian spends 43 hours a month online goes online something like 95 times a month and watches an average of 28.8 hours of television per week shame and the average this is my favorite the average canadian forgets the words to the national anthem but is always proud to stand when it's played so you can't always tell a christian from an average canadian uh when an anthem is played or in the gray cup but there is one area where christians are unique and that is our view of death and the coming of jesus christ as dan said today we begin the season of advent where we remember the first coming so that we prepare for the second coming and while the average canadian does the first coming does christmas what we believe about the second coming makes a huge difference now paul tells us in this little tiny passage that it makes a seismic difference in our emotions and our affections and how we deal with one another and so over the next four weeks we're going to be looking at one and two thessalonians which has some of the fullest teaching in the new testament on the what and the who and the where of that great day of jesus second coming the end of the world because at the heart of the christian hope is the personal public physical return of the person of jesus christ where he will bring history to an end he will raise the dead he will judge the world he will take us to be with him in glory and remake a new heavens and a new earth and there's one word in the new testament one great big word that covers all these things and it is the greek word parousia parousia all together now parousia very good last week we had a hebrew word this week it's a greek word it's translated in english coming but that's a little weak i think when i was a kid her majesty queen elizabeth came and made a visit to australia and in the weeks afterwards sydney was absolutely unrecognizable to me everything had been painted buildings had been torn down people had been moved that's what you do when the queen visits the emphasis of parousia is not just a visit the word actually means presence permanent

personal active physical glorious presence and when this word parousia the second coming is not a temporary thing but Jesus will be revealed for every creature to see it'll be the beginning of a new world and Jesus Christ will be present eternally this is what the Bible teaches we were made to dwell with God that's what Eden was about we were made to be in His presence and we chose to run away to go out of His presence and all through the Bible in a way it's the story of how God is bringing us back into His presence so in the book of Exodus He creates a tabernacle and a sacrificial system where He can dwell with them but only temporarily because His people are not yet raised and transformed and when we come to the end of the Old Testament there is a promise from the prophet Zechariah rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion shout aloud O daughter of Jerusalem behold your king is coming to you righteous having salvation humble mounted on a donkey on a coal on the fold of a donkey and he shall speak peace to the nations he brings shalom in his hands and you know the next line his rule shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth we know that at the first coming that first Christmas the word was made flesh and Jesus Christ came among us in weakness and in humility and throughout His ministry again and again and again more than any other topic Jesus speaks about His parousia His great coming His eternal coming in glory and strength and the rest of the New Testament calls Him the coming one isn't it lovely to hear the rain on the roof here yes are there any leaks well now the amazing thing about one Thessalonians as we turn to it is how pivotal this is in the original basic Christian belief one Thessalonians is one of two letters in the New Testament that was the earliest written and it's a very happy pastoral letter do you remember Paul visited Thessalonica on his second missionary journey and many many in the city became Christian including many of the prominent people of the city were converted but he was only there under a month something like three and a half weeks and what's interesting about Thessalonians is that every chapter finishes with a reference to the coming of Jesus look at chapter one if you have your Bible open 110 describing their initial response to the Gospel he says that you turn to God from idols verse 9 to serve the living and true God and to wait for His son from heaven whom He raised from the dead Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come chapter 2 verse 19 what is our hope our joy or crown or boasting before the Lord at His parousia His coming is it not you chapter 3 19 there is no chapter 3 19 let's go how was a trick let's try 13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless and holiness before our God and Father at the parousia the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints and if you look at chapter 4 from verse 13 all the way down to chapter 5 verse 11 it's all about the parousia and then chapter 5 23 may God sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit soul and body be kept blameless at the parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ three and a half weeks Paul had been there and yet this is absolutely key and pivotal to

their belief so that the coming of jesus christ the future of this world heaven and hell is not an adoption an optional extra add-on to the christian gospel it is clearly part of the original preaching of paul it's not something the early christians were embarrassed about they rejoiced in it and luxuriated in it and as we come to this little section in chapter 4 paul is tenderly dealing with a very real issue look back at verse 13 of chapter 4 and here we come to the passage but we do not want you to be uninformed brothers and sisters about those who are asleep that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope now we're not sure exactly what the concern was in the thessalonians but there was clearly an anxiety amongst these newish christians about their christian friends who had died since coming to faith and i think their concern was that they would somehow miss out on something their brothers and sisters who had died they believed in the resurrection of the dead and the future life so they believed they would be raised and in heaven and in glory with them i think their anxiety was that if they had died before the great day of christ's parousia coming they would somehow miss out on that happy day of jesus coming and the thessalonians are grieving the death of close friends and family members and the apostle applies the parousia to this most complex and common emotion of each of us he shows us the difference that parousia will make to our grieving notice he says he doesn't say he doesn't say christians don't grieve he doesn't say your grief as christians shouldn't be as deep as others non-christian grief he doesn't say your grief should be less he doesn't say it should be shorter he says the quality of our grieving will be different from those who don't have jesus we don't grieve like those without hope now i want to say i want to just pause for a moment and say i think christians as christians we ought to grieve i know that sounds basic but we ought to grieve this this is a card that i have on my desk in my pen box at the top of my pen box at home all the time one of the reasons i went missing for a year in 2009 was i was very busy serving god but i was largely unaware i think of the grief grief of what was happening grief in me over what had happened in the diocese and in the anglican church of canada and i am an australian evangelical male and you're not supposed to grieve and i have had to learn a whole new skill and so when something of loss takes place for me this card i get it out and go through it again it's very helpful i want to say to you if you're a follower of jesus christ you should grieve you should get angry you should rage jesus wept at the lay at the grave of lazarus even though he knew he was going to raise him to life again and i think part of jesus weeping was at the agony and the anguish of separation of death and loss and if we don't grieve we accumulate grief and it's

going to break out in some other way this is what i'm told and i've seen it happen it breaks out in anger or in anxiety or you grip onto something or someone very tightly as your security or you become disengaged with others paul is not banning grief for christians but he's saying our grief will have a different quality it will not be hopeless grief you take jesus out of the equation it will be hopeless grief but christian grief will have a different quality and i think that's why christian funerals genuinely christian funerals ought to be radically different and i think they increasingly are there's so much sentimentality and superstitious nonsense around death and dying in today's culture you see it sometimes in the poems that are read at funerals here's one that often comes up do not stand at my grave and weep i am not there i do not sleep i am a thousand winds that blow etc you know the kind of thing i mean and even the work of elizabeth kubler ross despite its brilliant insights into grief is sub-christian it's a kind of a warmed over platonism but a truly christian funeral will be radically different we are not there to celebrate the life it's not a celebration of life of the deceased we don't go we don't do funerals to bring closure we're not interested in closure we're interested in communion and the purpose of a christian funeral is to proclaim the gospel of jesus christ to bear the body of our loved one that's why the body should be there in a time of transition and to expose death and all its lies to the one who has triumphed over death even jesus christ our lord and to sing praises to jesus in the face of death because it's defeated off my hobby horse let's come back to thessalonians i just uh thank you for listening to that i've wanted to say it for a very long time do you see the coming of jesus christ should make a difference not just in our emotions but in our actions as well so paul makes two points here in chapter four how does the perusia make a difference firstly first point of two it's the day of resurrection and paul says the coming of christ will be a day of resurrection for two groups it'll be the day of resurrection for those who have already died christians who've already died look down at verse 16 for the lord himself and i'm reading from the front of the bulletin here the lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command with the voice of an archangel and with the sound of the trumpet of god and the dead in christ will rise first because the apostle is dealing with something way beyond our experience some of his language is symbolic and figurative and we have to beware and avoid this sort of brittle literalism that wants to nail every detail down and have it all right as well as the sophisticated cynicism of some theological skeptics and unbelieving bishops that mock the bible as some kind of primitive star wars things like that the bible is the bible is never interested in philosophical speculation it's intensely practical and paul is dealing with the reality of life and death and while this has some of the fullest teaching on the coming and return of christ there are all sorts of things here the apostle doesn't deal with he doesn't deal with judgment in these passages he doesn't deal with the intermediate state but that last day when the when jesus christ returns when there's nothing secret or hidden like lightning that flashes from one side of the sky to other jesus will come and the first thing is a massive noise and these three

phrases the cry of command the voice of the archangel and the trumpet i think are all symbols of one thing when jesus appears for all to see he's going to say a word and i think the word is get up and he speaks it to those who have died in christ this is what jesus taught in john's gospel he said truly truly i say to you an hour is coming and now is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the son of god and those who hear will live all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out you don't find that amazing those of us who are still alive let's say jesus were to come this afternoon and wouldn't that be a happy thing if he were to come this afternoon we will we will witness the resurrection of those who died in christ we'll see it and that's why i think three times the apostle speaks about those who've died in christ as those who are asleep in christ and i know sleep is used in lots of religions as a euphemism for death but the new thing about christianity is jesus and for everyone who follows jesus death is temporary it's not sleep sleep sleep without end it's not sleep without hope it's sleep followed by waking it's death followed by life rising to life this is the basic understanding of the christian gospel because of the resurrection of jesus from the dead for us as christians sleep is not a euphemism life with jesus doesn't stop at death and those who have died they're not they haven't been obliterated into non-existence they are alive and asleep in christ this is the logic of the resurrection you see paul is trying to spell out the implications in verse 13 he says i don't want you to be uninformed if you look at verse 14 it begins since we believe jesus died and rose again even so god will bring with him those who've fallen asleep the thessalonians believed the creed yes we believe in the resurrection of the body but jesus so paul is not telling them new news he's just applying what they know he's showing them the implications since we believe that jesus died and rose again it must follow that god will bring with him those who have fallen asleep because once we are in christ jesus that connection between us and the person of jesus christ can never be broken even by death and the last line of verse 14 is very important if you look at the bulletin i've translated it a little more accurately there god will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through jesus he is referring to the moment of dying he's referring to those who die as christians who die trusting jesus if i say it this way this this issue of dying through jesus is of absolutely central importance to your future salvation do you belong to jesus when you die these are the only ones jesus will bring with him on that day but i think there's more here those who die through jesus is speaking about a special ministry that jesus has to all who belong to him every single one of us who belongs to jesus we do not die separately from him completely on our own it doesn't matter how you and i are going to die if you are in christ jesus christ is there and his promises that he will usher you and me through death into his presence if you die through him isn't that amazing and as a pastor

[20 : 04] a minister who is with people sometimes when they die i cannot tell you what a privilege it is to see this the whole experience of death it's still agonizing and terrible and painful but the whole experience of death can be through jesus so the parousia when jesus appears means a day of resurrection for those who have died in him that's going to happen first and also it means a day of resurrection the second group for those who remain alive verse 17 then we who are alive who are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds now caught up this is one of those words where people have a field day it's the word rapture and it's the only clear reference in the new testament i can't see any hint here that it's a secret thing the idea is that something very big is happening outside of us and we are seized up to jesus christ when he comes so the first thing that happens is we hear the voice saying get up the second is we see we see our brothers and sisters raised and then we too are caught up into the presence of jesus christ and i think this is paul's way of speaking of referring to our being given resurrection bodies being caught up is the same as being changed being transformed or as paul says in one corinthians we shall not all sleep but we will be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet the trumpet will sound the dead will be raised imperishable and we that's we who are left shall be changed in other words these mortal decaying bodies will be clothed with bodies resurrection bodies immortal glorious and eternal the same kind of body that jesus had in his resurrection the same kind of bodies that we'll see in our friends who've been raised so there's no great advantage or disadvantage to dying before christ comes for those who belong to christ if you've died or if you're alive you're in christ and neither group gets the edge on the other neither group takes precedent neither group misses out both groups are raised by christ and brought to christ after being raised there is no possibility that anyone who belongs to christ can ever be separated from him okay so that's the first big point and the second is much shorter so the parousia is the day of resurrection for two groups and secondly the parousia is a day of reunion thank you to john stott for this heading and actually there are two reunions our first reunion is with the person of jesus christ this is one of the reasons why i wanted to print the passage on the front of the bulletin i put boxes around all the phrases that emphasize relation with jesus just look at it you know verse 14 god will bring with him those who've fallen asleep through jesus down in verse 16 the lord himself the dead in christ we who are left verse 17 caught up together with them to meet the lord in the air we will always be with the lord that day the parousia is a day of massive and wonderful reunion where all that is sad will be made untrue and all that is separate will be brought together because of the person of jesus christ in whom all things hold together you take jesus out of the equation there's no hope whatsoever it seems to me just eat be merry get on with whatever it is you want the bullseye of the christian hope is seeing him meeting with him having everlasting fellowship with jesus christ you sometimes hear people talking

about heaven as though it's a sort of a forever disneyland or disney world where there's a constant entertainment where you and your need me and my needs are met at the center and if jesus makes an appearance it's out on the periphery i don't know about you but i think that's a better picture of hell than heaven god's plan has always been to bring many sons and daughters to glory to make jesus the firstborn among many sons and daughters there is no heaven apart from him if you don't love jesus heaven's going to be misery that's why union with jesus is all important jesus he endured all the poison that death could pour in him death at its worst he swallowed it up and in his resurrection he's shown he's defeated death and when we come into union with him it changes absolutely everything nothing can take that away nothing in this life nothing in death when he comes our fellowship which was by faith is by faith in him now will turn into sight it will mean reunion with christ and also the second reunion it's going to mean reunion with each other verse 17 again we who are alive who are left will be caught up and this is very strong in the greek together with them in the clouds to meet the lord in the air so we will always be with the lord now the air here is another symbol it's not you know a mixture of nitrogen and oxygen the air in the new testament is the place where satan rules and that's where we're going to meet with those who have died before us to demonstrate christ's absolute mastery over everything that opposes him whenever bronnie and i fly back to australia together we have a number of friends and family who insist on coming to meet us at the airport it's a waste of their time uh in lots of ways uh because there's perfectly good public transport in sydney but they will not be deterred it is of no real utility and the only reason they come is for the reunion and every time we clear customs and come through the gates i recognize my friends and family it's a help to have a brother-in-law who's six foot five and it just it gives me this little glow um i can't really explain it um it may it despite spending 16 hours as a guest of air canada i feel different um you could say we fly and hope and what we then do is i go to my sister and brother-in-law's place and we take they usually take the afternoon off work we unpack our bags and we drive to bondi beach yeah and uh where the sand is i'm sorry to tell you this the sand is unbelievably white and the water is unbelievably clear and crystal and green and blue and we swim and we swim and we surf and we feel the sun several years ago i flew out um i think it was either christmas eve or and uh it was a brutally cold icy winter night and there was a full moon over vancouver that i watched from the window of the plane when we got to sydney uh we went to bondi and i swam out beyond the waves and i looked up and there was the same full moon in the day and i thought if only all my friends in vancouver be here and experience it together well on the day of perusia everything that divides and separates including death will not be just removed it's going to be overturned and we will be reunited with those who've died before us and we will know them we will have fellowship with them we're together with them and so we will always be with the lord

i think it's very good news don't you so as best as i can make out from this passage here are the sequence of things that are going to happen on that day first jesus will descend from heaven in honor and majesty and glory for all the world to see announcing the end of all things and calling those who have fallen asleep to resurrection second those who've died in christ will rise before us will be able to see it third we who are alive will be changed will be given our resurrection bodies caught up simultaneously with them into a great reunion and and fourth we will always be with the lord so here are two advent implications or applications for us i want us to apply this to ourselves and i want to apply it to one another just briefly firstly to ourselves the resurrection of jesus to put an end to history and to raise his people is part of our core belief and it means a difference a real difference in our relationship with our grief again not shorter not shallower but we grieve as those who hope because of this hope and for those of you who've lost loved ones who have died in christ i say to you they are with him now and he will bring them god will bring them with him when jesus comes your faith should make a difference to you in this for most of christian history believers have deliberately prepared themselves for their own death practicing what is called as moriendi which is the latin phrase for the art of dying well practical devotional resources a kind of a catechism a dress rehearsal where we face satan's common six common temptations as we experience death and we look to we learn how to look to jesus to carry us through that experience and we bring the resurrection to apply to our grief of course the best preparation for dying for christian death is living a christian life and i say again death will be decisive for our destiny you must die through christ it'll be tragic if the perusia came and you are not prepared i mean if you're outside of jesus now you must move inside of jesus christ if you want to know how to do it do it the same way the thessalonians did in chapter one in verse nine he said you turn to god from idols to serve the living and true god and to wait for his son from heaven you are like dan on the highway you don't go down you turn back and you place yourself and your faith in jesus christ you turn from all your substitutes for him and trust him and wait for him to come apply this to yourself secondly and finally apply it to each other i think it's very nice that the apostle does a little application at the end here in verse 18 he says therefore encourage one another with these words encourage means to come alongside and to give courage to bolster to give strength to build up that other person how do we do that we don't do it by being nice to them we do it with these words that is part of our ministry of love for each other is speaking these words to each other the words of life and they are the words of life because they're the words of jesus they're not human opinion

they come from the heart of god knowing this what i've told you this morning is not a means to an end so that you will be able to face death well although that's part of it it's not meant to terminate on you like every blessing it's meant to go through you to others and i think here is one of the ways we would be very different than our neighbours here in vancouver our risk averse and careful neighbours i'm not sure what you talk about at coffee but it would be a very good idea i reckon to pray that god give you an opportunity to encourage someone else even today with these words i know many of us just make it to church by our fingernails frazzled and burdened and it's so easy to want other people to say a word of encouragement to us and i'm not encouraging you to get all weird and intense and not talk about the grey cup if you talk about the grey cup spend 20 seconds on that and then see if you can find a way to encourage one another so let's pray by your holy spirit father we pray that you would take the seed of this word and planted in our hearts so that our hope our lives might lean forward that we might long and expect the lord jesus christ more and more and we are very conscious of many of those we love who've died are in your hands and we long for that day to be with you and to see you face to face and see them as well we pray this advent season lord that you would give us courage to comfort and enhearten one another with these words we ask in jesus name amen please kneel for prayer please kneel for prayer get you up to the high mountain oh zion oh zion oh zion oh zion herald of good news lift up your voice with strength oh jerusalem herald of good news lift it up fear not say to the city of judah behold your god father we thank you for the glorious things that were spoken this morning through your servant david father as we wait for your return may we wait with hope as you change us from glory to glory may you find us ready you are the king of glory spirit of the living god fall afresh on us lord in your mercy father as we contemplate your word and enter the seasons of advent this expectant waiting we give you praise for you alone are worthy of our praise and thanksgiving we thank you that at death we are alive in christ father thank you for reminders that each year during the season of advent we are reminded we are reminded why jesus came that death could not keep you that in your sacrificial love alone do we find peace we pray that you will continue to speak to our hearts

today father for we are needy people the approaching christmas is a reminder of things that are no more yet we are thankful that you are a constant source of peace even when there is no peace to be found in this world lord in your mercy father we give you thanks for music things we often take for granted and when things go wrong father we are I guess amazed but we thank you lord for terry and david for all the faithful choir members and father be this day also when praises will be sung to you lord in your mercy we your people kneeling down before you ask for your merciful hand upon those who recently lost loved ones and will find it difficult to celebrate christmas instill in us the deep knowledge that we are never alone even as we grieve we pray for the dundas family for comfort as they will find an empty place at their table be with their husband bob children james thrish and janet comfort your children father we pray for those who live with illness in our church family we plead your healing and loving hand upon rowena derek merv mel susan michelle graham carling and paula may they know themselves to be near your heart lord in your mercy father god we pray that you lift the darkness from our city and we pray also lord that the night of the game that it will end in peace give wisdom lord to our police may your light shine in the hearts of men women and children who will be there father teach us how to pray for this world because we do not know rightly how to intercede many of your people live under heavy hand of dictatorship and at times only the words we have lord please help in our weakness you remind us that your plans will not collapse because of our frailties thank you for faithful people that you have kept for yourself a people of praise and father after hearing your word this morning may we rejoice in the fact that one day we will be all together even before breakfast we pray for those father also who can send out to other lands people who are of us we pray for your servant josh in caro we ask you compassionate mercy upon him father in these especially in these difficult times and here at home we pray for susan norman may she experience your strength and love for the work she's engaged in and father we pray as well for grace church in calgary may they know the love you have shown to us as well lord in your mercy father we pray for our youth especially for some of the younger ones who are adrift in their own emotions we pray that the promises we made at their baptism will remain always thank you for the knowledge that your hand is strong to save seven spirited god you whose eyes roe over over all

[40 : 08] this world may our trust be in you alone wonderful glorious lord come quickly they lift up their voice they sing for joy over the majesty of the lord they shout from the west therefore in the east give glory to the lord amen well as we close our service i have several announcements to make the first is that i want to again welcome people who are new to st john's and i've been happily announcing for the past couple of weeks that you can find yellow welcome cards in your pews it's completely wrong people gave me a two weeks to think about it and then told me last week so i want to tell you that yellow welcome cards are on the welcome table in the foyer and that's where you can fill them out so that we can get to know you connect with you and on that welcome table by the way there's a number of other very interesting things there's a regent college newsletter that features a write-up on harry robinson there's the anglican planet newspaper and this month's edition of that has great articles from our own st john's people including one on our transition there's also christmas invitations so little cards you can take to invite people this is a wonderful season the season of advent and christmas to invite people to church so take advantage of those opportunities i also want to mention to you that on the inside cover here it tells us all the christmas service time so you're aware of them but also just below that there's an advent bible reading guide advent is a wonderful time to renew the discipline of reading god's word so we're going to be printing a little lectionary a way that you can read the bible every day we'll do that throughout advent so take a look at that several events happening this week including the funeral for shirley dundas which is tomorrow at 1 p.m. here also there will be a men's breakfast on december 3rd next saturday so please email to to book yours and that's right in here to to book a place there that will take place place at st augustine's catholic church which is right near the parish office and then finally there tonight the advent carol service will take place at 6 30 not 4 30 as it usually does but 6 30 the evening service is hosting us please come it'll be a great celebration of advent so let's stand and we'll sing together our closing hymn year■ chi 365 troop ■

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. And now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you.

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another.