

# Thessalonians 4

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Let us read God's Word in the New Testament in the first epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, chapter 4, reading from verse 13.

Let us turn now to the chapter part of which we read in the first epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, chapter 4, reading from verse 13 to the end of the chapter.

1 Thessalonians 4, verse 13, But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with them through to the end of the chapter.

Continuing our studies in 1 Thessalonians, we come tonight to the section where Paul is here dealing with the second coming of Christ and the prospects that that second coming hold out for Christians, those who are alive when he comes, and those who have died in the Lord.

As we've seen, there is a great emphasis on the doctrine of the last things, and the doctrine of the second coming in this epistle, and also in the next epistle.

[ 1 : 5 1 ] And that was because, as I've tried to indicate, when Paul was in Thessalonica, during his missionary journey there, his emphasis in preaching was on God's judgment upon sin.

And the thrust being that those who did not repent of their sin and turn to God would stand condemned in the judgment when God came again.

And when he wrote the letter to them, that emphasis comes through very clearly.

Unfortunately, there were some believers in Thessalonica who did not apply the teaching of the second coming in a proper way.

And as I see later on, dealing particularly with the second letter, some of them even stopped work, believing that the second coming was so imminent that they didn't need to work.

[ 3 : 0 7 ] In the letter, there are various references to the place which the second coming ought to have in the thinking of people, in the thinking of Christians.

We saw in the first chapter that Christians look for, wait for the second coming. They ought to. In the second chapter, we saw the joyful prospect that the second coming held out for the likes of Paul as the preacher contemplated the prospect of standing at the judgment with his converts.

Ye are our glory and our joy and our rejoicing, he says. Last week, looking at the third chapter, we saw how the second coming ought to inspire people to live lives worthy of the God who had called them.

They are called to holiness. And we had a look at that last week. Tonight, we look at the prospect and the joyful prospect of reunion between living and departed saints at the second coming of our Lord.

It may interest you to know that there are at least 300 references to the second coming in the New Testament.

[ 4 : 53 ] Jesus himself refers to it on at least 31 occasions recorded for us in the Gospels.

And you see, therefore, why this doctrine, why this teaching should have a very honored place in the thinking of the Christian church right through the ages.

And you also know that in connection with the second coming of Christ, there are two great events associated. The resurrection of the dead and the judgment of all men before Jesus Christ as judge.

Now, those of you who have been attending the Congregation Fellowship will know that this has been the subject of discussion for the past two or three weeks.

And if you hear something which is repetitive, I hope that you will forgive me. But it is such an important subject, particularly today, that we would do well to perhaps devote more attention to it than we are in the practice and the habit of doing.

[ 6 : 11 ] You know, for example, that there are some sections of the Christian church who devote almost all their attention to the second coming of Christ and to all the various views that they present concerning it.

And you know how some people wrestle favorite passages of the New Testament out of their context and particularly out of the overall context of the Word of God and try to fit the various events which are connected with the second coming into their own mold, into their own thinking.

But the overall picture that the New Testament gives us undoubtedly of the second coming of Christ is that that will be the sequence of events.

Christ will come, the dead will be raised and all will appear for judgment. Now, these events, I believe, are presented to us in the Word of God as events which are to be taken contemporaneously.

they all belong to the one great event and the one great moment for each one of us.

[ 7 : 25 ] We were reminded in discussion last Sabbath evening at the fellowship that one of the most readable books on this whole subject, this book which was written by a man who was dearly loved within the free church from Belfast, William Greer, who wrote a book called The Momentous Event.

And the event is this, the second coming, the resurrection and the judgment. Now, the people, the Christians in Thessalonica had no doubt at all about the fact that lies at the very heart of the Christian faith.

and is this, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Of course, it's Paul to them, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, verse 14, even so then also would sleep and Jesus will God bring with them.

Now, this has to be established at the very outset, that these Christians embraced as all Christians must, the great fact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Now, you know what Paul said about that great fact right into the Corinthians. This is what he said in chapter 15. If that isn't true, then our faith is in vain, our preaching is in vain, and we have no hope whatsoever.

[ 9 : 02 ] the whole structure of the Christian faith rests upon the physical, literal resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Now, if you don't accept that, you do not accept the Christian faith. It's as simple as that. God's love and that has not been dogmatic.

It has been true to the teaching of the word of God. It either says it or it doesn't. And if there is anything that the Bible says, it says that Jesus rose from the dead.

Now, they believed that. But their problem was this. Having believed that Jesus rose from the dead, they also believed passionately that Jesus was going to come again into this world.

They believed in the doctrine of the second coming, together with the doctrine of his resurrection from the dead.

[ 10 : 27 ] But this was their problem. What about the Christians who had died since they were converted? you see, the Thessalonian Christians believed that Jesus' coming was imminent.

They were waiting for it all the time. They were waiting for it any day. Now, when you say, as I heard today, being said of a very good Christian lady who's alive in this community, she believes that Jesus will come any day.

That's perfectly true. Jesus will come. any day. That's what the Bible says. He will come as a thief in the night.

But what Paul is dealing with in this section is not when he comes, but he's dealing with this vexed problem that they had. What about the Christians who will have died by the time that he comes?

and the problem there was this. You see, this passage speaks of the parousia. That's the word that is used for the second coming of Jesus in this section.

[ 11 : 45 ] The parousia. That is the physical presence of Jesus at his coming. Seen, visible, and the rapture, the joy, the ecstasy, that that is going to arouse in the hearts of those who are alive and who see him at his coming.

Now you see the problem. Those Christians who had died, they weren't going to see him at his coming, so they thought. And their worry was that these Christians, they're going to miss out.

They had so much fellowship together, the wonder of the grace of God in their hearts, as they communed together, was so wonderful, they couldn't get over the fact that God had converted them through the preaching of Paul, and they loved one another, and then there was sorrow because some of them had died, and the people remained were convinced that they would miss out when Christ came.

And that's what Paul means when he writes, I would not have you to be ignorant brethren concerning them which are asleep that those Christians who had died, this is the word that is useful, come back to that, that you sorrow not even as those which have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

[ 13 : 18 ] And you see now the picture. when these Christians died, the Christians who remained were sorry, they were full of sorrow, they wept.

Now there are some people who say that you should never sorrow at the death of a Christian. And I reject that view profoundly because it is completely unbiblical.

It is right that people should sorrow when other people die. The book of Ecclesiastes in chapter 12 gives you a picture of the scene at a death in a home and in a community and what it means.

People go about the street mourning. There's nothing wrong with mourning. Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus though he knew he was going to raise him again.

He wept. And there were people when they carried Stephen to his burial, they made great lamentations over him and they wept. It is perfectly in order for people to sorrow at the death of loved ones because look at what death does.

[ 14 : 31 ] It causes so much damage. It leaves so much heartache in its weight. It leaves so much desolation and so much emptiness.

A home from which someone has been removed will never again be the same. And it's only right that we should sorrow. But it is wrong to sorrow inordinately.

And that's what the Thessalonians were doing. Their sorrow went beyond the bounds as it were. And so Paul says to them he doesn't say that they were wrong to sorrow.

But what he says is that they were wrong to sorrow as though they had no hope. And here you have another great insight into the death or the death of the Christian.

The insight that the Bible sheds for us. The light that it sheds for us on the death of a Christian. It tells us without any jubility at all that the day of his death is better than the day of his birth.

[ 15 : 40 ] It tells that the death of the Christian is something which is precious in the sight of the Lord. It tells us to see later on that for them it is the entrance to a life of bliss and blessedness and peace and contentment and service forevermore.

They've left. Isn't it significant for example that the book of Revelation speaks of heaven in that way. It's a place where there is no sorrow, no sighing, no tears, no pain, no fatigue.

It's one in which there is perfect blessedness and bliss. So when we sorrow at the death of the Christian, we sorrow because of what the death has meant to us.

But we don't sorrow because it was meant to them. for them there is no more sighing and no more tears. But you see, for the person, this is what Paul means, if he said these people had died without hope, without light, without faith, without Christ, then your sorrow would be one which had no hope at all.

This is the light the Bible sheds for us on the death of those who have not Christ, whoever they may be. That day there is no hope in their death.

[ 17 : 07 ] But for the Christian there is hope. And so he writes to Thessalonians and says, look, it is right that you sorrow, that you sorrow, but it is wrong that you sorrow in the way that you do.

And what was the way that they were sorrowing? I indicated because they thought that because they had died, these people are going to miss out on the rapture and the glory and the blessedness of the second coming of Christ.

And so now in verse 14 he consoles them. I bring you comfort, he says, and I bring you hope. And the hope is this. If we believe that Jesus died and rose, then we believe something else, that the dead in Christ will rise as well.

These two are inseparably linked in the Bible. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees the resurrection of the dead.

If he rose, we too will rise. Now you know that that doctrine is rooted in the New Testament. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees our resurrection.

[ 18 : 27 ] That's the first thing he brings to them. And the second thing he brings to them is for their comfort. God, he says, will bring them with him. And here now, we're at the heart of his teaching concerning the second coming.

And he begins to fill in the details. And what he says is this, Christ is going to come, but he won't be alone. When he comes, he will have the angels with him.

This is a teaching of Jesus himself. And it's simply that Paul uses these words in verse 15. This we say unto you, by the word of the Lord. And you ask, what does he mean by that?

Well, I think that this is what he means, that the Lord had taught him. this was the Lord's teaching concerning the second coming. Oh, you say, where did Paul get that teaching from the Lord?

He wasn't alive when Jesus was in the world. He wasn't a Christian rather, when Jesus was in the world. He was very much his enemy. Ah, but remember something else. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, a chapter which is read at every communion service in this church and in every other church in our denomination, the warrant for the administration of the sacrament runs like this.

[ 19 : 39 ] 1 Corinthians 11. I have received of the Lord that also which I have given unto you, that the night which our Lord was betrayed, he took bread, break it, blessed it, and gave it to them.

Take it. This is my body which is broken for you, and so on. I have received of the Lord. There you have the same thing. Paul had been given this revelation by the Lord himself.

where and when we are not told, but he had received it, and in a similar way, he had received this teaching concerning the second coming. This, he says, is the word of the Lord, or the teaching of the Lord.

And what is his teaching? This is it. That we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

In other words, we won't have any advantage over those who are in the grave. If the Lord were to come tonight, put it another way, if he were to come tonight, you and I who are here, if we were to live until he came later on this evening, you and I who are alive wouldn't have any advantage whatsoever over the saints whose bodies are tonight in the various cemeteries throughout our island.

[ 21 : 02 ] but you say, we would have an advantage because we would see what they don't see. Ah, but there you're wrong because Paul puts us right here.

For he says, the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with a trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

Now, there are three things there connected with the second coming of the Lord. Notice them. The shout, the voice of the archangel and the blast of the trumpet.

Now, how would you understand this? Well, remember in the first place that God, you know what a trumpet is.

You know the way the hymn writers use it, when the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more. You know full well that there is no such thing as a trumpet as you and I understand it with God.

[ 22 : 20 ] This is language that the Bible uses so that you and I can understand what is being told us, so that our minds can accommodate it. what are we being told?

This, quite simply, that what will accompany the coming of the Lord will be a reverberating sound.

As the moment of his coming has dawned, there will issue from his presence in heaven this sound which will penetrate through to the grave and to which the bodies of the dead will respond and they will rise from the dead.

Now I think of course that the thing to understand here is this, in verse 15, in verse 14 he uses, he says this, them which sleep in Jesus God will bring with them.

Now who are those who sleep in Jesus? The Christians. What happens to the Christian at death? You know the short of catechism answers the question. The souls of believers are made perfect at death and do immediately enter into glory.

[ 23 : 46 ] That is the teaching of the Bible. There is no such thing as an intermediate state referred to in the Bible or purgatory or anything else. This is it. You are alive, you are a believer in Christ. The moment you die, your soul is severed from your body and your soul goes immediately to glory and within a day or two your body is placed in the grave.

Art is coming. What happens is this, in a twinkling, in the twinkling of an eye, in a moment, at the sound of the trump, again I state, reference to the New Testament.

The spirit or the soul is reunited to the body and they rise from the dead. There is this shout, there is this command, the time is coming, says Jesus, when they that are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they shall come forth.

and that is the first step in the second coming of our Lord. The voice, the sound, the shout will reverberate and will penetrate into the grave.

Someone put it like this, what forces of nature will be employed to produce the sound, we don't know, but for the Christian will be full of cheer and comfort and joy, for the denounce is coming for their deliverance.

[ 25 : 17 ] And the sequence of events is very clearly told us, here now presented to us, very clearly, step by step, after his coming, he will raise the dead.

And the dead, he says, will rise to meet the Lord in the air. That's a picture in verse 17.

That's the first step. The resurrected dead, those who are believers, only the believer, will rise to meet the Lord in the air.

And then he says, we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

That's a sequence of events. The dead are raised, then those who are alive will be caught up. Now some people will say, but what about this time element?

[ 26 : 17 ] Sure there must be some time element between the dead being raised and the Christians being caught up. And would it not be the case that the Christians will see all this happening? But we are not giving any indication of that in the New Testament.

Remember this, time will be no more at the coming of our Lord. When the trumpet will sound and time shall be no more.

So there's no point in thinking in these terms that there's going to be an interval between the one thing and the other. Now that's something that you and I find terribly difficult to understand because we think in terms of time and space, don't we?

So we will be caught up to meet them in the air. And I dealt with this passage last August. Maybe you don't remember it.

But I hope that I dealt with it from another angle. And I remember mentioning to you the meaning of the word here, we would be caught up, snatched.

[ 27 : 33 ] And it is this word, interestingly enough, that people use when they speak of the rapture. This is what people mean when they speak of the rapture of the saints.

Maybe some of you have heard the term. It means seized. Do you know that the idea here is if someone fell into the fire and you were near, you would seize them and drag them out of the fire.

If someone was in danger of drowning and you were able to save them, you would snatch, you would seize them, lift them up immediately out of the water in case they were drowned.

And that's the same idea here. It will be as sudden as that. They'll be seized, snatched, caught up to meet the Lord and the resurrected saints and the angels and no doubt Elijah and maybe Enoch and who knows Moses in the air as they come with the Lord.

And then he says, we shall be together with the Lord and we shall be ever with the Lord. And remember this is what he's driving at all the time.

[ 28 : 45 ] these Christians were sorrowing because they had lost their Christian friends. And Paul's thrust is this, friends he says, they won't lose out, they won't miss out at the second coming at all.

They will be as much a part of it as you. And the point is this, he says, we at his coming will be together.

Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. And that is the comfort that he wants to bring to them, the comfort of the reunion of sins at the coming of Christ.

And if I were going to title this sermon, I would title it that way, the second coming and the reunion of the saints.

And in that connection, and just very briefly, I want to hone in on two points here that have brought your attention. The one is the way in which the death of the Christian is spoken of, it is asleep, they who are asleep in the Lord.

[ 30 : 04 ] And the second point I want to make is the emphasis that we have here on this reunion. Now, and I deal with them very, very briefly in just ten minutes or so.

Those of you who have the works of the late Professor John Murray may know that he has a, that one of the sermons, a very short sermon indeed in one of these works, is a sermon on this passage, preached at the funeral of a brother minister of his in Chesley in Ontario in Canada.

And in the sermon, he makes this point about the death of the Christian. When he is speaking on the words, we believe that he even saw them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with them.

And the word that is used in the original language is this, Jesus has put them to sleep. Jesus has put them to sleep.

And it conjures up in your mind, and this is the application that he makes of it, it conjures up in your mind the idea of a mother putting her child to sleep at night.

[ 31 : 40 ] and she does it in the interest of the child and for his good. And she does it with love and with tender care, putting her child to sleep.

Maybe the child doesn't want to go to sleep, you know, those of you who are parents will know full well what that kind of thing is. Even the young child may not want to go to sleep. But he doesn't realize that what is being done for him is in his own interest.

And I think that maybe that thought of Professor John Murray may be a comfort to some Christians. You know that we meet Christians from time to time, those who are on their death bed.

And very often their complaint is that they really don't want to go. Well I suppose that it is a perfectly natural reaction in some instances.

But then you see they all come as we all will to recognize and to realize that what God is doing is the best thing for them. He has put them to sleep.

[ 32 : 50 ] And what does that suggest to us? Well I suggest to you this, that it brings before us as the Bible tells us, that what sleep means to you naturally so death means spiritually to the Christian.

What do you look forward to when you go to sleep? Well you look forward to a night of rest. And if the death of the Christian means anything at all it means that it is rest for them.

The New Testament indicates this. They shall rest from their labor. They've got rid of their fatigue, their struggle, they've got rid of the difficulties that they had as Christians, the agonies that they had, the tears and the sorrow.

Oh that was in others in the life of the Christian. There were also moments of tremendous blessedness and peace and contentment and joy in the fellowship of one another in the service of Christ.

Yes. But there's the other side. The Christian is scarcely saved. The Christian has difficulty in the way of salvation. The Christian has to endure chastisement because of his own disobedience and so on.

[ 33 : 58 ] He has to struggle with sin and with an unbelieving in a hostile world. He has to struggle with the wiles of the devil in this world. And he's left all that behind.

Left it all. And when he awakes again, when you and I go to sleep tonight, we go to sleep maybe after the rigorous of this day, the toil and the struggle of the day.

And even if you have rest and a restful night, you wake up, hopefully the next day, but it's going to be the same kind of routine almost. You're going to face the same problems and the same difficulties.

Mind you, you've been strengthened to face them with a good night's rest. But the Christian is never again going to awaken to that kind of day. When he awakes again, he will awake to the best day of his life, the resurrection, the reunion of soul and body to be forever with the Lord.

So when he goes to sleep in death, he can look forward to waking up on the morning of the resurrection. That was a psalmist's great hope.

[ 35 : 12 ] I shall awake in thy likeness and I shall be satisfied with thy likeness. And the Christian's death, therefore, is one which is full of hope.

He sleeps, he rests, in the hope of the resurrection of the dead. And in that sense, it is also a restorative sleep.

When you sleep well, you're restored, you're awake, refreshed, for the problems and the demands of a new day. and the Christian in the resurrection will awake in that spirit as well, reinvigorated, rid of sin forever more from the body, the body of sin that was such agony to him in the world and was such trouble to him in the world.

He is now reunited and he has left sin behind. But there is something else about sleep. It is temporary. When you go to sleep, you exercise the hope that you will arise, that you will awake in the morning.

And as I said earlier, that is true concerning the sleep of the believer. He looks forward to the resurrection more, when the face of the whole world would be renewed, when he will awake wake to the sweet repose of glory forever more, when the sights and the sounds are such as he has never seen, and when he will respond to them as he has never responded in all his life.

[ 37 : 05 ] Because remember this, just as the soul is made perfect in holiness at death, so is the body made perfect in holiness at the resurrection.

And all these senses are those souls tonight, which are both inlets and outlets, sometimes for the things that fill us with joy, and at other times that fill us with sorrow and with pain.

All these senses will be inlets and outlets for nothing but what will be joy and blessedness throughout the endless ages of eternity.

And you know that the thing that will attract the Christian most, both at death and at the resurrection, will be what the New Testament refers to as the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

At death, we shall see him as he is. I don't know what that means. I don't know how the Christian is going to see the Lord at death, except by faith.

[ 38 : 23 ] I can't understand how else he can see him, because he won't have eyes. He'll have left his eyes behind him in the grave. But at the resurrection he will have eyes, and he will see him as he is, literally, physically, he will see Jesus in the glory of his human aid.



But the end product will be to the glory of God. It's the glory of God that will be seen in the face of Jesus Christ. I think that is what is meant there that God will have all the glory, even as the Christian rejoices in what he sees of the glory of the risen, resurrected Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

No wonder then that the apostle says to these Christians, don't sorrow for those believers whom you knew who are no longer with you. You have reason to sorrow because you have missed their company because they are no longer with you.

And you remember many blessed moments in their presence. Yes. But you see, there is no sorrow with them. So make sure, my friend, that your sorrow is a right one.

Remember what was said once, how someone once put it. It used to be said, a little non-exist is a dangerous thing.

[ 39 : 54 ] But we used to understand this and those of you in the nursing and the medical profession, of course, will pardon us if we are expressing a bit of ignorance here. But it used to be said, and I don't know if that's right or not, that at a birth, the first thing that they wanted the child to do was to cry.

I don't know if that's right or not. But I'm led to believe that it's not a bad sign when the child cries whenever he or she is born. And this is how someone put it.

We wept or we cried when we were born, though all around us smiled. We shall smile when we die, though all around us should weep.

And I think that expresses perfectly what Paul is saying here. We cannot but sorrow at the loss of dear Christian friends, but they smile because their soul is full of joy in the presence of the Lord.

Wherefore, comfort one another with these thoughts. And secondly, this one, the reunion that awaits you at the second coming.

[ 41 : 16 ] You have referred to this already, the problem they had in Thessalonica. And so Paul assures them that there is hope and the hope is that they will be together yet again.

Yet again. Now I think that this is one that differences between heaven and hell. Jonathan Edwards, interestingly enough, believes that the Christians who knew one another in this world will know one another in the world to come.

And if it be the case, and I say if, if it be the case that the Christians whose souls are in heaven tonight long, and I do believe in the Bible, they do long to be reunited to their body.

death is an enemy and it severs soul from body and it is never forget it, it is an enemy. Though Christ has taken the sting out of it, it is still an enemy because of the trouble and the distress that it causes.

There is a longing, I think, in the soul of the believer to be reunited to the body. But perhaps there is another longing in heaven tonight.

[ 42 : 49 ] the longing of believer to be together with believer in the presence of the Lord. No longing detracts in any way from the blessedness of heaven.

There is nothing, there is no experience and there is no feeling in heaven tonight that takes away from the blessedness that they have in the presence of Christ.

Make no mistake about that. God is not to be God is in the world. But I think that we may be warranted to think that the church above longs for the church below, longs for the completion of the body.

And that is, I believe, one of the great differences put in heaven and hell. there is no longing. I don't believe for a moment that there is any longing tonight in hell to be reunited with anybody.

God is good. God is good. God is good. God is good. You know that when Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus, he said that one of the things that annoyed the rich man in hell was this, the thought of his five brothers ending up in hell.

[ 44 : 15 ] He didn't want them there. Can you think of a soul in heaven tonight that wouldn't want his brethren in the Lord to be with him where he is?

Well, I can't. I can't. One of the blessed prospects held out for the Christian in relation to his heavenly abode is this, that he will be there with the people whom he has loved most and loved best in the world.

And these are those who are united to him in Christ. Oh, my friend, how careful you and I should be about our associates in the world, about the friendship that we form and the friends that we have.

What a question that is for each one of us tonight. Where will we be with them at the end of our days?

Will it be in heaven or in hell? If you think of yourself tonight, going to heaven, a place of undescrivable blessedness and bliss, the bliss will be tenfold when you are there with all those who meant so much to you in this world and the Lord.

[ 45 : 55 ] Wherefore, he says, comfort one another with these words. We will be together with them and we will be ever together in the Lord.

I mentioned earlier, and I'm nearly finished, I mentioned earlier the name of Jonathan Edwards, the great American divine.

And this is what he put, this is what he said. Death, he said, does not break our union with Christ or with the church.

when the Christian dies, there is no cause for him to grieve because he has left loved ones behind.

Those, he says, whom he loves in the Lord, he has them, he has them in an infinite degree in the one in whom they were loved.

[ 47 : 07 ] Because Christ is not separated from his church. Christ cannot be severed from those for whom he died. He and they are one.

And therefore, when the Christian dies in this world and goes into the next, he is not severed either from his Lord or from those whom he has known in the Lord.

And therefore he says, I do not see why we should not suppose that saints that have dwelt together in this world and have done and received kindness to each other and have been assisting each other's true happiness in the world.

Should not love one another with a love of gratitude for that in another world. And that the joy in meeting them and seeing their happiness is part of that joy that is spoken of in this passage.

and you know that Paul himself said that, I think that that's what he's indicated in chapter two, what is our joy or our crown of rejoicing, are not even yet in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.

[ 48 : 47 ] Ah, you see, and wouldn't it be wonderful if each one of us here tonight could understand something of this. if you and I were believers in Christ, united together in the bonds of peace and in the bonds of love, Christians love one another.

They enjoy one another's company. Death does not put an end to that. They have it in fullness in Christ and in heaven.

That love will be shown to one another through him, the Lord, in the purest and the best form imaginable.

And they will be together in eternal service and in eternal praise. And as I said earlier, how important are the relationships that we form in this world?

And what assurance a Christian has and what a glorious prospect is held out for him in this passage.

[ 50 : 03 ] how do you react to it? Does it fill you with hope? Does it fill you with anticipation? Does it fill your own soul with longing?

You know that, and I cannot but say this, you know that when you lose a good Christian friend, when someone whom you loved in the Lord is taken away, and when that means so much to you and the fellowship that you enjoyed in the world, is it not a fact that you look forward to the day when that fellowship will be restored, and when it will be at its best, when no sin, and no error, and no interruption will enter in to mar the eternal blessedness of the Lord's people in the presence of the Lord.

Is that a comfort to your own heart tonight? Let us pray. O Lord, remember us with the love which thou bearest to thine own, and take us into close union with thyself by faith.

Help us to love thee, and to love thy people, and to say with another, thy God shall be my God, thy people shall be my people.

We bless thee, O God, for the life that thy word sheds for us on the death of thy blessed people. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.

[ 52 : 11 ] And we thank thee for the comfort and the prospect of blessedness that the resurrection and the reunion holds out before us.

O may we know tonight that we are thine and that we are theirs in thee. Bless us and go before us and forgive us.

For Christ's sake, Amen. Amen.