

# The Doorway to Heaven

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] let's turn to that passage for a short time this evening first Thessalonians chapter 4 and verse 13 or we could read at verse 15 page 1189 first Thessalonians chapter 4 and verse 15 for this we declare to you by a word from the Lord that we who are alive who are left until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep for 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 then we who are alive who are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we will always be with the Lord therefore encourage one another with these words the subject of death is always the central subject in our thinking when we come to asking about how we stand with God it's all about death and after death I suppose in any religion there is always that question of what does that religion teach us about death and what happens after death it's actually quite fascinating to compare the different the the teachings of different religions as far as the Christian faith is concerned there's absolutely no question about it whatsoever it is clear it goes all the way back to the person of Jesus Christ the risen Jesus and how he ascended to heaven that's why we spoke together of that why we read the first chapter of Acts and we read the account of how Jesus was lifted up from the presence of his disciples and he disappeared a cloud enveloped Jesus enveloped Jesus and the the the people who were watching him watching him going into heaven they were spoken to by angels and the angel said men of Galilee why do you stand looking into heaven now here's the point this Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven now that was the promise upon which the very first new testament church pinned all their hopes let me read it again here's the promise that lay at the very heart of the hope and the expectation of the new testament church this Jesus said the angel who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven now I want you to imagine that you're part of that early church these first group of first group of Christians and I don't think it mattered where you were whether you were in Jerusalem or in other parts of the Roman Empire if you were a Christian you lived in that expectation that the Lord was going to come you lived every day wondering if today this was the day that God that Jesus was going to come again after all that's the promise the promise was there this Jesus will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven and amongst the first Christians they believed that they would be alive that his coming would be while they were still alive the problem is that as time went on they began to see that they began to lose their fellow Christians their fellow Christians were getting old and they were dying or some of them were becoming sick and they were dying or an accident would happen and they were dying and then the question arose amongst them what does that mean in connection with this promise could it be that those we know who have died have died because God was displeased with them there were places in the Bible where people died because God was displeased with them for example Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5 their death came as a result of their lying to God in first Corinthians chapter 11 Paul talks about those who had fallen asleep because they had adopted a lifestyle that was wrong particularly in connection with the Lord's Supper and they were they naturally the Christians of Thessalonica were beginning to ask questions what does that mean about those who have died those who have believed in Jesus and have since died are they going to be at a disadvantage when Jesus comes what's going to happen to them in connection with those who are still alive and so this is the question that Paul had to deal with in this passage that's a burning issue it's a question that you and I would have asked if we see we have the benefit of having the whole Bible in front of us with all its explanations and with its clarity they didn't have the New Testament at that time they didn't have the teaching that we had so they had to ask those very real questions but it's a question that we are glad that they asked

because in answer to that question Paul was able to develop for them this wonderful passage that we are able to give us so much encouragement in connection with when our loved ones die because it gives exactly the detail it gives the detail of what will one day happen when Jesus returns and it's something that concerns every single one of us so let's look at this passage then and let's look first of all at how the how Paul he grounds he roots the the promise that Jesus will one day come and he does that by talking about Jesus resurrection that's the first thing that the apostle refers to he refers to his resurrection verse 14 since we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so through Jesus God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in other words what he's saying is that everything that we expect everything that we hope for and anticipate in the future it rests and hangs on this one singular fact that Jesus having been dead and risen again having been dead and buried rose on the third day everything depends upon that now you know there are some things in the bible that people argue about there's lots of things that christians individually disagree with there's lots and lots of questions I firmly I'm firmly of the opinion that many of these things are deliberately put there in order to in order for us to develop our knowledge of the bible sometimes it's only by by discussing various teachings in the bible that's why bible study is so important for our growth and knowledge but there are other things that are absolutely 100 percent crystal clear the most important things the fundamental things about the christian faith are absolutely unquestionable and it begins with this that jesus rose for me everything begins with jesus rising from the dead on that's on which that that's that's the truth upon which i stand and i fall and you

stand or fall this evening that jesus rose from the dead that's where it makes that's the one thing or at least the the starting point which draws a difference a contrast between the christian faith and every other religion in the world in that it has the key to life and death and the key is found in the person of jesus christ having been dead and having risen from the dead have you discovered the truth of the resurrection have you discovered how relevant that truth is it's not something that that only applied to two thousand years ago and those who happen to be christian it is the most dynamic life-changing truth you'll ever come across when you think about it it's the answer to your very first fundamental question it's the answer to where can i find the truth how can i be right with god you find it in the person of jesus christ who rose from that how do i know that jesus is the son of god because he wrote the very first reason i know because he rose from the dead how do i know that his death is the payment of my sin because he rose from the dead how do i know that jesus is true to his promise because he rose from the dead how do i know that he has the authority to save me and to rescue me from sin because he rose from the dead how do i know that the christian faith is the truth amongst every other christian faith you have access to every faith under the sun in the day and age which we live in how do we know all these people who are so sincere about what they believe they they have built ornate temples for themselves they go through the motions the sincere motions of a lifetime that's devoted to the faith you go and see it you see it all the time i see it when i go to thailand and even in the far east you go to these buddhist countries you will see the ritual some of them start at four o'clock in the morning that's how devoted they are and the question of course arises well how how can you say how can you be so confident that you have the truth and you believe in the truth they only there's only one starting point and that is that jesus rose from the dead that's it i remember when i was in aberdeen there was a with a student at the time his name was mike mcconnell and i have never in all my life come across a guy so obsessed with computing as this guy was this was 10 years ago and he had his laptop even the days when very few people had laptops and i remember he used to he was a member of our church in in bon accord and there was one time we drove to inverness and i had a whole lot of them in the car including mike mcconnell we drove to inverness to a sam samadier recital in the free north and inverness and there was a whole carload of them and coming back mike had to take his computer with him and he not only had to take it but he had to he had to use his computer and even in those days he had a mobile phone very few people had mobile he had a mobile phone he hooked up his computer to the mobile phone and he started he started sending instant messages to somebody in hawaii through his mobile phone this was in car bridge and he was typing out his message to this girl he had no idea who the girl was just somebody who happened to come across and she started talking to this sending instant messages this is in a car from inverness to aberdeen and so i'm asking him what are you doing mike and he's telling me what he's doing he's talking to this girl in hawaii and she's and i said what are you saying oh he said she's asking me where i've been and i'm telling her i've just been at a free church samadier recital and so she says what's a samadier recital so he's

explaining what's a samadier recital so she she starts asking about the christian faith this was in a car on the way to an instant message

on the on the on the on the on the laptop what's the christian faith and so he starts explaining to her all about the christian faith and then she asked the key question why do you believe in the christian faith any more than i should believe in any other religion what's the difference you see everyone is asking that question it's probably the most popular question that you'll ever find it doesn't matter where you go in a world that's full of a plethora of a mixture of religions the answer the question is a very real one how do we know would you be able to answer that question because believe me somebody's going to ask you at some point in time well i'll tell you where i this is it for me it stands and falls the resurrection the only reason i'm a christian this evening is because jesus rose from the dead now why is that so important well it's important because if i wasn't a believer i would be asking one i've said this before if i wasn't a believer i'd simply be asking one question who has the key to life and death otherwise what's the point in dressing in all the right clothes and attending the temples and saying your prayers all that kind of stuff what's the point in doing all that if you're only going to die at the end of the day and there's no message there's no hope for life after death what's the point being religious what's the point believing in god if there's no reason to believe in god i'm asking one question and i hope tonight that's the question that you're asking the one question is this is there somebody out there that has the key to life and death and is there any way of knowing knowing that there is life and death there is life after death and the answer with resounding clarity in the new testament is an absolute yes why because jesus rose from the dead and it begins there here's what paul says for this since since we believe that jesus died and rose again even so here we go through jesus god will bring with him those who have fallen asleep that's me if in other words if i have trusted in jesus not if i have done my best not if i have been lived a perfect life not if i have done everything according to what i should have done not it's not about what i've done for the lord but it's what god has done for me that's that's going to save me at the end of the day if we live and die um god will bring with him those who have fallen asleep but it's not only that it's the words of jesus takes us all the way back to the to the words of jesus himself who said i am the resurrection and the life he that believes in me listen to this though he were dead yet shall he live now i'll tell you i'll tell you tonight if i wasn't a christian i'd be i'm looking at these words and i'm saying either these words are the truth in which case i need to follow jesus or these words are a lie in which case i don't want to hear anything more from his lips you see the gospel is as clear as that i am the resurrection and the life he that believes in me though he were dead yet shall he live that's a promise it's either the truth in which case god jesus is speaking with all the authority of god because god is the only one who can bring the dead back to life or it's a lie in which case don't listen to another word he says that's why paul paul was

paul was was he thought exactly the same way paul could no time for empty religion as far as paul was concerned was either clear or it wasn't through at all the resurrection of the dead in first corinthians chapter 15 and he says this if christ how can some of you say he says how can some of you say that there's no resurrection of the dead see some of the people in corinth were teaching that there was no such thing as the resurrection of the dead verse 12 chapter 15 of first corinthians here's the problem if there's no resurrection of the dead says paul then not even christ has been raised if christ has not been raised then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain we are even found to be misrepresenting god because we testified about god that he raised christ who he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised if the dead are not raised christ has not been raised your faith is futile you are still in your sins let's eat and drink for tomorrow we die throw the bible out the window it's complete nonsense if there's no resurrection from the dead that's it it all hangs on this in unchangeable truth that jesus rose from the dead what else does the apostle say well he talks about he goes on to talking about the importance of christ's revelation first thing he talked about was jesus resurrection but now he goes on secondly to talk about jesus revelation in verse 15 for this we declare to you by a word from the lord a word from the lord now this wasn't the verse that i just mentioned a few minutes ago i am the resurrection and the life this was something which obviously the apostle got from the lord subsequent to the ascension of jesus because here's what the lord told him that we who are alive who are still living who are left until the coming of the lord and the bible obviously tells us that there will be people who will be alive at the coming of the lord when jesus personally returns at the second coming but he says will not precede those who have fallen asleep for the lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command etc now what was this word from the lord the word from the lord was quite simply this that those who die

believing and trusting in jesus die in the lord the moment they come to trust in jesus a relationship there is a relationship that is created by god in which they're united by faith to jesus and that relationship will never disappear it continues day by day while we are still alive in this world and it continues with us into death itself you see death for the believer that's why he says in verse 13 he opens up this passage to say this don't be uninformed brothers about those who are asleep that you may not grieve as others who have no hope you know these are very very precious words to the person who has recently lost a loved one or who has lost a loved one and that person died as a believer what these words tell us is first of all that we do grieve grief is normal and natural in a fallen world jesus himself grieved at the death of his friend lazarus we also believed we also believe that at some [ 20 : 33 ] point in his life his earthly father died at that time also he must have grieved and yet there's a difference between the difference between the person who grieves for someone who dies in the lord and the person with no hope that's why it's so important to come to terms with the lord because his word tells us that when a person who's a christian dies two things happen the body is placed in the grave is placed in the grave to wait for the resurrection but our souls become detached from our bodies i said this last week our souls become detached from our bodies and go straight to be with the lord that's why paul said he said either i am present in the body and absent from the lord or i am absent from the body and present with the lord the old catechism puts puts it this way the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory but their bodies being still united to christ rest in the grave until the resurrection did you notice when we're reading this passage that when paul talks about the death of believers he talks about it as sleep it's the same as when jesus went into the the house where jairus's daughter had died and he said she's not dead she's asleep now she had died she had truly physically died and yet when jesus came in he said she is asleep because in the view of the bible death is only temporary you could be dead for a hundred two hundred a thousand two thousand years there have been saints who have died in the old testament they've been dead for thousands of years and yet it's still only temporary as far as god's concerned a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day because the day will come a day will come when the graves will be opened and when the bodies of believers will rise again and be reunited to their souls now there's all kinds of questions very very interesting questions like like will there be a difference between the body i have in this world in this life and the body that god will give me on the day that i rise from the dead will there be a difference will i still be recognizable as the person i have been in this life that's an interesting question isn't it and if there will be a difference what will that difference be the bible tells me that i will still be the identity that i am in this world but it also tells me in a mysterious way which i can't understand i will be made like jesus i haven't got time to go into the explanation as to what that is but that's what paul tells us in second corinthians chapter five he says and first corinthians 15 he tells us two things he tells us the bodies that we'll have when we rise in christ they'll be will still be recognizable as as you and i recognize each other tonight don't ask me what age will be don't ask me to what extent we will look like what we do tonight i don't know but we will still be recognizable uh why was it that peter james and john recognized moises and elijah when elijah when they appeared with jesus on the mount of transfiguration they recognized them because they were still they still had their own identity and yet yet we believe that the body that god will give us will be a different body it will be a glorified body made like jesus in his glory and in his majesty that's all we can say we can't go any further than that but what we can say is you know what amazes it you know when you think about this and this is why we need to think about passages like this we need to think about their relevance to us these promises are absolutely life-changing and when you really begin to apply it let me put it like this today in stornoway if you want to go for a walk in peace and quiet you go down to the sandwick cemetery you get plenty peace and quiet down there you can go through the gates a beautiful place on a beautiful day you can walk all the way down to the shore you can walk along you're not likely to see anybody else except maybe one or two other people and there you go you can go to agnes and there again you'll hardly see anybody else you come back into cromwell street on a busy saturday afternoon and there'll be loads scores of people you'll wade your way through the crowds and woolies and then all these other places and you'll wade your way through the crowds of people just like there is in any other busy town but what this passage is saying to us is this it's saying the day will come one day now i know how difficult this must be to believe but one day because jesus has said it cromwell street will be empty and agnes will be mobbed so will sandwick so will grace there won't be a busier place in the vicinity that's what this

word tells me think about it think about what god has said and listen to what god is saying to us because there'll be two kinds of resurrections on that day john chapter 5 tells us this he tells us the day will come do not marvel at this for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out that's the word of jesus but then he goes on to say don't stop there don't put a full stop there because he carries on those who have done good to eternal life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment it's not just the believer that's going to be raised from the dead it's the believer and the unbeliever for the believer it will be the greatest day in our lives for the unbeliever it will be the greatest nightmare ah but you say well what does it mean then those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment does that not mean whether or not we do our best in this world and hope for the best no it doesn't because jesus goes on in the very next chapter to explain what it means to be saved because he said because there were some in the next chapter that asked him that very same question it's the most important question that anyone could ask in relation to where we stand with god and it's the question i'm going to leave you with this evening john chapter 6 verse 28 they said to him what must we do to be doing the works of god jesus answered them this is the work of god that you believe in him whom he has sent to believe is to receive and when you receive christ by faith in him god changes your life he makes you his own son and his daughter he forgives all your sins and he accepts you as righteous in his sight and from now on from then on you live for him and you know that when you die it is a doorway to heaven may that doorway be ours let's pray father in heaven once again we rejoice in your word and in the in the clear message of the gospel we rejoice that jesus has risen and for all that his resurrection signifies to us particularly the fact that in his death our sins are forgiven we ask lord tonight that every single one of us will know what the forgiveness of sins is and will experience it for themselves by coming to faith in jesus in his name amen