

“I’ll Be Over Here”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

2/13/22 Epicenter / BAC

Rev. Brian T. Smeal; pastorsmeal@gmail.com

With acknowledgements to Kevin L. Jones

There is a place where we belong . . . and this world isn’t it (Philippians 3:20). Heaven is a place where all things are new; where we find the river of the water of life, as bright and clear as crystal; a place whose foundations are adorned with jasper, sapphire, emerald, topaz, amethyst, and other precious jewels; a place with streets of pure, transparent gold. Heaven sounds like a pretty wonderful place, but there’s only one way to go from here to there, and it means leaving this life and entering eternity. When someone you love passes on from here to eternity, you grieve – a very powerful emotion.

It is said that there are 2 certainties in life – death and taxes. Everyone faces death – the righteous and the unrighteous alike, but how those two groups view death is as different as night and day. Some ancient examples of pagan writings regarding death read: “Of a man once dead there is no resurrection.” (Aeschylus), “Hopes are among the living; the dead are without hope.” (Theocritus), “Suns may set and rise again but we, when once our brief light goes down, must sleep an endless night.” (Catullus). There is no hope in these words. Conversely, many ancient Christian burial sites feature Psalm 4:8 - “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” There is a big difference in how Christ followers and non-Christ followers view death and grieving

Proper grieving has one principle and zero specifics. God’s Word is not that you do not grieve, but that you grieve with hope. Having a relationship with Jesus brings that hope, because of the promises we have through God’s Word. The principle here is that it’s okay to grieve, but you don’t have to grieve like those who have no hope. This grieving has no specifics; that is, there is no timeframe or limit to how or how long you grieve; what we know is that when we, as Christ followers, grieve, we still have hope.

We have hope because we have the promise of REST. The Thessalonian church was comprised of new believers, who had some logical questions. The first time one of these new believers passed away, the question would have arisen – “What about them? Will they miss out on the riches of Christ’s kingdom?” Paul explains (verses 13-14) that those who die ‘in Christ’ will not “miss out.” See also 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:21.

“Asleep” does not refer to the false notion of ‘soul sleep.’ Soul sleep would be like pressing the pause button on a DVD player. Soul sleep is taught by 7th Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others. But Revelation 6:9-10 shows that those souls in heaven have consciousness of their surroundings. Soul sleep is a false teaching.

We have hope because we have the promise of RETURN. Jesus will return, and this return is capable of happening at any moment (Luke 12:40). Jesus Himself will return,

not a representative (Acts 1:10-11). It will be visible to all (Luke 21:27). Jesus' 2nd coming is not when you received Him into your heart.

Paul is not coming up with this teaching on his own; rather, it comes from a word from the Lord (v.15). This may be either a direct revelation or maybe something Jesus had said that is not recorded in the Biblical canon, which contains all we need to know, but not all that Jesus did (see John 21:25).

We have hope because we have the promise of REUNION. How awesome will it be when we are reunited with our loved ones, and with our Savior? Imagine the questions you will be able to ask!

This raises the question of whether or not we will know each other in heaven. Matthew 22:23-33 shows that things will be different in heaven, but doesn't clarify whether we'll know one another or not. However, there are many examples in the Bible that imply that we will know each other. In 2 Samuel 12:23, David expresses his belief that he would see his dead child again. In Matthew 26:29, Jesus says He will not take communion again until He is able to take it with His disciples in heaven. In Matthew 17:3-4, at the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples recognized Moses and Elijah somehow. And so, it appears that yes, we will know each other in heaven . . . somehow or other.

As much as we look forward to Jesus' return, how many people in your life would be lost if Jesus came back today? If Christ came back today, someone you know, someone you love will be left behind. They will miss out on eternity with Jesus; are you taking the opportunities to share this hope so that as many people as possible can be with the Lord forever? Today's passage was written to the church; to believers. But the good news is that this hope is available to everyone!

Who do you care about that doesn't know Jesus? Do you want them to have this hope that Paul is describing? Where will they get it? This hope comes FROM Jesus, but it often comes THROUGH you and me. What have you been waiting for?

Revelation 21:4 – “[God Himself] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” We grieve, yes. But that does not disprove your faith in Christ or in the resurrection that is to come; rather, it proves you are capable of loving someone.

Those who have received Christ as Savior will be reunited when Jesus returns. One day He's coming – and oh, what a glorious day that will be! Death, for a Christian, is not an end, but a change; a move from this existence to an existence in eternity. It is not an end; it is, in one manner of thinking, that person saying, “I'll be just over here.”

Death is not to be feared by those who know Jesus Christ as Savior. Embrace that faith; share that faith; spread that hope into the lives of those around you, so that we can make the party in heaven as full as possible by inviting others to go deeper in their understanding and faith in Jesus Christ.

DIG IN!

Wherever you are, you can use these questions to help personalize and apply this morning's message.

- 1. What so you know about the rapture? How do you know this?**
- 2. How does 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 affect your view of grieving?**
- 3. If you were a sea lion on the go, which major cities would you like to visit?**
- 4. Read these verses several (may be 12) times. What questions does it raise, but not answer? Can you find these answers elsewhere in the Bible?**
- 5. How should this passage affect your day-to-day life? What direct application does Paul give (v.18)?**
- 6. Describe what you think it will be like to meet Jesus face to face.**
- 7. For further reading, check out 1 Corinthians 15:35-55, Philippians 3:20-21, Luke 23:43, Luke 16:19-31**