

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NIV)

¹³Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

¹⁴We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

¹⁵According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words.

52-04-02-A Human-Friendly Hope

death, grief, hope, 2nd Advent, resurrection, heaven, reunion
1Thes 4:13-18

Christ's return makes Heaven a *down-to-earth* human experience.

INTRODUCTION: (Text as the Scripture Reading)

–Receiving Jesus as Savior is so *heavenly*, we write songs about it [“Heaven came down and glory filled my soul, / when at the Cross the Savior made me whole.”]. That's the 1st Advent, bringing “Immanuel... ‘**God with us**’.” But this *heavenly feeling* will become a *tangible reality* when **HOM.idea**.

–Presently, salvation's *joy* is mixed with *failures, losses and suffering*. Christ's 2nd Advent won't just *bring these to an end*, but **Rom 8:21** says, that the entire creation “will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” This “glorious freedom of the children of God” is the subject of our text and the object of our hope. One aspect of this *human-friendly hope* is that...

I. Christ's Return Ends Our Grief– v.13-14, *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died [fell asleep] and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*

A. Some say in death souls “fall asleep,” but it's *the body* that sleeps

[it's a **euphemism** for *death*, since dead bodies look asleep]. *Otherwise...*

1. *It would mean Jesus sleep-walked*, when **1 Pet 3:19** says He “went and preached to the spirits in prison,” during His 3 days in the tomb.
2. *Sleep implies awakening*, which came by His *bodily resurrection* and will come with our own, at His 2nd Advent, His 2nd Coming.

B. In the meantime, before Christ returns with “*those who have fallen asleep in him*,” every dying believer gets to be, as Paul says, “absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” (Not asleep, but awake!)

TRANS: Those with Jesus are *awake, alert, and oriented*. In **Rev 6:10**, the martyrs in Heaven ask, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” They're *awake!* Not *talking in their sleep!* Another reason our hope is human-friendly is...

II. Christ's Return Restores Us Bodily– v.15-16, *According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of*

the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

- A. Our hope **isn't** to stay in the *present Heaven*, where we'll be "like the angels" [*celestial spirits*]. [If on a flight to Atlanta with a stop-over in Phoenix, you wouldn't say, "I've arrived," when you're at the Phoenix airport.] (Those waiting in Heaven right now haven't arrived yet!)
- B. God made us from *star-dust* and *spirit-breath* not to become like angels, but to be *body-spirit beings* that would fulfill His plan of joining the cosmic and celestial worlds under a single government.
1. We barely started our job, when *we failed*. (But God entered that plan Himself, both to *fix our failure* and *restore our destiny*.)
 2. *His Cross fixes human failures*, but *His empty tomb restores our human destiny*— 1 Cor 15:20. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. [Ghosts & corpses aren't fully human; but *resurrection rejoins them* to *restore their full humanity!*]
- C. Jesus, with His own resurrected body in Heaven, awaits the day of bringing back to earth "those who have fallen asleep" in Him, to give them a resurrected body identical to His own— Phil 3:21 says that He, "by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

TRANS: Christ's return makes Heaven a down-to-earth human experience. There's **no hope** more *human-friendly* than our *immortal physical resurrection!* If we live till then, v.17a says, "*we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*" **What! We get to fly but don't get new bodies? No— 1 Cor 15:51-53.** Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. *Oh, then it's afterwards* that *Jesus takes us all back up to Heaven, right? No, again— v.17b, And so we will be with the Lord forever. But where will He be?*

III. Christ's Return Brings Heaven Down to Earth— Rev 21:2,

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

- A. In our new bodies, we'll move between *cosmic* to *celestial realms*, just as Jesus does, but in this "new heaven and new earth," where is the center of His kingly rule?— Rev 21:3. And I heard a loud voice from the

throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." (**Heaven**, "the dwelling of God," is *descending to a new earth!*)

- B. Paul says in 1 Cor 6:3a, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?"
1. Jurisdiction over angels was in our original job-description. (While *highly intelligent* and *extremely powerful*, angels are just a part of creation, like us, and *they aren't happy yet!*— Rom 8:19, 22-24a. The creation [*earthly & angelic*] waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.... We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, **the redemption of our bodies**. For in this **hope** we were saved. (What "this hope"? *Resurrection hope!*)
 2. Why does Luke 15:7 talk about "rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents"? Angels get excited, because it brings the whole creation, including themselves, that much closer to Resurrection Day!
- C. The idea of a non-earthly afterlife isn't from the Bible but from Gnosticism [a false belief that *matter* and *the body* are *evil*; only the spiritual is *good*], but Scripture proclaims an earthly destiny for humanity:
1. In Mat 19:28, Jesus gives the context of His 2nd Advent: "at the **renewal** of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne." [That word "**renewal**" (*paliggenesia*) means "*repeat genesis*, or "*genesis again.*"]
 2. At Pentecost, when Peter preached about Christ's 2nd Advent, he said, "He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to **restore everything**, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets." (What did the OT prophets predict? A renewed earthly paradise!)
 3. The song sung in Rev 5:9-10 about Jesus, the Lamb of God, says: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and **they will reign on the earth.**"

CONCLUSION:

—**Christ's return makes Heaven a down-to-earth human experience.**

Let's share this *hope*— v.18, Therefore encourage each other with these words. But unbelievers need to hear about it too. Whether they know it or not, they're all looking for Heaven on earth. But only Jesus can bring it! He does so right now by becoming our indwelling Savior. But later on, He will resurrect our physical bodies for a restored human life in "a new heaven and a new earth." This is the *human-friendly hope* of the Gospel.