**1 Thessalonians 4:13-14**

**What Happens When You Die?**

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***13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.***

* This morning we come to the next section of instruction in Paul’s first letter to the church in Thessalonica.
  + And by the nature of the topic of Paul’s instruction we have strong evidence that this was one of Paul’s earliest letters.
  + It is most likely that Paul’s letter to the Galatians was his first New Testament letter. And we know that his letters to the Corinthians and Romans came after his two letters to the Thessalonians.
  + His four prison epistles . . . Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon . . . came during his first imprisonment, after he had completed all 3 of his missionary journeys recorded in the book of Acts.
  + And his three pastoral epistles . . . 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus . . . came near the end of his life.
* This new section of instruction is on the subject of **eschatology**, which is **the study of end times events.**
  + Specifically, in this section Paul is teaching on the subject of **the return of the Lord.**

**Something is lacking**

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***1 Thessalonians 4:13— But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.***

* In v. 13 Paul begins with a statement that indicates that there was some deficiency in the doctrinal knowledge of some of the Thessalonians. Paul begins in v. 13 by stating . . . ***but we do not want you to uninformed, brethren.***
  + I like the English word, ***uninformed***, used in the New American Standard Version. The King James Version uses the word ***ignorant***, which has a negative connotation, which is not intended by Paul. This statement is not a rebuke, but an admission that there was a deficiency in their doctrinal knowledge that he wished to correct.
* The Greek word that is translated ***uninformed*** is a form of the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning “to know,” and adds the “alpha privative” . . . the “a” at the beginning of the word, which changes the word to mean “the opposite of.”

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* + In other words, by adding the “a” to the beginning of the word “to know” changes the word to means “to not know.”
* So, here at the beginning of v. 13 Paul is saying that there was a deficiency in their doctrinal knowledge . . . that there was something important that they “didn’t know” that he now wished to correct.

**What is lacking?**

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***1 Thessalonians 4:13— But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope***

* Then, having stated his purpose to correct an error in their doctrine, Paul then states the error that he wishes to correct . . . ***about those who are asleep***.
* The Greek word for ***asleep*** is *koimaō*, which **literally means “to be calm, at rest, or asleep.”**
  + Here Paul uses the word *koimaō* metaphorically to refer to those Christians who have died.
* Specifically, here in v. 13 Paul wishes to instruct the Thessalonian believers regarding the state of their fellow brethren who had recently died.
* And, as we read in v. 13, the reason Paul wishes to instruct them on this subject is because Timothy has relayed to him that there was some misunderstanding and fear concerning the fate of those believers who died before the Lord’s return.
  + As Paul states in v. 13, some of the Thessalonians were ***grieving*** the death of some brethren.
  + And from Paul’s instruction here in chapter 4 it is apparent that, for some unknown reason, the Thessalonians believed that those Christians who died before the Lord’s return would suffer some irreparable disadvantage at the Lord’s return.
  + It is in light of this doctrinal error that those who had died would be disadvantaged or would miss out on some aspect of God’s eternal blessing that Paul now writes to correct their error and allay their fears.

**Is the word “*asleep”* a Euphemism?**

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* Before moving on to the specific doctrine of the Lord’s return that Paul wishes to correct, I want to stop and consider Paul’s use of the term ***asleep***.
* As I said a few minutes ago, the term *koimaō*, which **literally means “to be calm, at rest, or asleep.”**
  + But this term is **not a** **euphemism for “dead.”**
* A **euphemism** is a mild word or expression substituted for one that is considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing.
  + Euphemisms for death include . . . passed away . . . deceased . . . departed . . . gone to be with the Lord . . . in a better place . . . bought the farm . . . kicked the bucket . . . gone to his/her reward . . . and many more.
  + But here in v. 13, when Paul describes those Thessalonian Christians who had died as ***asleep***, he is not so much using a euphemism as he is **describing their current condition.**
* In my study this week I came across an interesting fact. I learned that the English word **“cemetery”** is derived from the Greek word *koimētēria*, which literally means “a resting place” or “a sleeping place.”

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* + The Greek word *koimētēria* was **coined by Greek Christians** in recognition of the Christian belief that physical death results in the physical body going into the ground for a time . . . a time of “sleep” . . . waiting to be reunited with the soul when the Lord returns.
  + So, in effect, **a cemetery is a place where the bodies of Christians are placed to “sleep” until they are eventually reunited with their soul when the Lord returns for His church. What an awesome picture!**
* But Paul is not the only person to refer to those who are dead as being ***asleep***. The Lord uses this same term to refer to the condition of Lazarus, as we read in John 11:11 . . .

***John 11:11— "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep."***

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* In Acts 7:60 Luke records the death of Stephen, when he was stoned by the Jews . . .

***Acts 7:60— Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.***

* In 1 Corinthians 15:6 Paul describes how the Lord appeared to many after His resurrection...

***1 Corinthians 15:6— After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;***

* In these passages the Lord, Luke and Paul are not using a euphemistic phrase to avoid speaking of something unpleasant. They are using a word that **perfectly describes the condition of believers who have died . . . they have fallen asleep.**
  + And this term, ***asleep***, is a perfect term to describe the condition of believers who have died **because, as we will learn in this passage, the separation of our body and soul at our physical death is only a temporary condition.**

**What is death?**

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* In stating that physical death is only a temporary condition, this brings up the question, **“what is death?” In reference to the human condition, death means “separation.”**
  + **Physically, death is the separation from our physical, material body from our eternal, immaterial soul.**
  + Physical death is what happens when the body ceases functioning. In the instant that the physical body dies, the soul leaves the body.

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**What happens to our soul when our body dies?**

* At our physical death, the immaterial aspect of our being . . . our soul . . . goes to one of two places . . . **Hades or heaven**
* For those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, at the moment of physical death, our souls are immediately transported **to heaven**. We see fact stated in 2 Corinthians 5:8 . . .

***2 Corinthians 5:8— we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.***

* + As we see in this verse, while we are living in our earthly bodies we are absent from the Lord. But when our soul leaves our human body, we go to ***be at home with the Lord.***
* But for those who do not believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, at their physical death their souls are transported to Hades . . . a temporary holding place for those awaiting judgment. We see this judgment event described in Revelation 20:11-15 . . .

***Revelation 20:11-15— 11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.***

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* + As you can see, contrary to the belief of many, physical death does not result in annihilation . . . ceasing to exist. No. Physical death is merely a transition from this earthly existence to another realm of existence for the purpose of judgment.

**What will our existence in heaven be like? Will we have bodies?**

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* One of the first questions that arises when we discuss our souls going to be ***at home with the Lord*** after we die is, **“what will our existence in heaven be like? Will we have bodies?”**
  + While we know very little about what will initially happen to us in heaven after we die, we have some information in Scripture. In Revelation 7 John is allowed to see a scene in heaven in which a multitude of Tribulation saints . . . who have not yet been resurrected . . . appear in the throne room of God dressed in white robes . . .

***Revelation 7:9— After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;***

* + So, despite the fact that these tribulation saints had not yet received their glorified bodies, and yet they can be seen by John, is evidence that we, too, will receive some sort of intermediate body in heaven prior to receiving our resurrected bodies.
  + And while this answer does not satisfy our natural curiosity, God has chosen not to reveal any more to us.
  + All we know is that while our physical bodies “rest” in the grave, our souls are in heaven with the Lord, awaiting our reunion with our bodies.

**Reunion with our new, imperishable bodies**

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***1 Corinthians 15:42-44— 42 . . . It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.***

* The most definitive information we have regarding the reunion we have with our bodies is found in 1 Corinthians 15, in which Paul teaches on The Resurrection of Christ and The Resurrection of Believers.
  + Regarding the resurrection of our bodies, we read in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 . . .

***1 Corinthians 15:42-44— 42 . . . It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.***

* + Paul’s point in this passage, and others, is that when we are reunited with our bodies, they will be changed. No longer corrupted, diseased and aged by sin, our glorified bodies will be unstained by sin . . . perfect and incorruptible.
  + Age and disease and the taint of sin will never again be able to corrupt our bodies.

**The “first death” vs. the “second death”**

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* So, we learn from Scripture that physical death is the separation of our corrupted bodies from our souls.
  + This is also referred to as **the first death**. And because of the corruption and corrupted nature we received from Adam, all mankind . . . believers and unbelievers, alike . . . will experience this “first death.”
    - Only those believers fortunate enough to be alive when the Lord returns will never experience the first death.
* But there is also a ***“second death”*** taught in Scripture. We see this ***“second death”*** referred to **4 times**, all in the book of Revelation.
  + We read of the ***second death*** in Revelation 20:14-15 in the description of the events of The Great White Throne judgment of unbelievers . . .

***Revelation 20:14-15—14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.***

* Remember that I told you that **the definition of death is “separation.”**
  + The **first death** is the **physical separation** of our bodies from our souls when our body dies.
  + The ***second death*** is also separation. But this separation is **a spiritual separation**. The ***second death*** **is the separation of unbelievers from God . . . forever.**
  + **The purpose of *the lake of fire* is to eternally separate the unbelieving dead from the very presence of God.** We see the ***second death*** further described in Revelation 21:8 . . .

***Revelation 21:8— "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."***

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**The Encouragement of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14**

***1 Thessalonians 4:13-14— 13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.***

* The reason I wanted to take the time to explain these things about death and resurrection is because of the great encouragement that comes from knowing that upon our individual deaths our bodies will literally be “laid to rest” in the ground.
  + While we all inherently fear the process of dying and the physical and emotional pain that accompanies dying, believers should look upon the condition of physical death as a time in which our souls immediately go to be ***at home with the Lord***, while our sin-wracked bodies are finally able to rest from the pain and corruption of this earthly life.
  + We should also find comfort in knowing that our soul’s separation from our body is only temporary. We have the encouragement that they will one day be reunited in glory. The body that was once ravaged by sin will be transformed to a perfect and incorruptible body.
* From now on I will look upon the death of a fellow believer **not only** as a glorious release of his or her soul to be with the Lord, **but also** as the release of his or her body from this life of pain to a time of rest and sleep, awaiting the call of the Lord to rise from the grave.

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**What if there is no resurrection of the dead?**

* Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior love to mock Christians and ask, “what if you’re wrong? What if there is no resurrection of the dead?”
* First of all, we are not wrong. God’s perfect, infallible and inerrant word teaches and promises our resurrection to eternal life.
* But if we were wrong to believe in Jesus as our Savior, Paul eloquently tells us the result in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 . . .

***1 Corinthians 15:12-19— 12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.***

* Unbelievers love to scornfully mock Christians and tell us that we believe in a fantasy . . . that **there is no God and no heaven and no eternal life.**
  + But to this I simply point them to the evidence of Scripture. **“Evidence? What evidence?” they reply.**
* **The answer is . . . God’s prophetic word. One of the reasons God has given prophetic revelation in Scripture is to authenticate His word as true.**
  + In fact, God used His prophetic revelation in Daniel 9:24-27 to show me that His word was true. Here was a man, Daniel, who prophesied the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem and His resulting death . . . to the exact day . . . more than 500 years before the event actually occurred.
    - When I learned of the prophecies of Daniel and understood that it is mathematically impossible for someone to predict an event . . . to the exact day . . . more than 500 years in advance, as well as the other many other events that Daniel prophesied, **I learned that God’s word was completely true.**
  + Even unbelievers understand that the prophecies of Daniel are impossible to explain from a human perspective. So what do they do? They claim that they are a forgery . . . prophecies made after the fact.
    - Why do they do this? Because they know the impossibility of their fulfillment apart from being God’s revelation. And, refusing to give God the glory, unbelievers claim God’s prophetic word to be historical . . . recorded after the fact .
* You want further proof that God’s word is true? One word . . . **Israel.**
  + No other nation in human history has ceased to exist on the earth and then been reborn with it’s culture and language intact. And yet, after having been destroyed and dispersed around the earth by God for almost 2000 years, God caused the nation of Israel to be reborn, despite the efforts of virtually every nation on earth to destroy her.
  + Who, but God, could accomplish such a miracle?

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***1 Thessalonians 4:13— But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.***

* Here in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Paul exhorts the saints in Thessalonica **not to *grieve as do the rest who have no hope***.
  + As Christians we live with the ***hope*** . . . the confident expectation . . . of our resurrection to eternal life.
  + The unbelieving world . . . ***the rest***, as Paul refers to them in v. 13 . . . ***have no hope***. By rejecting Jesus Christ as their Savior unbelievers also reject the offer of eternal life. And **without the** ***hope* of eternal life, what do they hold out hope for? Reincarnation? Nirvana? Annihilation?**

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**Our Christian *hope***

***1 Thessalonians 4:14— For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.***

* But, in contrast to ***the rest who have no hope***, we Christians have abundant confidence because ***we believe that Jesus died and rose again.***
  + And because Jesus Christ has risen to eternal life, we also have the confidence that ***God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus***.
  + Those brothers and sisters in the Lord who have gone before us and now peacefully rest in the Lord in the grave will one day be raised to eternal life.
* In addition to the great comfort and encouragement of this passage, I always find joyful comfort in reading the word of Paul on this same subject in 1 Corinthians 15:50-57 . . .

***1 Corinthians 15:50-57— 50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "death is swallowed up in victory.” 55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

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**Exhortation**

* I don’t make an exhortation to the congregation after a message as often as I should. But this morning, in light of the wonderful news of the gospel message of the hope of our eternal life in Christ, I want to ask, “is there anyone here this morning who does not yet believe in Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior?”
  + If there is . . . if there is someone who does not yet believe . . . or if there is someone here who is being moved by the Holy Spirit to faith in Jesus Christ, I invite you to come and speak to me or one of the elders.
  + God has made salvation possible by the blood of His Son Jesus. By His death Jesus paid the price to save us from an eternity in the lake of fire. For those who repent and believe, God gives the gift of eternal life.
  + If you have not yet believed, this is my exhortation to you this morning . . . believe in Jesus as your Savior and be saved.