

The Communion of Saints

1 Thess 4:13-18



Background: The pandemic has brought months of enforced isolation. Loved ones have been dying in hospitals and nursing homes, isolated from family and friends, unable to feel a comforting touch as they pass. These family and friends are themselves isolated in their grief, unable to receive visitors to wrap them in a comforting hug. News had reached Paul that some Christians in Thessalonica had died, probably due to persecution. Unable to be present with those grieving to provide comfort, he wrote a paragraph in his letter to them (1 Thessalonians). This paragraph has prompted much speculation about end-times, including the supposed Rapture. But Paul intended it for comfort not speculation. He ends the paragraph, “Comfort one another with these words.”

Sermon Text: 1 Thess 4:1-12 (NIV)

¹³ Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ After 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. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Discussion Questions

1. Preparation

- a. As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out to you most?
- b. What is one thing you hoped to talk about today/tonight?
- c. What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?

2. Sermon questions (pick 3)

- a. We read the Apostle's Creed twice during the service. The creeds are "short-hand" notation of our faith. Read this creed again with your group. Do you have any questions about it? Consider committing it to memory.
- b. Verse 14: Because of what God has done with Christ in the past, we have hope for the future ("big-H Hope" as Lisa shared in the kid's message). In other words, God's faithfulness in the past provides hope and comfort for the future. Where in your life have you experienced God's faithfulness in the past? How does this provide hope for the future?
- c. Bernard said the "old" understanding of the rapture caused damage in four ways:
 - It bred an escapist mentality.
 - It failed to prepare the church for enduring tribulation.
 - It produced a negative view of caring for the earth.
 - It was not conducive for living a "quiet life" (v 11 from last week).
 - Discuss these four views with your group. Do you agree with Bernard's assessment? Why or why not?
 - What are the many practical implications to these views? (In other words, this theology immensely impacts our lives!)
 - Spend time talking through these implications and how your life might change moving forward, according to this theology.