

“Encourage Each Other With These Words.”

✦ **For loved ones passed (vv.13-15)**

✦ **For our eternal reunion (vv.16-18)**

In the name of Jesus, our Triumph for life eternal, dear triumphant saints:

Some people think Christians have a few screws loose. All the lights are on, but nobody's home. One plate shy of a place setting, two cans short of a six-pack, not the prettiest color in the Crayons, not the brightest candle in the labra. In the world's culture of death and darkness all around us, life looks scary and light makes bugs run and hide. So it was for our first parents in their rebellion. So it would be for us if Christ had not sent His missionaries like the Apostle Paul into the world with the Good News of Christ-crucified and risen. Paul was sent by God's own Son even to us non-Jew Gentiles to call us out of our natural-born darkness into the blazing light of God's truth. But sometimes we suffer from something worse than a few loose screws. Call it missing bricks. It happens when adults miss or forget lessons from the Catechism and our Bible Information Class. It happens when God gives your pastor a Bible class or sermon for exactly what you need next week, only you're not here to listen. It happened in Thessalonica when Paul and Silas had to escape in the darkness from a Jewish mob. And when it happens, only one thing can light the candelabra of your heart: **Encourage Each Other With These Words.**

✦ **For loved ones passed (vv.13-15)**

Imagine how distressing it would be if you were a new Christian in Thessalonica all excited that God's Son came to be your Savior, but deeply disappointed when Pastors Paul and Silas had to flee persecution at night. Then comes a letter supposedly from them saying, “You know, your Grandma who died last year is lost. If you're not alive when Christ returns on Judgment Day, you'll miss out on resurrection to eternal life.” Such bogus sources are what modern scholars love for TV documentaries.

Problem was, the letter was not sent by Paul. Right from the start there were upstart preachers jealous of his success who forged letters and paid postage to spread lies. And without the firm foundation of enough solid classes in Christian education new believers were sitting ducks for shotgun scams. We can only imagine how troubled Paul felt for his dear Thessalonians.

That's why this is no insult, even though our English sounds like it: ***“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant....”*** “Ignorant” is not the same as stupid. “Stupid is as stupid does,” but ignorance needs instruction. Bricks were missing from their foundation that could be skillfully placed by a master builder following the lessons of the Master Himself. So His assigned teacher, the Apostle Paul, set to work ***“about those who fall asleep,”*** in order that Christians would not ***“grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.”*** One of the saddest stories I ever read was about a Jewish boy whose grandfather died. With no hope in the Messiah whom God sent through Jews as the world's Savior, the boy's grief had no relief. He had no sure and certain hope to help **Encourage Each Other With These Words.**

“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. 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.” Be confident, dear Christian, **For loved ones** who died in faith and **passed** to paradise with God.

The Bible puts no time between death and facing your Maker. ***“The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”*** (Ecclesiastes 12:7 NIV) Jesus told the dying thief on the cross, ***“Today you will be with me in paradise.”*** (Luke 23:43) Soul and body separate in death – the body to the grave, souls of unbelievers to hell, souls of those who trust in Jesus as their Savior to paradise

with God. Judgment Day is a public announcement of God's verdict by Jesus: ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*** (Mark 16:16 NIV)

If we are still alive at Christ's coming, we can be sure we ***“will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.”*** **Loved ones passed** to glory like our believing grandparents will come back with Jesus first. He will bring them back to reunite their souls with bodies raised and glorified like Jesus' resurrected body – never again to hunger, hurt or die. Therefore, **Encourage Each Other With These Words!** And keep encouraging as God sets a few more bricks in the sure foundation of our faith, eager...

✠ **For our eternal reunion (vv.16-18)**

If there were no second part to this sermon, we would be *Left Behind* like the book series that got it backwards. When Jesus talks about **our eternal reunion** in Matthew 24, Noah and his believing family are left behind in the safety of the ark. Perhaps billions of unbelievers in the pre-Flood world ***“were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”*** (Matthew 24:38f NIV) Millennialists and futurists all trying to beat each other with a new theory find no support for their “rapture” in the Bible.

“Rapture” is not a word used in the Bible. But then, neither is “Trinity.” The concept of the Three-In-One God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is all over the Bible from beginning to end. So we're right in using a word like “Trinity” to say what the Bible says. “Rapture” is not be a bad word if we think of it the way our Lord speaks here through His Apostle Paul in the last verses of our text: ***“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. 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. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”***

No one will sleep through Judgment Day, especially not if they slept through church and Bible class all their lives. Terror is a great wake-up call for everyone not ready. When the trumpet blast shook Mount Sinai with the thunder and smoke of God's Ten Commandments, even Moses was ***“trembling with fear.”*** (Hebrews 12:21) That's why God has used His angels to get us ready for that Day. Only two angels are named in the Bible, Gabriel and Michael. (I'm not so sure “Lucifer” even fits the context as a name for the devil.) Michael is the **archangel** who fought alongside Jesus for the Israelites in the days of Daniel. No hearing aids will be needed when Michael shouts and the trumpet blasts. When the ***“loud command”*** of Christ the Judge empties out all the graves, no gravity will hold our feet as we are raptured, ***“caught up together”*** with saints triumphant in ***“the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”*** No tail gate party in the skyways. Don't worry it will end in a thousand years. No, ***“we will be with the Lord forever.”*** Forever and ever, Amen. And “Amen” does not just mean the end of a sermon.

Think about ***“forever with the Lord”*** to **Encourage Each Other With These Words** today. Will the Stock Market make any difference in that land where streets are paved with shining gold? Won't your 401K or 403B seem like alphabet soup compared to the wedding banquet of the Lamb? Will all the dollars we held back in fear from the Lord's offerings help anything? Will pointing fingers of husbands and wives carry any weight in glory? Satan wants to strip our faith and cement our feet in sin. But let us stand up and lift up our heads, for our redemption is drawing near. (Luke 21:28) Jesus is coming in the clouds with all His holy angels. Today is the day to repent of all our sins and prepare for God's glory.

And oh, what songs we will sing in everlasting bliss! Every voice will be tuned to praise with saints and angels. The shout of them that triumph, the song of them that feast, will break out like cheers in a championship for eternity with God. All the songs from every hymnal and supplement in full harmony will burst forth in unending praise for Jesus. Don't stop bricking in that solid foundation of Christ-crucified and risen. Then you will always, now and forever, be willing, eager and able to **Encourage Each Other With These Words.** Solid and true, ***“forever with the Lord!”*** Amen.