

Diligently Seeking God (Hebrews 11:6)

PRAIRIE VILLAGE CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Scripture of the Week



1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

When the Apostle Paul preached the Gospel in the city of Thessalonica, he was only there for a few weeks before he was forced to leave. Soon afterward, he sent Timothy back to check on the young converts he had left behind, and to report back about their welfare. Timothy brought Paul a good testimony about the Christians in that city. Even though some jealous men formed an angry mob to persecute some of them (Acts 17:5-8), their faith in the Lord and their love for one another remained strong and vibrant just the same (1 Thessalonians 3:6). It was encouraging to Paul to hear that these babes in Christ were remaining faithful while enduring affliction, but it does appear that they were confused and troubled about the Second Com-

ing of Jesus. One issue that concerned them was that some of their loved ones had recently died, and they were worried that they would miss out on the Lord's Return. Paul assured them that, not only would the deceased not miss out on that great event, they would actually precede those who are alive at His coming (verse 15). The dead in Christ shall arise first, then there will be a glorious reunion in heaven with Jesus and all the saints, and so it shall be forever more. There's no reason to grieve over loved ones in Christ who have passed from this earthly realm. Their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life and we will be united again with them if we're faithful until death. These words should bring us great comfort.

Awaiting the Lord's Return

The main focus of Paul's first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica is the return of the Lord Jesus. All five chapters of the book end with a reference to that great, inevitable day. In the fourth and fifth chapters Paul went into some details about what will happen when that day finally comes. He wrote that Jesus himself will descend from heaven, and that it will be a loud and spectacular event. He wrote that the dead in Christ will arise from their graves and those who are alive at that time will meet together with the Lord in the air and remain with Him there forever. But as comforting as those words were meant to be, Paul didn't want to leave them with the impres-

sion that their work on earth was over. Until the Lord returns, we all have some important things to tend to in anticipation of that great assembly in the air. Paul went on to specify some of our responsibilities in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-25. Among other things, we are to *“admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and be patient with everyone”* (verse 14). As glorious as that reunion in heaven will one day be, we still have to learn to live lovingly and peacefully together here on earth. We need to help discipline the undisciplined, lift up the heavyhearted and be longsuffering with all our brethren. We all struggle with problems from time to time

that need to be addressed. While we're here we also must be careful to *“examine everything”* (verse 21). In other words, don't take anyone else's word for what the Bible teaches. It is our personal responsibility to make sure that what we are taught and what we believe is truth. That means we all need to get serious about studying the Bible, because our eternity depends on it. We must also be careful to *“abstain from every form of evil”* (verse 22). Paul wrote in detail about a few particular sins, but he says here to avoid evil in all its forms. If we hope to be ready for the Lord's return we must walk righteously, study diligently, and love steadfastly.