

Have you ever seen those really bright lights that go off in the hallway when the fire alarm has been set off? When I was in college, they had one of those lights in each one of our little dorm rooms. And there was also an ear piercing sound that would blare whenever the fire alarm went off. I remember one time the fire alarm went off at 3 AM. And I woke up and all I could see was that blinding light right in my eyes and all I could hear was that ear piercing sound and I thought, “This is what it’s going to be like when Christ returns.” You don’t usually look forward to fire drills, but you should definitely look forward to the return of Christ. Look forward to the Last Day 1. Because Jesus will give us resurrection life, and 2. Because we will be with the Lord forever.

The Bible passage we are looking at today is from a letter that Paul wrote to some Christians living in a city called Thessalonica. When Paul first came to Thessalonica these people were not Christians. They worshiped idols. Paul says in 1 Thess 1:9 that **“You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”** Paul told them there is a day that is coming, Judgment Day, when the Lord Jesus Christ will appear in the sky. In 2 Thess. it says that **“the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire” (2 Thess 1:7).** On that day God’s wrath and punishment for sins will come. The Thessalonians, like most Greeks of that time, had committed a lot of sexual immorality and Paul told them **“the Lord will punish all those who commit such sins.” (1 Thess. 4:6).**

But Paul also told them that the same Lord Jesus Christ also died on the cross to take away the guilt of every single one of their sins. And for those who trust in Jesus for forgiveness the Last Day will not be a day of wrath but a day of joy. For those who repent of their sins and turn to Jesus for forgiveness, the Last Day is not a day to be scared of but a day to look forward to. 1 Thess. 1:10 - **“We wait for God’s Son from heaven – Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath.”**

Paul also told the Thessalonians that three days after Christ died, he was raised from the dead with a glorious resurrection body and that when Christ returns he will glorify our weak and feeble bodies to be like his glorious body. C.S. Lewis once said, “Take the lowest, poorest Christian on earth. If you were to see him after Jesus comes back and gives him a glorious resurrection body, if you were to see him then, you would be tempted to fall down and worship that Christian.” That’s how glorious believers will be when Jesus comes back to transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body.

The Thessalonians believed Paul. They turned to Jesus for forgiveness and they couldn’t wait for the Last Day. They were genuinely excited for what Paul called “the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” But then a crisis happened. A few of the Thessalonian believers died. And they thought “Oh no! Now they are not going to be here to witness Jesus appearing in glory!” They were so sad not only because they missed their friends but also because their friends were not going to be alive to see Jesus come back!

And Paul writes to them and says “No, they are not going to miss out on Jesus coming back. They’re just going to be on the other side. Instead of being here on earth they will be coming along with Jesus.” Paul writes, **“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. 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.” (1 Thess 4:13-14).**

When a believer dies, his soul goes to heaven to be with Jesus. And when Jesus comes back, he will bring all the believers along with him. **“God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.” (1 Thess 4:13-14).** Your believing loved ones who have died are not going to miss a thing on the Last Day. The only

difference is, instead of being down here on earth with you, they will be accompanying Jesus as he comes down from heaven.

And then Jesus will join their souls back together with their bodies and even if their body has been in the grave for a long time, Jesus will transform their bodies and raise their bodies as glorious resurrection bodies. **“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.” (1 Thess 4:16)**

There is something about the Thessalonians’ love for the Last Day that makes me really look forward to it. As I was writing this sermon this week I was thinking to myself, “Maybe just maybe it will happen within my lifetime. Maybe I’ll actually be on earth to witness the return of the Lord Jesus. What if it happens in my lifetime?” But the point of this passage is that even if I die before then, I’m not going to miss a thing because Jesus will bring me with him and then reunite my soul with my body and give me a glorified existence and a resurrection life. Do you long for that day? I do.

The other reason we should look forward to the Last Day is that we will be with the Lord forever. **“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.” (1 Thess 4:17)** So when Jesus comes back dead believers are going to rise and join the believers who are still alive and then we will all go to meet the Lord in the air.

As a pastor I’m very often with people as the time draws near for Jesus to take them home to heaven. And they always say two things. They want to see their family and they want to see Jesus. And this passage supports both of those things. When Christ returns we will be reunited with our believing loved ones. It says, **“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” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).** Believers never say good bye to each other for good because we will all be reunited around the throne of Jesus Christ.

But as great as it will be to be reunited with our loved ones, that won’t be the best part about heaven. No, whenever the people in the Bible talk about heaven, overwhelmingly there is one thing they are looking forward to the most and that is: to be with Christ. In Philippians the Apostle Paul said, **“I desire to depart and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23).** And in our passage he says, **“And so we will be with the Lord forever.” (1 Thess 4:17).** The best part about heaven will be that Jesus is there.

You have to remember that the Bible in many places says that Jesus is God. The Bible says that the Lord Jesus Christ is your Creator. So when you see the face of Jesus you will be looking into the face of your Creator. Human beings are meant to be with their Creator. In fact before Adam and Eve fell into sin the Creator would walk with them in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day. Sin separated God and humans but when Jesus returns you will be reunited with your Creator.

We usually call the day when Jesus comes back, the Last Day. But in Germany, they don’t call it the Last Day. In Germany when they want to talk about the day of Christ’s return they don’t call it the Last Day, they call it, *Der Jüngste Tag*. In the word *Jung* you can hear the English word, “Young.” “The Youngest Day” or the *First* Day. We call it the Last Day, but the German expression is the *First* Day. And that puts the emphasis where it belongs, on the joyous new beginning. When Jesus comes back it will be the end of sin and death. But in a deeper sense it will be the beginning of a rich and full and eternal life. Amen.