

2. September 2019 “The coming of the Lord”

1. Thess, 4:13-17

We want you to be quite certain, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, to make sure that you do not grieve for them, as others do who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that in the same way God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

We can tell you this from the Lord's own teaching, that we who are still alive for the Lord's coming will not have any advantage over those who have fallen asleep. At the signal given by the voice of the Archangel and the trumpet of God, the Lord himself will come down from heaven; those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise and only after that shall we who remain alive be taken up in the clouds, together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. This is the way we shall be with the Lord for ever. With such thoughts as these, then, you should encourage one another.

In the early days of Christianity, including in the community of Thessanoliiki, there was obviously an expectation that the Lord would soon return to the last judgment. Thus the whole life should be concentrated, because the orientation towards the Second Coming of the Lord puts the whole existence in a positive attention and vigilance.

This is similar to the integration of our death into our lives, which for us Christians means the final encounter with the Lord. Such an attitude will make us wise to use the time given to us to serve the kingdom of God and to be prepared for the final encounter with the Lord in the death.

We are not left in ignorance of the death like those people described in the text by the Apostle who have no hope. This means disbelieving people for which death remains something incomprehensible, which with all its force can unexpectedly end life and leave other people stunned, such as the death of close and loved ones.

The question of what will be after death remains unanswered for these people and remains in a darkness and cannot give them any comfort. This shows more clearly how important it is to proclaim the last things of faith to

people, so that they have hope and learn to understand life and death in the dimension of faith. Even today, there are many unbelieving people, and not a few, who have erroneous or imperfect ideas about death and eternal life, and therefore cannot have the right hope.

Today's text speaks of the rapture of the faithful who are on earth when the Lord returns. The words of the Apostle could indicate that Paul himself believed that he would still experience the Second Coming in his lifetime: *"that we who are still alive for the Lord's coming will not have any advantage over those who have fallen asleep"*

But this, although at certain times was strongly believed to be very close and led to so-called chiliastic movements, has not yet been done. But this should not confuse us believers, for the Lord has expressly said that we do not know the time and hour of His return, but that we should interpret the preceding signs: *"But as for that day and hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, no one but the Father alone."* (Mat 24: 36)

If the Lord does not yet return, this is not a omission, but according to Peter 9 it says: *"The Lord is not being slow in carrying out his promises, as some people think he is; rather is he being patient with you, wanting nobody to be lost and everybody to be brought to repentance."*

The Lord's intention is therefore to save people and to offer all future generations the possibilities of salvation. So people should learn about the glory of Eternal Life that in eternity we will be united with God and the angels and saints in all joy. But it is also important for them to know that there exists also an eternity that is separated from God and means torment for man.

The great questions of life and death have received a true answer through true faith in Christ. Just as the Lord died and rose again, so will it be with us. Whether we are among the people who are on earth when Jesus comes back we do not know. That is not the decisive factor either. It is important that we follow the words of Titus 2:11-14 and that the Lord finds us prepared:

"You see, God's grace has been revealed to save the whole human race; it has taught us that we should give up everything contrary to true religion and all our worldly passions; we must be self-restrained and live upright and religious lives in this present world, waiting in hope for the blessing which will come with the appearing of the glory of our great God and

Saviour Christ Jesus. He offered himself for us in order to ransom us from all our faults and to purify a people to be his very own and eager to do good. This is what you must say, encouraging or arguing with full authority; no one should despise you."