

dead in Christ shall rise first: 17. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

The first verse in the passage shows the problem. The people of Thessalonica were evidently much distressed about some of the members of their church who had died. Clearly it was their expectation that Christ would return very soon. They sorrowed to think that those who had died would not have the privilege of participating with them in that joyous occasion. Paul writes to comfort their hearts and to assure them that this is not the case.

We notice that Paul says that they are not to sorrow "as others which have no hope." He does not say that they are not to sorrow. The Christian sorrows when a loved one dies. A parting from those who are dear to us is always hard, but our sorrow should never be like the anguish and misery that is often manifested by those who have no hope beyond death.

To the Christian death is only a step around the sharp bend of a mountain trail. It is a change from life in the earthly body to joyful existence in the very presence of Christ. Paul shows us elsewhere that the departed go to be with Christ immediately, and enjoy conscious bliss in His presence:

For I am in a strait betwixt to, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better (Philippians 1:23).

Yet their situation is still incomplete. Paul describes it as "unclothed":

For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life (II Corinthians 5:4).