

# “Foundation for Resurrection Hope”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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SERMON 1949

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Our sermon text is from 1 Thessalonians 4:14, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

With the arrival of the third-last Sunday in the church year, the lectionary turns the focus to our Lord’s return on the Last Day. This topic is a uniquely Christian teaching, which serves to both warn and comfort. **Today’s Holy Gospel** teaches us that after a time of tribulation our Lord will return on the Last Day. Believers will be gathered to be with our Lord. The concern of this gospel reading is that believers would not be led astray by false christs and false prophets. **Today’s Epistle** speaks of those believers who have died before the Lord’s return. St. Paul explains that they will not be at a disadvantage because of their death. Their souls are already enjoying eternal bliss. When Christ returns, their bodies will rise from the dead. Furthermore, St. Paul describes their death as a temporary sleep from which they will awaken on the Last Day.

**The Scriptures teaches us that the return of our Lord is to be a source of great comfort and joy for believers.** The church desires the return of her Lord, because it will be the inauguration and consummation of her marriage feast. Her sinful nature will be destroyed. Sin and the temptation to sin will cease. The final tears will be wiped away never to flow again. Time will cease and our enjoyment of eternal life will commence.

**The Greek word Maranatha**, made up of two more ancient Aramean words, was often used by the early Christian church in her liturgies and songs. When translated, Maranatha means, “O Lord, come,” but like the Hebrew words Alleluia and Amen, it was often left untranslated. **1 Corinthians 16:22-24** says, “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. {*Maranatha!*} O Lord, come! <sup>23</sup>The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. <sup>24</sup>My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

**Chapter 10 of the Didache**, an early Christian writing probably written between 65 and 80 A.D., includes the word maranatha in a pre-communion prayer. This prayer is a record of the church’s great expectation and desire for the Lord’s return. I quote, “<sup>5</sup>Remember, Lord, thy Church, to redeem it from every evil, and to perfect it in thy love, and gather it together from the four winds, even that which has been sanctified for thy kingdom which thou hast prepared for it; for thine is the kingdom and the glory forever. <sup>6</sup>Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to the Son of David. If anyone is holy let him come (to the Eucharist); if anyone is not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen.”

**The ending of the book of Revelation**, the last of book of the Holy Scriptures

concludes with Jesus' promise to return and the church's response. Revelation 22:20-21 says, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! <sup>21</sup>The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

I mention all of this because it would seem that **21<sup>st</sup> century Christianity has forgotten about her Lord's return.** We have become like the Old Testament people who were waiting for Moses to come down from the mountain. It would seem that the church has said, "As for this fellow, Jesus, who promised to come back again, we do not know what has become of Him. Come make us gods that shall go before us."

Alright, maybe we haven't completely forgotten about our Lord, but **the teachings concerning the Last Day and the resurrection from the dead have ceased to become a foundation for faith.** At the very least, the doctrine of the resurrection and the Last Day are seldom mentioned in the church. St. Paul says in today's Epistle that believers ought to comfort each other with the teachings of the Last day and the resurrection from the dead. Many have found that they don't need this comfort, or at least they don't find these doctrines to be comforting.

Why is that? **We have become comfortable with this world** and we don't look for a world to come. False prophets have made us golden calves, so that we are content. We have sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. We don't really need our Lord's return anymore. We don't mourn our sinful thoughts and desires, and so we don't cry out for a Savior to rescue us. Things don't seem so bad here, and thus we don't want a maranatha. Earth is our home, and we aren't ready to leave this sinful world behind. We are content to eat and drink and be merry here; no rush to attend the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom. Today's gospel says that we are not to go back into the house to take anything with us. But we have so many nice things in our houses and they make our sinful stay so comfortable.

On the other hand, what I have found is that **there are times in which the curtain is drawn back and we realize that the real questions in life still need answers.** The movies don't present real life. The sitcoms are staged with laugh tracks so we know when to laugh. But even supposedly happy events, may not make us happy. The reality shows aren't real, are they? The actress which appears to have it all together commits suicide. The man who plays the perfect father on TV, gets a divorce in real life. Sometimes you can't even tell what the correct decision in life is. Bad guys don't wear black and good guys don't wear white. You may not like either choice. More than that, if you have been convinced that your team always has it right, then be prepared to be shocked when the truth comes out.

The abomination of desolation spoken of by Jesus was a direct reference to the **Roman defeat of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.** The early Christians heeded Jesus' words of warning in order that they might not be destroyed. They got out of Jerusalem. Jesus needed to warn them, for the very reason that the Jewish people thought that it would never happen. The Jews falsely trusted that God would never abandon His Temple or His chosen Old Testament people. However, when they rejected the Savior, God did hand them over to their destruction. Idolatry was brought into the holy place and the city of Jerusalem was besieged and overcome.

**What is today's abomination of desolation?** Just consider that thing which you think will continue and can never be overcome? Anything can be taken away in a moment. Everything can change within a twinkling of an eye. An untimely death will

turn your world upside down. The loss of health can leave you depressed or immobile. A natural disaster will change your daily life. Nations can fall by war, as well as by civil unrest.

When you are young, you tell yourself that you will not become your parents. You say that you will never get old or fat or complain incessantly. Good luck on that resolution. It's not that youthful desire is a bad one. You just don't realize how much things, including you, will change. The real questions in life cannot be answered by another kitchen appliance. Another vacation doesn't make life all better. Another surgery isn't going to give back your youth. This world is groaning under the weight of sin, and sometimes the answer is to look for Christ's return.

I tell you that **the abominations have already been admitted into the houses of God.** There is the spiritual liberalism which allows any and every behavior. There is the spiritual rationalism which considers the Word to be in error and trust in man's own reason. The golden calf of this generation which is worthy of all trust is called science. There is the spiritual revivalism which is based on emotionality and sentimentality. God's people are poorly taught, but highly entertained.

I was talking about our diocese, **Eldona**, the other day. I mentioned that we have deliberately organized our church government in a way to discourage the democratization of the church, which has caused much mischief. In Eldona, congregations are not members, only the pastors. However, the congregations are to judge their pastors based on the Word of God. Like the divinely-called pastor, our bishop is not up for reelection. Unless removed for false doctrine or an immoral life, He continues to serve. He examines each of the pastors at least annually. I was asked if that would keep Eldona from falling into error. I don't think they expected me to say a resounding no. The only way we can remain true is through continual diligence and clinging to the Word of God. We must continue to reject liberalism, rationalism and the emotionality and sentimentality of revivalism.

**This world is passing away and so are you.** Our sinful nature desires to take us captive. Our sinful desires want us to go back in the house for our idols. Instead, we need to learn to live in this world, but not be of this world. When the call is made to flee to the mountains, we need to be willing to leave it all behind. Any earthly item can be a false Christ. Any earthly desire can be a false prophet. When we are shown our sins, we need to confess them. **We need to continually direct our attention to the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the body.** Your sins are forgiven and the Lord is returning for you.

Several members have mentioned that the reading of the names of the faithful departed in last Sunday's All Saints' Day service had an effect upon them. It made them think about those people who have fallen asleep in Jesus. It made them consider their own mortality. Those members, friends and family were faithful to Christ unto death. The reception of God's Word and Sacraments are not an unessential and optional activity. Without the church's preaching and the members encouragement concerning the Last day and the resurrection from the dead, we would grow comfortable with our sinful lives.

The resurrection of the dead has its foundation firmly rooted in **two things**. First, **the Word of God declares** that Jesus Christ will raise up the dead when He returns on the last Day. **Second Jesus**, the very one who gave us His Word that He would return and take us to be with Him, **has died and risen again.** 1 Thessalonians 4:14 declares,

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.” These words are of great comfort. His resurrection serves as the foundation for our resurrection. Luther says that we know that we will rise from the dead because “just as He has risen from the dead lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.”

St. Matthew 24:27, “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” That, too, is a comfort. None of us knows when the end will come. **But we do know that Christ will return for those who believe in Him. We will not miss it.** His return will be open and bring all things to an end. We know that if we fall asleep in the Lord, like the thief we will immediately be with Christ in Paradise. And furthermore, on the Last Day, Christ will raise up our bodies from the dead. Body and soul “we shall always be with the Lord.”

It seems that our Lord has ascended the mountain of heaven and has delayed His return. Do not be fooled. **The Lord is not even one day late.** The Scriptures say that He has held off his return in order that He might save as many as possible giving them time to hear the church’s message and repent. The Scriptures also say that Jesus knows about the great tribulation in which believers live. He has shortened those days, on account of His believers, so that we might not be overcome.

Like eagles gathered around a carcass, so let us be Christians gathered around the Word of God. Flee from the abomination, and hold firmly to the true Christ, Jesus our Lord. Listen to the true prophet, who proclaims that Jesus will return again, any day. Build your hope of a resurrection upon the Word of Jesus Christ who died and rose again! Maranatha. Amen.