

The Word of the Lord

An Exposition of I & II Thessalonians

I Thessalonians 4:14-16

Scriptures

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Thessalonians 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

Christianity has a criteria for salvation that no other religion does; it is that for a man to be saved by God, then he must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.

Romans 10:9-10 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.¹⁰For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

As Romans reveals, salvation requires two essential elements. 1. A confession of Christ's lordship over a man's life. 2. Belief, that God raised Jesus from the dead. On these two great spiritual truths, salvation rests, without which no man can be saved.

Understanding this, for God's salvation to be given, it is essential that there is in the penitent, a solid and sure belief, that God raised Jesus from the dead.

It was common in Christ's earthly ministry, even as it is essential in Christ's heavenly ministry, that in order for Him to either save or deliver any man, there was both need, and needs to be belief in His power. Simply put, if a man did not believe in Christ's power to deliver him, then Christ could not.

The record of Jesus healing the two blind men in Matthew's gospel shows us this principle in action.

Matthew 9:27-30 And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us.²⁸And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord.²⁹Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.³⁰And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straightly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.

The first thing notable is that the two blind men following Jesus, both knew and believed Him to be the Messiah.

Yet, as the record goes on to reveal, being aware of Christ's identity and even believing in it, is not the same as believing in Him to do what is by human means impossible.

The Word of the Lord

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, Matt. 9:28

Believe ye that I am able to do this?—The cry, “Have mercy on us,” had implied the request that He would restore their sight. In this case, as in others, faith was the antecedent condition of the miracle.

Christ's question, *Believe ye that I am able to do this?*, refers specifically to Himself.

This teaches us, that it is not simply if men believe something can come to pass, but rather if they believe in the One, Who alone has the spiritual power to make it come to pass.

It is worthy of emphasis, that though the blind men had sufficient faith to pursue Jesus because they knew Him to be the Messiah, still Christ required that they believe in His power to heal them of their blindness. His mercy was available if faith in His power was exercised.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Matt. 9:28

Believe ye that I am able to do this? - To work such a miracle. Though they had followed him and cried after him, yet he required of them an open profession of their faith in regard to his power.

What a wonderful truth this teaches us, that to be either saved or delivered by the Son of God, and receive mercy from Him, faith in His power is necessary.

Ultimately, the two men had exhibited the necessary faith to be delivered by the Lord. 1. They had believed Him to be the Messiah. 2. They had the faith to follow and pursue Him where He went. 3. They had sufficient faith that Jesus could do the impossible, and heal them of their blindness.

Thus, it was their total and complete faith in the Son, that yielded to them a miracle from God. So that when Jesus said, *According to your faith be it unto you*, He desired them to know the primary reason for their deliverance. It was because they had fully believed in His person as well as His power.

Romans 4:19-24 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: ²⁰He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; ²¹And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. ²²And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. ²³Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; ²⁴But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, Rom. 4:21

And being fully persuaded, &c.—that is, the glory which Abraham's faith gave to God consisted in this, that, firm in the persuasion of God's ability to fulfil his promise, no difficulties shook him.

It was Abraham's belief, that God could give him a son, though Sarah's body was barren, that led God to impute to him righteousness. Thus, it was Abraham's faith in God's power to do the impossible that allowed God to fulfill His promise to Abraham.

Understanding this, it is only when men have sufficient confidence, faith, and trust to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, that divine righteousness is made available to them.

By faith men inherit God's promises, even as if they remain in unbelief, they shall be broken off from them.

Returning to Thessalonians we read, *Even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*

Based on the truth that God raised Jesus from the dead, Paul proceeds to reveal even more revelation concerning those who died while trusting in Christ while on this earth. It is that at Jesus's return, God will bring the souls of the saved from heaven with Him.

Matthew Poole's Commentary, I Thess. 4:14

Will God bring with him; and though their resurrection is not expressed in the text, yet it is implied in this saying. By God is meant, as some understand here, the Son of God, who is to come from heaven, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, and who will bring the spirits of just men, made perfect in heaven, with him, and unite them to their bodies, which cannot be done without their resurrection: whereby the apostle gives another argument against excessive sorrow for the saints departed, they shall return from heaven again with Christ at his coming.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, I Thess. 4:14

If the question be asked from *whence* God will bring the dead along with Christ, it must be answered, from Paradise, and the persons brought must be the disembodied *spirits*; for in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 this coming of the Lord with the saints is the signal for the dead—*i.e.*, the *bodies*—to rise.

For those who have believed in the Son of God, and His resurrection from the dead, their justified souls shall return with the Savior, to be clothed with new bodies provided also by Christ's power.

From the grave then Jesus shall transform what were before His people's earthly bodies, to then heavenly bodies, equipped for permanent residence in heaven.

When believers are glorified and given new bodies by the Son, then shall Christ Himself be even more glorified because of the power of God given to Him.

To understand the process of this future salvation, we must understand what three elements make up a man's being.

I Thessalonians 5:23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Generally speaking, when the scripture speaks of what man is comprised of, it simplifies his being as either flesh or spirit, the flesh put for both the body and soul of man. Yet, here in Thessalonians, the scripture makes the vital distinction between the soul and the spirit.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, I Thess. 5:23

All three, spirit, soul, and body, each in its due place, constitute man "entire." The "spirit" links man with the higher intelligences of heaven, and is that highest part of man which is receptive of the quickening Holy Spirit (1Co 15:47). In the unspiritual, the spirit is so sunk under the lower animal soul (which it ought to keep under) that such are termed "animal" (English Version. "sensual," having merely the body of organized matter, and the soul the immaterial animating essence), having not the Spirit (compare 1Co 2:14; see on [2447]1Co 15:44; [2448]1Co 15:46-48; Joh 3:6). The unbeliever shall rise with an animal

(soul-animated) body, but not like the believer with a spiritual (spirit-endued) body like Christ's (Ro 8:11).

Pulpit Commentary, I Thess. 5:23

The "spirit" is the highest part of man, that which assimilates him to God; renders him capable of religion, and susceptible of being acted upon by the Spirit of God. The "soul" is the inferior part of his mental nature, the seat of the passions and desires, of the natural propensities. The "body" is the corporeal frame. Such a threefold distinction of human nature was not unknown among the Stoics and Platonists. There are also traces of it in the Old Testament, the spirit, or breath of God, being distinguished from the soul. Be preserved blameless. "The spirit is preserved blameless at the advent when the voice of truth rules it, the soul when it strives against all the charms of the senses, and the body when it is not abused as the instrument of shameful actions" (Lunemann).

Practically speaking, every man possesses all three elements—body, soul, and spirit—which comprise his being. He has a body of the earth, he has a soul like the beasts of the field, and he has a spirit.

What is unique though in a Christian, someone who has believed upon the Son of God, is that they are given a *Holy Spirit*, a divine Spirit directly related to and connected with Christ's own resurrected nature. This nature is both holy and everlasting. There is thus a distinction between the spirit of man and the Holy Spirit given to men, by the Son of God.

The Holy Spirit, as revealed in scripture, is separate from both the body and soul, and need not and does not die at the body's death.

I Thessalonians 4:15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

The apostle, by using the words, *we say unto you by the word of the Lord*, assures the Thessalonians that what he was about to reveal to them, concerning both the living and dead at Christ's return, had its source in the Lord Jesus Himself.

The gist of the revelation is this, that there is no real advantage to being alive at Christ's second coming, simply because the dead will be changed before the living.

In simple terms, the bodily transformation of the dead, shall be prior to those living at Christ's return, given their new bodies. Thus, at this time, this glorious time when Jesus returns to the earth, to rightfully claim what God has given Him, it shall be more advantageous for the bodies of those who have fallen asleep in Christ, than even those saints still alive at His return.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 4:15

Shall not prevent them which are asleep - Shall not precede; anticipate; go before. ... The meaning here is, that they who would be alive at the coming of the Lord Jesus, would not be "changed" and received up into glory before those who were in their graves were raised up. The object seems to be to correct an opinion which prevailed among the Thessalonians that they who should survive to the coming of the Lord Jesus would have great advantages over those who had died. What they supposed those advantages would be - whether the privilege of seeing him come, or that they would be raised to higher honors in heaven, or that they who had died would not rise at all, does not appear, nor is the origin of this sentiment known. It is clear, however, that it was producing an increase of their sorrow on the death of their pious friends, and hence it was very important to correct the error. The apostle, therefore, states that no such disadvantage could follow, for the matter

of fact was, that the dead would rise first.

I Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

That which shall precede the dead and the living being given new bodies by the Lord Jesus, shall be His return from heaven to the earth.

It is this coming of the Lord in the clouds that Daniel had spoken prophetically about, as referring to the Son of Man.

Daniel 7:13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

Benson Commentary, Dan. 7:13

behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven — One in the shape and likeness of a man, but clothed with such ensigns of majesty and honour, (signified here by the clouds of heaven,) as showed him to be an extraordinary person, (compare Revelation 1:13; Revelation 14:14,) indeed no less than the Messiah, as the following description of him declares.

The scripture here lists three things that shall mark and call attention to Christ's heavenly entrance into this world. 1. Shout. 2. This shout will be the voice of the archangel. 3. The trump of God, which was sounded to mark all solemn events and gatherings shall be blown.

First, there shall be these great sounds that reverberate throughout the earth, reaching and touching each and every one of its inhabitants. This is meant to draw people's attention upward. For then, after the shout and voice of the archangel and this last trumpet of God, Jesus shall appear.

These sounds of heaven, therefore, will give anticipation for Christ's glorious manifestation to the world as both the Son of Man and the Son of God. He shall come in the Father's glory, and the heavenly sounds introducing Him, foretell of His glory and might. Practically speaking, Christ's entrance will startle all the inhabitants of the earth. He shall interrupt all the noises of human activity and communication.

Never before has the earth, the entire earth, heard the trump of God, which also caused the Israelites to shrink in fear at Mt. Sinai, and summoned them to hear God's voice.

Never before has this voice of the archangel, been so loud and dramatic, that not even one will not recognize it as coming from God.

So great also will be this shout that accompanies Jesus' return, that it shall awaken and call from the grave, the bodies of those, who prior to death, maintained faith in the Son of God.

If one should ask why such a public and universal display of Christ's glory, then it should be considered that Christ was first humiliated publicly: He was mocked and put to shame for all men to see by the Romans, the Jews, and the devil. Thus, as open and as public as men sin in this world, and did sin against the Son of God, so shall Christ's victory over hell and death be a grand and visual event in view of the entire world.

All faith therefore both of the Son of God, and those who have believed in Him, shall be proven true, and worthy to be openly declared righteous.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Acts 1:11

(Barnes, Acts 1:11) it is proper that he should come to vindicate his people, and raise them up to glory. Here they have been persecuted, oppressed, put to death. Their character is assailed; they are poor; and the world despises them. It is fit that God should show himself to be their friend; that he should do justice to their injured names and motives; that he should bring out hidden and obscure virtue, and vindicate it; that he should enter every grave and bring forth his friends to life.

(3) it is proper that he should show his hatred of sin. Here it triumphs. The wicked are rich, and honored, and mighty, and say, Where is the promise of his coming? 2 Peter 3:4. It is right that he should defend his cause. Hence, the Lord Jesus will come to guard the avenues to heaven, and to see that the universe suffers no wrong by the admission of an improper person to the skies.

(4) the great transactions of redemption have been public, open, often grand. The apostasy was public, in the face of angels and of the universe. Sin has been open, public high-handed. Misery has been public, and has rolled its deep and turbid waves in the face of the universe. Death has been public; all worlds have seen the race cut down and moulder. The death of Jesus was public: the angels saw it; the heavens were clothed with mourning; the earth shook, and the dead arose. Jesus was publicly whipped, cursed, crucified; and it is proper that he should publicly triumph - that all heaven rejoicing, and all hell at length humbled, should see his public victory. Hence, he will come with clouds - with angels - with fire - and will raise the dead, and exhibit to all the universe the amazing close of the scheme of redemption.

And though this glory is yet future, still it is certain. We know this because all that Paul had revealed, and will reveal, he assures us came from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Galations 1:11-12 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. ¹²For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.