

November 14, 2021

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

“(In)security”

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede

those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

I think all of us know someone close to us who is an excellent gift giver. Someone who always has it figured out, and you've been on the receiving end of one of their thoughtful gifts or have seen the twinkle in the eyes of those who have. I think this is very noticeable because all of us, including good gift-givers, have found ourselves in a situation where we have no idea what to get someone. Giving gifts can be extremely difficult. We often find ourselves in these situations where we want to provide them with something because they mean something to us.

Oftentimes even though we care so deeply for them, we know not what they might need. We'd like to help them somehow but don't really know what I could really offer them. My observations have not given me a clear direction on what they really want. They seem to be put together, have life figured out, and I really am lost on what I can purchase with dollars or offer in service to this person.

Well, you're in luck because with the Holidays coming up especially, I have a 100% guaranteed something that every single person you know wants: REASSURANCE

It doesn't matter if you are young or old, accomplished or just starting to figure out what to do in life, struggling to pay our bills or wealthy, every single person beneath some manufactured shining armor, or studied and concealed camouflage, are very insecure.

We are haunted by doubts about our true value to others and the world, by concerns and worries about our future, by dread about things we have done, or embarrassment or

guilt about who we are. Every day there are things that threaten us, that make us feel bad about ourselves, or look at others as being more put together, more accomplished, got life figured out. Despite our faces which say everything is fine, all of us have fears and a backdrop of doubts about ourselves in some capacity.

We all desperately have a want of someone, even someone random, to tell us some comforting words, something to show us that they're on our side. Something as simple as "Hey, I know that the past few months have been really complicated for you. You know what, I've thought about you since the last time I saw you. I really admire how you do things. Or you work really hard and it's ok to want a break. Just something to quell those thoughts of insecurity and know that someone has faith in us. I would go so far as to say that reassurance isn't something everyone wants; it's something that everyone needs.

So what about Spiritual reassurance? Do we want, do we need spiritual reassurance? Well, I think that we probably need more spiritual reassurance more than we could ever need emotionally. Because I think all of us can be a little insecure, especially in the season of End Times. Especially after hearing last week how the wicked will be turned to ash. All those sinners will be judged and trampled by righteous like dust.

The Thessalonians Christians definitely needed some. The Thessalonians were new Christians who had a pagan background. And they didn't quite comprehend the magnitude and the power of the Resurrection yet. They were worried that the people they knew would never be resurrected. They would never go to heaven because they died before Jesus returned. This also made them scared and frightened for their own deaths because they were sure that if they died before Jesus came back, they would be lost.

What about you? Do you want some spiritual assurance about the end? Judgment day is scary. Because just like we put up a camouflaged appearance when in reality we're pretty scared underneath. Whether you're a lifetime Christian or even a man in front of a congregation in a white robe. All of us have some kind of doubts about what our actual value is. All of us have something that we have done in days gone by that absolutely haunts us; perhaps even if it was a one-time mistake in the time of our youth, it still makes us ashamed that we did it. We all have embarrassment about how I am just a poorly performing Christian when I'm looking around at everyone else.

How does God handle those who are imperfect, who are scared and fearful? Does Paul lambast them for not comprehending the Scriptures? Does he lampoon them for having a weak faith? No, Paul simply gives them reassurance. Everything in this text seeps comfort and reassurance. In fact, there is not even a mention of the things that they are afraid of: There's no talking about where the wicked go, there's no mention of the judgment, Their friends are not dead, but asleep, simply waiting for Christ to return to be reawakened. And not only that, but when Christ comes back, they will be the first ones to meet Christ in the air. So those who have died, and even if you die, you don't

have to be scared. These words are a gift of reassurance for these people who have doubts, concerns, and worries.

That's the difference between reassurance and flattery. Flattery involves a lie to gain some kind of advantage. While assurance is genuine affection to give someone strength to endure. Flattery tells their prey about their strengths, but reassurance does something so much more powerful: It speaks that they have seen the weakness but have only compassion for the person with those weaknesses. Paul didn't lie to the Thessalonians that they were the greatest Christians he had ever known, that would have been flattery, but he speaks down to the things that they are weak in with words of understanding and comfort, that's reassurance.

In a sense, assurance is a picture of the Gospel. That God sees you with all your faults, with all your doubts, and all your fears, and speaks to those. He knows that you are weak, and he doesn't talk about the good parts you have but heals the hurt. God sees that you are not perfect, but he doesn't prop you up on your strengths but goes in to rectify the wrong.

God speaks comfort into our specific weaknesses and uncertainties. In our particular moments of dread, fear, and embarrassment, of the last day, of the end of the world, the Gospel promises speak sweetly in this text: "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."

It's all assurance for you too. There's no mention of what you did that haunts you, or how embarrassed you feel, or how you could be better. The mention is only that you are in him. If you are in him, then heaven is yours. If you believe that Jesus died and rose, then you will be with the Lord forever. That's all that matters.

It won't matter if you are alive or if you die before Christ comes; since you believe in Jesus, you will be caught up in the air to meet Christ. It doesn't matter how weak and worthless you feel; since you believe in Jesus, you don't grieve like the rest of mankind. That's why Paul tells us to encourage one another with these words. They're not flattery; they're so much more important. They are words of assurance. Divine words of comfort are spoken to all our hearts that are so prone to fear. We who are so insecure become with God, in his security.

It will always be challenging to buy the right kind of gift for people you care about. Sometimes people won't get you the gifts that you want. You can be sure that God gives you the gift that you want, yes, the gift that you will always need: The assurance of the Gospel. God be praised for that gift, Amen.