

Comfort one another with these words?

The early Christian church was expecting Jesus Christ to return and establish his kingdom on earth within their lifetime. At the church in Thessalonica (in what is now Greece) when some of their fellow believers died, the believers were concerned; perhaps even alarmed. They thought those who died wouldn't be around to be a part of that Kingdom. The Apostle Paul wanted them to be properly informed so they wouldn't grieve like everyone else in the world. He explained that God would raise dead believers in Christ back to life when Christ returned, just as Jesus himself had died and rose to be alive again. All believers, including those who died and are raised to life will meet the Lord in the air when he returns and be with him forever. Knowing this would be their source of comfort and encouragement.

13 Now we do not want you to be uninformed, believers, about those who are asleep [in death], so that you will not grieve [for them] as the others do who have no hope [beyond this present life]. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again [as in fact He did], even so God [in this same way—by raising them from the dead] will bring with Him those [believers] who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For we say this to you by the Lord's [own] word, that we who are still alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will in no way precede [into His presence] those [believers] who have fallen asleep [in death]. 16 For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel and with the [blast of the] trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain [on the earth] will *simultaneously* be caught up together with them [the resurrected ones] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord! 18 Therefore comfort *and* encourage one another with these words [concerning our reunion with believers who have died]. 1
Thessalonians 4:13-18 (Amplified Version)

When I read these verses, I am struck with how differently we might comfort one another after the death of a loved one. Paul didn't say anything like, "Don't worry, they are already in a better place," or "They are in heaven now with the Lord." Instead he explained that even though the dead believers would rise out of the grave first, neither living or dead believers would be with the Lord before the other because both would be caught up "*together*" (the original Greek

meaning is “*at the same time*” or in other words, “*simultaneously*”) to meet the Lord in the air. The Thessalonian Church didn't believe the dead believers were already with the Lord. Neither does it appear that Paul did either, as he indicated the dead believers would be with Christ after they were bodily resurrected. There isn't even a hint that Paul or the Thessalonian believers felt that the dead believers were already with the Lord in some way. It is telling that Paul would say that being alive at the coming of the Lord was not an advantage as far as who got to be with the Lord first. This is further evidence that Paul didn't think dead believers were with the Lord already in some form and moreover the Thessalonian church mistakenly thought that dead believers would miss out altogether.

Paul calls the death of believers sleep; Because at the return of Jesus they come back to life. It's as if they were asleep because their death is not permanent. Jesus used the term sleep in reference to Lazarus before he raised him from the dead. His disciples were confused with this usage because it was not something that they normally associated with death. They figured if Lazarus had been sick and he was sleeping and that meant he was on the road to recovery, but Jesus had to explain to them that Lazarus was dead.

Understanding why death for the believer is called sleep and the importance of the resurrection of the body are basic yet, key fundamentals of the Christian faith. Speaking to leaders of the Sadducees, a Jewish religious sect that did not believe in the resurrection, Jesus emphasized that God is the God of the living not the Dead. As proof of this he pointed to the future resurrection of the dead patriarchs; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. [see [Mark 12:26-27](#)] He didn't say they were alive in some form in Paradise or in Heaven but that they would be alive again at the resurrection. The hope of the resurrection at the returning of Christ is a central theme throughout the New Testament. The bodily resurrection of Christ is the core belief of Christianity as it serves as a precursor of the believers future bodily resurrection to life again; a life without end for eternity. Without the bodily resurrection of Christ there is no Christianity and there is no hope of life after death! [see [1 Corinthians 15:16-18](#)]

These verses introduce many important concepts. Dead believers are not with the Lord now but, they are not without hope because they will live again at the return of Jesus. This life starts when their bodies are resurrected and brought back to life. If their body is still in the grave then dead believers are not yet with

the Lord. According to popular belief our soul leaves the body at death and goes to be with the Lord. There is no hint of such a concept here.