

LEAVING THE GRAVEYARD

Monday, October 27

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1 Thessalonians 4:16 *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 like walking through cemeteries and reading the inscriptions left on the gravestones. Some are touching; others can be humorous. A gravestone found in Springdale, Ohio says, “Here lies Jane Smith, wife of Thomas Smith, marble cutter. This monument was erected by her husband as a tribute to her memory and a specimen of his work. Monuments of the same style 350 dollars.”¹ The inscription on sculptor John Bacon’s tomb in Westminster Abbey reads: “What I was as an artist seemed of some importance to me while I lived; but what I was as a believer in Jesus Christ is the only thing of importance to me now.”²

This passage in 1 Thessalonians 4 has been a comfort to many believers who have experienced the loss of a loved one. While Christians may disagree on the timing of the Rapture (Latin word for being “caught up”), we all gain solace from the promise that Christ will return for those who love Him.

Like many today, the Thessalonians were confused over the doctrine of Christ’s return. Some believed it would happen immediately and had stopped working while they sat around and waited for the Lord’s return (1 Thessalonians 5:12ff). Others were fearful that their loved ones who had died in Christ would miss out on the joys of the resurrection. Still others were afraid they had missed the rapture all together! Paul writes that when Christ comes for His people, all saints, both living and dead, will meet Him in the air! The wonderful comfort of these verses is that “we will be with the Lord forever.”

Grieving is a natural part of loss and the healing process. When a loved one dies, we feel sorrow because we miss them. But if they are believers in Christ, we need not sorrow as those “who have no hope” (4:13). They are not really lost. We know exactly where they are – they are with the Lord! They are more alive today than they have ever been. And we will see them again someday at the glorious reunion in the sky.

Far from the terror unbelievers feel at the thought of death, believers have hope because Christ rose and so shall we. Someday we will all leave the graveyard never to sorrow again! Union with Christ here means reunion with loved ones over there.

¹ <http://everyuselessthing.com/tag/epithets/>

² <http://www.sermonsearch.com/sermon-illustrations/1355/famous-sculptor/>