November 22, 2026 Pastor Priewe
Last Sunday of the Church Year 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 NIV

It's Time to Look for Christ the King
1) With Informed Minds
2) With Trusting Hearts
3) With Encouraging Mouths

For the last number of weeks, we've been operating under the series, *"The Beginning of the End,"* recognizing that the signs which point us to the end have already been occurring. Today, as we come to the last weekend of the church year**,** our focus switches to *"the End of the End."*

Thinking about "the End" comes with a ton of captivating questions. "When is the Last Day going to be? (Friday, November 13th was the most recent wrong guess!) And what is Judgment Day going to look like? How is it going to work? Where am I going to go, and how can I be sure? What if my loved ones or I die before then? What happens then? And boy, once the questions start swirling, there's no end to our curiosity.

Sometimes those questions are created by details or pictures that come from the different prophecies, and parables, and visions about the Last Day, like from each of our Scripture readings today, or from the book of Revelation, and there's a lot of details and symbols and meaning to unpack in all those different sections. Sometimes we might get the feeling that all of this "End Times" stuff, as fascinating as it is, is kind of like the deep end, like the Trigonometry and Calculus of Bible theology.

That may be partially true. There are details that are hard to interpret, and take a deeper study, but at the same time, God's word also assures us that **"the unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.**" Psalm 119:130. So the Bible isn't only for Bible scholars with doctorates, it's for regular people and can be understood. There's a good principle of Biblical interpretation to mention here: *we let Scripture interpret Scripture by using the simple, clear passages of Scripture to give us the meaning of the harder verses.*

Paul's words here in 1 Thessalonians 4 are one of the simple, foundational sections for the Bible's teaching about Judgment Day and the 2nd Coming of Christ the King. Different than some of those apocalyptic visions and symbols, this is more like the 5th grade math version that helps understand the other more complicated sections. So today, the Apostle Paul points our eyes to the skies in anticipation of the Last Day, and gives us the knowledge needed to prepare us for that day. ***It's Time to Look for Christ the King:*** 1) With Informed Minds, 2) With Trusting Hearts, 3) With Encouraging Mouths.

First, Paul writes to inform the mind because someway or another the Thessalonians seemed to be lacking an understanding about Judgment Day, and it was robbing them of peace and comfort. Paul writes, **"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."** He wanted to make sure that the Thessalonians and us had the right head knowledge to some of those questions that can be troubling if we don't know the Bible's answers. They had questions like, "What happens to those who sleep in death, what happens to believers who have already died?"

For us today, there's no end of fanciful ideas all around us about things like purgatory, or the rapture, and the millennium that cause confusion and false teaching. Roman Catholic teaching depicts believers who have died who are now being purified and working off the punishments of their sin in a place of limbo between here and heaven. On the other end of the spectrum, the best-selling "Left Behind" books and the movies depict a secret second coming, a rapture, where believers suddenly vanish from the earth, and then a great period of tribulation takes place, and then a visible 1000-year reign of Christ with the saints here on this earth, and then the final judgment still coming after that. It ends up being 3 or 4 comings of Christ, and there's all kinds of variations even within that system.

So we too might have questions similar to the Thessalonians or different modern questions that come from these twistings of the truth. Like "Do believers really have to go to purgatory to work off their guilt? Or if we're still around here on earth, do we have to worry about getting "left behind?"

Before curiosity kills the cat, let's let Paul set the record straight with clear, simple words. "**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."** Those who have died with faith in Christ, their souls are already with Christ in heaven. They've already crossed over from death to life. Believers already have the verdict, so to speak, which is the salvation purchased for them by the blood of Jesus. They already get to see his face, and the bliss of heaven the moment they died with faith in Christ.

When Jesus returns, he's going to bring their souls back with him. **"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. 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.**

On the day Jesus Christ returns, there will be nothing secret or hidden. His presence will be announced by trumpets and angels. And the souls of the dead in Christ will not be sprung from purgatory, but will be brought back from heaven along with Jesus to be reunited with their bodies, which the Lord will call out of their graves and the dust of the earth (yes, even if they were cremated). So the dead in Christ will rise first, their glorified bodies now reunited to their souls.

"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." Believers who are still living when Judgement Day comes won't need to have their bodies reunited to their souls because physical death never separated the two, but they'll wait their turn for a brief moment while the dead in Christ rise first. Then on this one, single, great and glorious day, all believers, both those who had died and those who were still living, will be caught up together to meet Christ the King in the clouds. **"And so, we will be with the Lord forever."**

Here's the information that Paul gives us so that we can lift up our eyes to look for Christ the King, **1) with informed minds.** And because God tells us what to expect, what to wait for and watch for, then we can wait and watch with certainty, **2) with trusting hearts**, even in the face of a day that seems so scary like Judgment Day.

The idea of Judgment Day is one that rightly strikes a sense of fear into our sinful flesh, because it's the day we will meet our maker, the Ancient of Days, with thousands upon thousands of angels attending him, and he's white as snow because he's holy, and there's a river of fire flowing from his throne, and the court is called to session and the books are opened. All of that is meant to portray the glory and holiness and justice of the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth, before whom every knee will bow on that day whether they like it or not.

And on that day the books will be opened. (Daniel 7:12) We shudder to imagine having the record of every sin we've ever committed recounted and judged for all to see. Yet that thought is only useful insofar as it instills a holy fear that drives us to repentance beforehand so that we are not found to be unbelievers on that day, those to whom the King will say, **"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt 25:41** And then the King will recount their sins, even things that didn't seem so bad. **"I was hungry and thirsty and you gave me nothing. You didn't clothe me or visit me."** It will be held against those without faith, we can't afford to be found on the wrong side of that day.

But notice how emphatically and positively Paul expresses the way that believers get to look forward to that day. Not with unbridled grief about whether our loved ones are lost, nor with hopelessness about whether or not we ourselves will be saved, nor in terror about the books being opened. No, Paul proclaims with confidence, **"We believe that Jesus died and rose again**—the foundation of our faith, and since he rose—**so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep. And we too will be with the Lord forever."**

The promises of God declare what will be true for believers on the great Day of Judgment, and so our hearts need not waver or shudder. Instead we look for Christ the King 2) with trusting hearts. Jesus Christ, who died and rose, his life counts for mine, and he has paid for my sins! We trust Jesus' very own words, **"At that**

time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:28). We don't have to fear that day nor what's in those books because the Lord has promised us that he will remember our sins no more, because he has forgiven them and wiped them away. (Jeremiah 31:34) And there's another book that will be opened, the Lamb's Book of Life, with the names of all those he has chosen and redeemed!

By his grace, the King will say to his beloved flock, **"Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." (Matt. 25:34)** Then he'll actually recount our good deeds, which didn't earn our way into heaven, but gave evidence that we belonged to him. And finally, we'll be with the Lord forever. These are the promises we trust with all our hearts.

To close today, the Apostle Paul gives one last piece of instruction about what to do with all this knowledge. **"Therefore, encourage one another with these words."** (1 Thess. 4:18) Dear friends in Christ, you whose minds are informed and whose hearts trust the promises of God, you possess a treasure trove of hope, and peace and joy to bless one another with—to inform those who have no idea what happens on Judgment Day, so that they can be ready. And to comfort those who mourn with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

When a husband stands over the casket of his beloved wife, or a parent over their dear child, you can steady the knees and the hearts that give way. **"Jesus will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in him. And we too will be with the Lord forever."** And all this isn't something we just keep tucked in our back pocket for the very end, we rely on it now, we trust it daily, and we speak it whenever we have opportunity—at the graveside, the bedside, or with a friend who needs a true friend. Between now and the end, *it's time to look for Christ the King, 1) with informed minds, 2) with trusting hearts, 3) and with encouraging words.* Amen.