

ISSUE

19.20

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

May 14,
2017

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon

Ryan Ferguson

Arend Gressley

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Brady McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Rusty Scott

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



“Not Dead, But Sleeping”

By Kyle Pope

While Jesus was upon the earth the gospel of Matthew records a powerful statement He made just prior to raising a young girl from the dead. Her father came to Jesus declaring, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay **Your hand on her and she will live**” (Matt. 9:18, NKJV). As Jesus went to the house where the little girl’s body lay there was a crowd of people mourning for her. The text tells us, “He said to them, ‘Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.’ And they ridiculed Him” (Matt. 9:24). A profound doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ is articulated with these words. Jesus teaches us that death is not the end—it is merely *sleep*.

This truth runs throughout Scripture, but it is especially clear in Paul’s first letter to the church in Thessalonica. Near the end of the epistle Paul writes, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). Like the crowd mourning the little girl, death brings sorrow to the family and friends of those who pass away. But like Jesus, Paul says those who die are not gone—they have simply “fallen asleep.” Is Paul speaking metaphorically? Is he talking about sleep in some spiritual sense? No. The next verse connects it with Jesus’ death and resurrection. He

writes, **“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus”** (1 Thess. 4:14). Paul says the physical death and bodily resurrection of Jesus served as evidence that informs us about our own nature. The fact that He lived again after death foreshadows the promise that when He returns He will “bring with Him” those described as those who “sleep in Jesus.”

Again, Paul isn’t talking about some spiritual “sleep.” This is contrasted with those who are physically alive. Paul continues,

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep” (1 Thess. 4:15). Those who “are asleep” are not those who are physically “alive and remain”—those who “sleep in Jesus” have died physically. Will they miss out on the blessings of the Lord’s return? No. When Jesus returns the dead will return also. But, in what sense will Christ bring them “with Him” when He returns? Paul continues, **“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first”** (1 Thess. 4:16). The “dead in Christ” are those who “sleep in Jesus.” How will He bring them “with Him” when He comes? They will “rise first.” Is Paul talking about some type of spiritual resurrection? No. Nothing about Jesus’ physical death and bodily resurrection relate to a spiritual resurrection or simply the revival of a cause. Paul, like Jesus, tells the saints in Thessalonica that their brothers and sisters in Christ who have died are “not dead” (in one sense) “but sleeping.”

The dead will not miss out. They are not gone. Their life is not extinguished. Paul continues, “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17). Those in Christ can look forward to a grand reunion with those who have passed away in Christ. The living, together with the “dead in Christ” who have risen will be “caught up together” to meet the Lord. The Bible doesn’t ever teach a concept of “The Rapture” (as the world teaches it), but at the Lord’s return His people with the resurrected saints will be “caught up” with **“them in the**



air.” This is not describing events before some imagined earthly kingdom. It is not describing our fellowship with one another in the church. When this happens God’s people are promised a time when “we shall always be with the Lord.” In this life we can separate ourselves from fellowship with God at any time we choose to reject Him. That will not be the case in the age to come. Paul ends by urging them to “comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4: 18). What a comfort it is to know that though life may pass from our body we need not fear. When it happens we will not be “dead, but sleeping.”

In the next chapter, however, Paul uses the figure of sleep in a different way. After comforting the saints with a lesson on the Lord’s return and our own hope of resurrection he addresses the question of timing. When will all of this happen? He writes, **“For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night”** (1 Thess. 5:2). Jesus used this wording in His discourse with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. After talking to them about the destruction of Jerusalem and His final coming, He warned, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come” (Matt. 24:42). He then compares it to a thief coming in the night (Matt. 24:43), concluding, “So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Matt. 24:44). Paul cites the Lord’s very teaching in his words to those in Thessalonica. When will this happen? We don’t know—it’s like the coming of a “thief in the night.” Paul continues, **“For when they say, ‘Peace and**

safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (1 Thess. 5:3). If we live our life imagining that all is “peace and safety” but never consider our accountability before God we are not following the Lord’s charge to “watch” and “be ready.” Paul urges Christians not to make that mistake. Christians must be “sons of the light” and “sons of the day”—not living “in darkness” lest this day over take us “as a thief” (1 Thess. 5:4-5). What are we doing if we don’t heed that advice? What is our condition if we are not ready? Paul writes, **“Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober”** (1 Thess. 5:6). In what sense does Paul say in this verse that some “sleep”? Is he talking about physical death? No. This is a charge *not* to sleep. The sleep of death is not a matter of choice. Paul is talking about those who are liv-



ing, but who are unwilling to “watch and be sober.” They are not living their lives prepared to stand before God. In their blind unwillingness to be ready for the Lord’s return, they (in a different sense) are “not dead, but sleeping.”

What is your condition today? Perhaps you have avoided thinking about your own mortality not knowing what lies beyond this life. Jesus offers the

only source of true comfort and assurance after death. To die in Christ is not a fearful thing. John wrote, “**Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them’**” (Rev. 14:13). If you are obedient to the gospel you need not fear. If death comes before the

Lord’s return you can take comfort in the promise, you will not be “dead, but sleeping.” On the other hand, if you avoid preparing yourself for the Day of Judgment through fear or indifference, you may tell yourself you are truly living while stumbling through life with your eyes closed to its inevitable realities. In such a case you are “not dead, but sleeping” through the moments of life that the Lord has given you to prepare for His return. If so, we urge you “Wake up, O sleeper” don’t linger in the spiritual death of separation from God—“**rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you**” (Eph. 5:14).



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**We are so glad that you joined us today.
Please come again.**

● **Let us know if you have any questions.**