

THE WALKING DEAD IN CHRIST WILL LIVE
Dead in sin but alive in Christ -- Don't grieve, believe!
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

TEXT: *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 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. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till 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. 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. Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

"The Walking Dead..." The TV series is very popular. The concept of dead men walking about with some sort of force that animates their dead bodies has made this TV show very popular. I've not watched the show because the ads promoting it are just too ghoulish for me. That's not for me.

However, an analogy can be drawn from our culture's obsession with zombies and dead men walking about. Scripture reveals something that no one knows unless he knows what Scripture says and believes it. This revelation is that all humans ever conceived are born dead, spiritually. They have body and soul, but are spiritually dead. That's why Jesus, in such simple terms, emphasized: ***I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*** Jn 3.

Following ancient church tradition, today is our celebration of All Saints' Day. While millions of young Americans walked about dressed as spooks and zombies begging for candy on that "Hallowed Evening" known as Halloween, the ancient Christians prepared for November 1st which was a sacred remembrance of their loved ones in heaven. Today's Epistle Lesson from the Revelation paints the picture of what is now going on in heaven as we wait for the coming of the Lord: ***... they are before the throne of God ... Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. ... For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ... And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*** Re 7 From Paul's letter to the Thessalonian Christians we also celebrate these truths: **THE WALKING DEAD IN CHRIST WILL LIVE! Dead in sin but alive in Christ; Don't grieve, believe!**

Like us, the Thessalonian congregation knew and believed in Jesus. But they had another question: What if I die before Jesus comes again on the Last Day. They believed in Jesus and that He would soon return. But enemies of the Gospel had driven their pastors out of town before they could give them a thorough instruction in such matters. So they sent a letter to Paul with a question that Paul here addresses: ***Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 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.*** In other words, those who live and die in Jesus are not dead but alive. Their bodies are "dust to dust, ashes to ashes, drowned in the depths of the sea" but their souls are alive and in heaven. The Revelation describes them as those wearing "white robes" before the throne of God.

But when Jesus returns, their souls will come with him, and by the power of God, their souls will re-enter their bodies, resurrected from dust and ashes, and, as the Bible says: *The sea (will give) up the dead that were in it...* Re 20 And then, Paul says: *According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till 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.* You will witness this! If you are dead when Jesus comes, you will be raised to life! If you are still alive when Jesus comes, you will witness the resurrection of all the dead!

You and I are still alive! That is, we are still here, among the walking dead. We live, as Isaiah sadly declared: *Woe to me! ... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips...!* Is 6 Look at the spiritual zombies among whom we live! Then, like Isaiah, look yourself into the mirror of God's perfect law. With Isaiah we too must cry out: *Woe to me! ... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips.. !* Is 6 Paul did an honest examination of his heart and cried out: *When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?* Ro 7 It's called "Original sin" and there is only ONE way to be saved.

Jesus said: *I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. ... I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.* Jn 3 Your baptism was the miracle of the Holy Spirit giving birth to the new man, the spiritual man, the faith in you that is required to believe what Jesus then did to redeem us from our sins. While you and I, Isaiah and Paul still grieve over our sinfulness, we rejoice in what God has made us to be through Jesus' word and promise.

So while we are still dead in sin, God has made us alive in Christ! Don't grieve, believe! Believe Jesus!

The Lord doesn't want us to grieve over the death of a fellow Christian, or over our eventual physical end of life on this earth like those who have no hope. He says: *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again.... Therefore encourage each other with these words.* What are these words of comfort for us who live among the dead but have the hope of eternal life through Jesus' death and resurrection?

Paul tells us: *According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till 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. 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.* There won't be a lot of time to stand before this awesome sight, for *according to the Lord's own word*, God's Elect, the righteous will suddenly be separated from all who despised the Lord, as Paul says: *the dead in Christ will rise first. 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. This is the Judgment, simple clear. As the dead rise, the righteous, and those who believe in Jesus who are still alive, will be separated from those who are left behind. Our glory begins! Again, according to our Lord's own Word, it begins with a public announcement of what is hidden in your heart. We cannot see faith, but the Lord can. Based on your faith in Jesus' blood that paid for your sins and His righteousness that is yours through faith in His name, you will be separated by this glorious ascension.

Yes, we grieve when our loved ones are called from this life, but not like those who like zombies have no hope. We believe Jesus! We have been baptized. We have been fed His actually body and blood in the Supper Jesus himself instituted for us to eat for our ongoing comfort and assurance. We believe Jesus so that our tears are turned to joy. And when Jesus returns on Judgment Day, along with all those who have preceded us in death, our bodies will be raised and glorified. That same baptism by which you were born again by the power of the Holy Spirit also carries this promise, as Paul writes: ***... don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.*** Ro 6

This past week the news was that Pope Francis has declared that the theory of evolution is a fact and that it does not contradict the role of God in regard to the origin of man and the universe. Jesus says otherwise, and Jesus himself was there. If the Pope is correct, then Jesus is not and then what can we ever trust coming from the mouth of Jesus? But if Jesus is correct and His Word is indeed true, then we have every reason to rejoice for what is about to come upon this world.

The Pope also is among the walking dead, but he obviously is not among the dead who walk in Christ. For our Lord tells us: ***At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.*** Mk 13 Don't grieve, but believe and rejoice! Amen.