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This week at MRC we continued our series in Thessalonians, reaching a section concerning death and the return of the Lord Jesus.

We thought about how Paul outlines the fact that Jesus' return impacts both our brains and understanding (4v12-18) and also our everyday lifestyle (5v1-11).

### Thinking right about the return of Christ (4v12-18)

In this section Paul deals with some misunderstandings that seem to be doing the rounds in this young church. There seems to be a muddle about what happens when Jesus returns, and especially what happens to those who have already died before Jesus comes back.

Paul takes the opportunity to correct their thinking, but also to re-focus their attention on the resurrection of Jesus. He says it's OK and right for Christians to grieve when believers die, but to grieve with hope (v13). The bible uses this 'Hope' word in a different way from how we usually use it. Hope in this context is firm and steadfast because it's based on a sure foundation, namely the resurrection of Jesus. He died and rose again, and so the Christian can be confident that, in Christ, they too will die and be raised again.

For the believer death becomes like 'sleep' says Paul and the thing about sleep is that we wake up. The tomb becomes but a bed.

The actual 'science' of Jesus' return is slightly complicated and couched in bible language and imagery. In v16 Paul says Jesus will descend - which seems to be the overarching 'direction'. The idea of clouds represents the presence of God

and trumpets and archangels highlight the awesome finality of the occasion. Those who have already physically died will meet Jesus, followed by those still on the earth.

### Living in the light of the return of Christ (5v1-11)

Paul then addresses another implication of the return of Christ, namely how to practically live in the light of it. Jesus is coming back he assures them, therefore what does that mean for daily Christian living? How does it affect tomorrow morning?

The answer is, because he's coming back 'like a thief in the night' namely unannounced and unexpected - well so we're to be always ready. The proverbial 'sorting out our life at the 11th hour' is not tenable because we don't know what time it is!

To illustrate this Paul uses the same imagery of being awake and asleep from ch 4, but tweaks the meaning! To be asleep in v4-8 mean to not live with Christ as Lord - to live as if we're in darkness at night time. Christians though are people of the day who live in the light and so are to live accordingly. Paul urges believers to remember 'what time it is'. If you remember our thoughts from last week when we considered the reality of sinful and messy Thessalonian culture, it makes sense why Paul urges them of this.

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### A few questions to start the ball rolling...

Where have we seen the idea of hope so far in the letter? Are the Thessalonians good at hope?

From the section in chapter 4, why can the Thessalonians have hope? Upon what is it founded? What does it mean to grieve with hope?

How does Paul, using the language of sleep change their view of death? What point is he making?

From chapter 5 how does Christ's return affect their daily living? Why?

What does it mean 'to encourage each other' (4v18, 5v11) with these things? How can we do that?