

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Hope for Loved Ones and Ourselves
1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a series of sessions needs to have access to the "Introduction" article found at the beginning of each series (Bible Teaching #....). The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bible Study Leader:

Worship Time Leader:

Music Sources:

Soon and Very Soon, *The Worship Hymnal*, #599 , CCLI # 11249

Face to Face with Christ, My Savior, *The Worship Hymnal*, #612, CCLI # 33382

A New Name in Glory, *The Worship Hymnal*, #616, CCLI # 71904

1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

Hope for Loved Ones and Ourselves

Focal Text

1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

Background Text

1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5—2:12

Main Idea

Christ's resurrection and promised return provide assurance that we and our loved ones who trust in Christ are with Christ, beyond death as well as in earthly life.

Question to Explore

What hope is there when death comes?

Teaching Aim

To lead the church to testify of the hope Christ offers themselves and their loved ones when death comes.

Gathering together:

Read together a description of heaven from Reading # 607 of *The Worship Hymnal*. Or prepare your own reading using Revelation 21: 1-4; 9-11, 21.

First thoughts:

In *The Worship Hymnal* prepared in 2008 by LifeWay Christian Publications, (for mostly North American and other English-language churches) there is a good assortment of new praise songs, hymns sung several years ago and even some hymns from many years ago. In the section entitled "Eternal Life, Heaven" the songs are hymns from an earlier era. Few newly written songs were available for enclosure in that section of the hymnal. It seems to reflect our modern day avoidance of death. We intend to eat well, exercise enough, and with the help of modern science live into rich old age. We don't need to nor wish to think, sing, or talk about death.

While living in Mexico from 1970-1985 the author noted how often Christian believers there talked about Christ's return. They longed for it to happen. Many believers around the world today still feel that way. The toil, poverty, persecution and uncertainty of their lives make them long for heaven and home. In today's study we join our friends of the church of the Thessalonians in listening to Paul's teaching about the resurrection of Christ and our hope for heaven.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Hope for Loved Ones and Ourselves

Focal Text

1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

Background Text

1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5—2:12

Main Idea

Christ’s resurrection and promised return provide assurance that we and our loved ones who trust in Christ are with Christ, beyond death as well as in earthly life.

Question to Explore

What hope is there when death comes?

Teaching Aim

To lead the church to testify of the hope Christ offers themselves and their loved ones when death comes.

Introduction to your personal study:

Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians has included thanksgiving, words of counsel about living a morally pure life, practical advice about daily living and, in this passage, words of hope for eternity.

It is well for us to remember that although God intended Paul’s letters to remain as his inspired message to us throughout the ages, Paul was writing a letter to friends. He was writing to people who had accepted Christ under his ministry and had continued in their Christian growth as a church. That church probably met in a home and probably had no trained leadership.

Furthermore, Paul’s writing was laboriously done. Many young people today do not even remember the typewriter. Their only real contact with the writing process has

been using a computer where organizing, rewriting, and checking spelling are easily done.

But for much of human history and certainly in Paul's day, writing was a laborious process. Not very many people knew how to read and write. Paul may have had help in writing some of his letters, but others he may have written himself. He was well educated under the tutorage of Gamaliel, a famous Jewish teacher—a doctor of the Jewish law and a member of the Sanhedrin. Yet, it may be that Paul's eyesight was poor as one passage hints. His hands may have become deformed from his occupation of making (sewing) tents. At any rate, writing with poor writing tools on scrolls and other rough forms of "paper", was a difficult process.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the "**Introduction**" article found at the beginning of this series of Bible Study and Worship sessions (Bible Teaching #.....). The person who downloaded this session should have that material for you, as well.

All of this is to indicate that Paul had much to say to his friends and his brilliant mind sometimes ran ahead of his ability to transcribe his words. Thus, he seems to change subjects abruptly at times. If a teaching presented itself to his mind and he wrote about it, he could hardly go back and organize his writing. It stayed in the text as it was written and sometimes he returned to the topic more than once.

The passage we are examining today seems a radical departure from the practical advice Paul had been giving. Yet as we think of how important the Christian hope of the resurrection is, we know that this is not actually a departure, but a foundational part of faith and the final completion of our life in Christ.

Focusing on the Meaning:

Paul is apparently addressing an issue he has talked with these believers about on other occasions. The resurrection of Christ and the hope for resurrection of the believers was a keystone of Paul's teaching. The reality that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ is emphasized over and over by Paul. "**We...are one body in Christ**" (Romans 12:5); "**You are wise in Christ**" (I Corinthians 4:10); "**It is no longer I who live,, but Christ who lives in me**" (Galatians 2:20); "**In Christ shall all be made alive**" (I Corinthians 15:22); "**There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**" (Romans 8:1); "**He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him**" (1 Corinthians 6:17); "**If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation**" (II Corinthians 5:17).

However, early believers and believers all through the ages have asked, "But what will it be like when Christ returns?" The church at Thessalonica may have felt strongly that

Christ would return in their lifetime. As time passed and members of their body died, they wondered what their destiny would be.

Paul himself apparently felt that he would be able to personally present to God the members of the churches he had formed (Colossians 1:28). In the passage for study today, however, Paul stresses that the times and seasons are not ours to know (1 Thessalonians 5:1) and that Christ will come as a thief in the night: that is, he will come unexpectedly (5:2). A further picture of that unexpected arrival is given by referring to the pregnant woman whose labor comes suddenly (5:3). However, the pregnant woman is certainly aware that the baby will come and has made preparations for that event. So we, too, should be ready for the very sure coming of Christ.

Commentators agree that the exact meaning of Paul's teaching of the "parousia" (return of Christ) is difficult to understand. It may be best to consider this passage a picture of the glory surrounding the return of Christ and the sure participation of all believers (both those already dead and those still alive) in it.

"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" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). These words have comforted believers down through the ages. This writer has reason to claim these words various times in the last year alone. The loss of a mentor, friend, and second mother was very painful only a year ago. Margaret visited in our home in August and it was a sweet, sweet visit. But her return to her home soon brought the reality that she suffered from pancreatic cancer. Several hospital visits and chemotherapy and radiation followed before she went home to be cared for until her death. During one of those visits to the hospital, we talked with her daughter who told us of her mother's positive and hopeful outlook. "People come all the time to see her," Bonnie said, "It's just one preaching time, scripture reading time, and prayer time after another around here." Our friend, Margaret, had lived with the Lord for all of her life and the crossover into heaven was not for her a frightening thing.

Whatever the circumstances of our death, the believer does not die without hope. Perhaps one of the unfortunate realities of modern day Christianity is our acceptance of the world's view that we are one religion among many good religions. We sometimes forget that we are a faith with hope. Paul's transition in 1 Thessalonians from his understanding of the everyday essentials of the Christian life to the glory of Christ's return is not such a huge transition if we consider that all we are doing in this present world is fitting us for life with Christ in eternity. If it is not our desire to please God in this life, how well fitted would we be to spend eternity with him?

Verses 14 and 15 probably address the concern of the Thessalonians that people who died before Christ's return might have some different or lesser experience. ***"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."*** "That was a normal way of speaking of the dead in ancient society. In fact, the English *cemetery* comes from the word translated *asleep*. Unbelievers used the word to describe the appearance of the dead,

who look as if they are asleep. Most people of the first century had no hope of life after death; therefore, they did not expect anyone to awaken from this final sleep. Christians used the word, but always with the expectation that the dead would awaken (compare Luke 8:49-56; John 11:11-15, 25-26, 43-44). Thus, Paul referred to those who “sleep in Jesus” as having victory over death because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (*13 Ready-To-Teach Bible Study Lessons, Broadman Comments Jan.-Mar. '97*, p. 92).

“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.” Paul is not trying to resolve the question of whether “asleep in Jesus” refers to an intermediate time between death and resurrection. His point is that the believer who dies is never separated from God. (See previous scripture references where Paul points out our unity with Christ).

Verses 16-17 is a triumphant word picture of Christ’s return. Like any description it still falls short of what the reality will be. **“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.”**

Not long ago, my husband and I watched an incredible sunset. Half of the sky was filled with a glorious red light which gradually lightened with various hues of red and pink and orange. We said to one another, “Christ might return at this very minute.” We watched in awe and took a picture. The picture was, of course, but a faint replica of experiencing the real thing. However magnificent the word picture of Christ’s return is in these verses, it is only a part of the glory that we will some day experience. That is our sure hope.

Verse 18 of Chapter 4 of 1 Thessalonians tells us the reason for Paul’s inclusion of this teaching. **“Therefore, encourage one another with these words.”** In the dark hours of an unexpected or tragic death even the most committed of Christians may need friends and loved ones to lift high this biblical teaching. We must gently remind the one who is left behind and we must ourselves believe that we do not grieve like the rest of men who have no hope.

In verses 4-11 of Chapter 5, Paul reminds the Christians of the watchful attitude we must have if we are to be ready for Christ’s return. We are to be alert and self-controlled. Paul uses imagery here similar to the Ephesians passage (Ephesians 6:10-18) which speaks of the armour of God. Here Paul refers to faith and love as a breast-plate and the hope of salvation as a helmet. Again, Paul reminds his readers that we are to encourage one another (verse 11).

In 2 Thessalonians, Chapter 2:1-12, Paul writes again concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him. Paul warns the readers not to

become easily upset especially if someone says that the Lord has already come. It would seem that speculating about the return of Christ has a certain fascination for some people. Certainly, the *Left Behind* series written several years ago held an attraction for many Christian readers. Some Christians have become so involved in understanding the meaning of Old Testament prophecies, the few passages on the return of Christ in the New Testament and the book of Revelation that they become sidetracked from other more practical studies. They become almost frantic in convincing others that they have worked out how it will happen. To them, a careful study of modern day events bring the conclusion that we are nearing the end of the age.

Paul stresses in this passage that we are not to become involved with these issues, but are to spend our time on basic elements of Christian living – prayer, serving others, sharing the gospel.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:1-12 Paul does introduce a topic which is very difficult to understand. In verse 3 he writes ***“Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for, that day will not come, until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.”***

In the time between the writing of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, the believers in Thessalonica had apparently become more and more interested in the second coming of Christ. Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians which were meant to calm those who were anxious were either ignored or misinterpreted. Some now were indicating that Christ had in fact already returned. Imagine the anguish of the believer who felt that they had missed Christ’s return and his gathering together of the believers with him into heaven.

Paul indicates that the return of Christ has not happen and will not happen until the man of lawlessness is revealed. “There is no identification of either the rebellion or the man of lawlessness at any point in the discussion, and in order to attain any real understanding of the teaching here we must pay close attention to the smallest details of the description” (The Interpreter’s Bible, 1955, Volume 11, p. 326, Nashville: Abingdon Press).

Paul refers to “traditions” in vs. 15 and 3:6 so we may understand that Paul is reflecting the shared ideas of the Christian community. Paul and others were inheritors of the traditions of Judaism.

The man of lawlessness is described as one “who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called gods or object of worship”. Further, he “takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God”.

The man of lawlessness is the very embodiment of evil and through the centuries many have identified evil men as the man of lawlessness. The man of lawlessness was being restrained, but the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.

Some commentators feel that for Paul the man of lawlessness was represented by the Roman emperor and the mystery of lawlessness was the Roman Empire. The “restrainer” is not easily identified.

Other commentators feel that the mystery of lawlessness is Judaism and the man of lawlessness is some leader in that faith, e.g., the high priestly house or some high priest yet to be. The “restraining force” could then be the Roman Empire. (See The Interpreter’s Bible).

What does this say to us today? Basically, it seems that Paul would want us to return to the comforting words written in 1 Thessalonians. Christ will return and he will gather believers unto Himself.

Evil men and women have lived throughout history and live today. We can easily work ourselves into a state of agitation as we try to determine the extent of evil in the world today. A major economic crisis, war in many parts of the world, major religions at odds with one another, Israel an ongoing point of conflict – all of these things make it easy for us to feel that things are as bad as they can get.

Yet most adults have lived their life under the reality of issues much like these. Can we also point to a renewed interest in caring for the environment, positive advance in areas of women’s development and education, young adults who have made deliberate choices against ostentatious life styles, families committed to loving and caring for one another as indicators that the human spirit continues to do battle with evil.

We simply cannot know what Paul was saying to his people in this passage. To become agitated about its meaning is to fail to understand the teachings on living as Paul described in 1 Thessalonians 5: 11-23. We are to comfort ourselves together and edify one another. Do not render evil for evil. Rejoice. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in everything. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesying. Test everything (that is, consider it carefully and compare with biblical truth already known). Abstain from the appearance of evil.

There is a promise and a prayer with Paul’s admonition. ***“And the very God of peace will sanctify you wholly.”***

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

The Teaching Aim written above in your instructions is clear: “To lead the church to testify of the hope Christ offers themselves and their loved ones when death comes.” As you lead the study, stay super-sensitive to those in the group who may have lost loved ones in death who were not followers of Jesus when they died. It is not your place to confirm their destiny without God. It is only your place to encourage everyone to ensure that their own lives are in God’s hands and that they are faithful to share with

others what God has done for them. Don't be guilty of assuming the role of the Holy Spirit. Let God be God and allow Him to sort out eternity.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this session bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Hope for Loved Ones and Ourselves

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

Background Text

1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5—2:12

Main Idea

Christ's resurrection and promised return provide assurance that we and our loved ones who trust in Christ are with Christ, beyond death as well as in earthly life.

Question to Explore

What hope is there when death comes?

Teaching Aim

To lead the church to testify of the hope Christ offers themselves and their loved ones when death comes.

Connect with Life:

Prepare a large piece of paper or a white board with the following title “**Facts Sheets About the Resurrection of Believers.**” As you study the passage, add the following “facts” as appropriate.

Our resurrection is based on Jesus' resurrection.

Christ's coming will be accompanied by a shout, an archangel's voice, and a trumpet blast.

Believers who have already died are with Christ in some form.

Christ will raise those believers who have died first.

Christ will then bring those raised believers and come for those who are living.

Believers living on earth will meet this group in the air.

All believers will be with the Lord forever.

We should comfort each other with these facts.

(13 Ready-To-Teach Bible Study Lessons, Broadman Comments, Jan.-Mar. '97)

Guide the Study:

Review the teachings of Paul in earlier chapters of 1 Thessalonians: He is thankful for their faithfulness; he encourages moral purity and gives a long list of practical ways to live the Christian life. (You may want to access that list from Biblical Teaching 21, #11. You may still have that list from the last time you gathered together).

Talk with your group about what seems to be an abrupt change in Paul's theme. (This is discussed in the **Teacher Preparation** material.

Mention to the participants: This obviously was an important point for the believers in Thessalonica.

Explain: They felt that Christ would return before they died. That did not happen for all of the believers.

Now look for opinions: What does that mean? Create a feeling for the anguish they must have felt in such uncertainty.

Share: Paul answers with the passage in 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18. Have someone read that entire passage.

Suggest that you focus on verse 13.

Invite someone to answer: What is the great teaching here which endures for our generation? (We do not grieve as others who have no hope).

Examine verse 14.

Encourage responses: Upon what is our hope based? (Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him).

Discuss with the group the concept of “fallen asleep” (refer to the **Teacher Preparation** material).

Have someone to read verse 16.

Search out an answer: What will accompany Christ's coming? Give time for comments on how magnificent we can imagine that return to be.

Now ask: Is Christ's return a fearful event for believers?

Request that a person read verse 17.

Follow with this: What will happen to us after the return of Christ? (We will be caught up together with the believers who have already died and will meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever). **Stick with the scripture passage. If someone has been taught details of one or more theories of “End Times”, and believes passionately in their theory, they could expound for hours. This brief session is not the time or place for that discourse. Suggest that, if that is important to the group, a special time should be set up for the study. However, Paul insists that such things should not be seen as important as other emphases of the Gospel story and the Christian life.**

Look for an answer: What is the purpose of Paul's writing this to us? (To encourage one another).

How do we encourage one another?

Read Chapter 5: 1-7.

Seek an answer: What are two analogies Paul uses to describe how Christ will return? (A thief in the night; a pregnant women whose labour comes suddenly and unexpectedly).

Another question: What does this passage say to those who spend time and energy trying to determine the time of Christ's return? (We are not to concern ourselves with times and dates; we are to live a self-controlled, God honouring life so that whenever Christ returns we will be ready).

Complete your “**Facts Sheets of the Resurrection of Believers**”.

Read the entire passage about the “Man of Lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

Discuss the commentators' belief that this may refer to the Roman Empire or to the Jewish religion.

What are some of the signs of the coming of the lawless one? (Verse 9 “in accordance with the word of Satan displayed in counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders” “every sort of evil”)

Verse 10 says “**...and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and thus be saved.**”

Does this verse indicate the ongoing choice to refuse the truth that is a part of the way that unbelievers treat opportunities to believe?

Verse 11 is a complex verse. At some point in an unbeliever’s life, it would seem that the Holy Spirit turns a person over to their own belief system. They are allowed to believe as they choose.

As teacher/facilitator of your study, be aware that this whole passage lends itself to conjecture. Avoid spending too much time trying to determine what this means. There was evil in the world in Paul’s day; there is evil in the world today. We cannot determine who is the most evil and when God will choose to end our existence on this earth.

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the session by and for themselves.

Summarize the teaching of the passages in today’s session:

- 1) Christ died and was resurrected.
- 2) Because of Christ’s death and resurrection and our belief in him, we will always be with Him – here in this world, immediately after death and forever. This reality is too big for our human minds to comprehend.
- 3) We encourage one another with this belief. On Easter Sunday we say to one another, “Christ is risen” and we reply to one another, “He is risen indeed!” We need to say that affirmation to one another more often.
- 4) We must live so that we are ready, at any moment, for Christ’s return. This should not be a problem. Why would we want to be doing something that we would be ashamed to be doing at Christ’s return?
- 5) We are not responsible for the how, when and where of Christ’s return.

Now lead the group to say to one another – **“Christ is risen!”** and reply with the affirmation **“He is risen indeed!”**

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Hope for Loved Ones and Ourselves 1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Comforting Others When Death Is Involved

Youth have a tendency to view death as a possibility only for older people. Yet they know this is not true. Young people die in car accidents, drive-by shootings, fires, war and from disease. What biblical truth from today's lesson would comfort someone facing the death of a friend or loved one?

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Hope for Loved Ones and Ourselves*****1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11****Beginning the Service:**

Sing:

Face to Face with Christ, My Saviour, *The Worship Hymnal*, #612**A New Name in Glory**, *The Worship Hymnal*, #616**Offering:****Praying for the World:**

Approximately ten percent of the population of Egypt or 7.5 million are at least nominal Christians. Ask God to revive and empower His people in Egypt to be faithful, bold, and winsome witnesses who daily share the gospel with those who have never heard. Pray for the lost to be given ears open to hear the gospel and hearts eager to embrace new hope in Christ. Pray for the Spirit to sweep through Egypt calling this generation of Egyptians to complete surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

The Resurrection of Christ**Introduction:**

Although Easter is the time of year that we give careful attention to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, it is appropriate that we emphasize and rejoice in this truth

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throughout the year. It is belief in the resurrection which makes Christian faith unique and Christian hope possible. As we conclude our study about the return of Christ and our own eternal life with him, it is well to examine Scripture passages which remind us of Christ's resurrection.

Matthew 28:1-10 is one place we find this story. These verses emphasize the empty tomb, the angel's message, and the risen Lord. (Read the entire passage)

The empty tomb. (Verses 1-4)

Mary Magdalene and another Mary (See Mark 16:1 where this Mary is identified as "mother of James") came to the tomb about dawn on the first day of the week. They had been there after Jesus was buried and knew that a great stone had been rolled in front of the door to the tomb.

Verse 2 describes the great earthquake and the angel of the Lord coming from heaven, rolling back the stone from the door and sitting on it. The angel is described as having a countenance or face like lightening and clothing which was white as pure snow. His appearance caused the guards stationed at the tomb by the enemies of Jesus to be so afraid they fell to the ground as if they were dead.

The angel's message. (Verses 5-7)

In verse 5-7 the angel spoke to the women telling them not to be afraid. Then he made the joyful announcement that Jesus was no longer in the tomb because He had been raised from the dead. He told the women to look into the tomb to see for themselves. They were then told to go tell the disciples that he was risen from the dead. The angel also promises that Jesus has gone on ahead and that they will see him.

Telling the news about Jesus' resurrection was the task of the women who went to the tomb and it has been the task of every believer since that glorious day. It is a marvellous message – an unbelievable message in fact. Only as God gives one the grace to believe can this truth be accepted and shared.

The risen Lord. (Verses 8-10)

The women quickly ran to tell the disciples what had happened. On the way, they met Jesus who greeted them by saying, "All hail". They held him by the feet and worshipped him. We see very clearly in the words of the Scripture "And they came and held him by the feet and worshipped him" that they fell down in awe, grasped his feet and cried out their joy and worship. The story of the resurrection ought to always engender within each of us that same desire to worship humbly with no thought of ourselves, but only thinking of our Lord and Saviour.

Like the angel, Jesus told the women that they were to not be afraid, but to go tell the disciples that they were to go to Galilee and there they would see Jesus.

Comfort One Another (v. 18)

“Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” Paul’s words to the Thessalonian Christians were based on these words of Christ. *“Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up”* (1 Thessalonians 5:11). The message of the resurrection is one of comfort. The women who went to the tomb were comforted, though overwhelmed with awe, by the fact that the tomb was empty. They were told to share the news of the empty tomb and the living presence of Christ with the others who loved him. The message was then shared with others and on and on throughout the ages.

Every time a loss comes we have the opportunity to comfort one another. But that comfort is based on the sure knowledge that Christ died, was buried, and rose again so that believing we would not face death, but life eternal.

Comfort one another with these words.

Call to Commitment:

An old hymn by Robert Lowry is sung on Easter Sunday mornings in many churches. Have it read by children or youth in a meaningful and dramatic way.

First reader:

**Low in the grave He lay
Jesus, my Savior!
Waiting the coming day
Jesus, my Lord!**

Second reader:

**Vainly they watch His bed
Jesus, my Savior!
Vainly they seal the dead
Jesus, my Lord!**

First reader:

**Death cannot keep his prey
Jesus, my Savior
He tore the bars away
Jesus, my Lord!**

Second reader:

**Up from the grave He arose
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes.
He arose a victor from the dark domain.
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.**

First and second readers:

**He arose!
He arose!
Hallelujah!
Christ arose!**

Ask the entire group to say together these last words

**He arose!
He arose!
Hallelujah!
Christ arose!**

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Concluding the Service:

Sing **Soon and Very Soon.**

Make two copies for use as suggested to conclude the Worship Time:

First reader:

**Low in the grave He lay
Jesus, my Savior!
Waiting the coming day
Jesus, my Lord!**

Second reader:

**Vainly they watch His bed
Jesus, my Savior!
Vainly they seal the dead
Jesus, my Lord!**

First reader:

**Death cannot keep his prey
Jesus, my Savior
He tore the bars away
Jesus, my Lord!**

Second reader:

**Up from the grave He arose
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes.
He arose a victor from the dark domain.
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.**

First and second readers:

**He arose!
He arose!
Hallelujah!
Christ arose!**

Ask the entire group to say together these last words

**He arose!
He arose!
Hallelujah!
Christ arose!**

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