

1 Thessalonians 4:17 || Ep. 1 – The Dead in Christ Rise First

Dwelling Richly Podcast – Series: So Glad You Asked

[lightly edited transcript]

Hey, welcome back. This is Jennifer, and this is the Dwelling Richly podcast, a very special episode—the beginning of a new series called *So Glad You Asked*.

One of the things I enjoy most about being in fellowship with other believers, whether that's in my church, in my friendships, in casual conversations, or even in my conversations with my husband, is working through tricky passages in God's Word or difficult scenarios that come up in life, and thinking biblically about them.

Often, because of the nature of my job and my personality, I get asked questions by people—questions about moral dilemmas, difficult situations, or just things that come up in regular daily life. I love engaging with these questions and being careful to think biblically about them.

I've been working for quite a while on creating a podcast that would address some of these questions, kind of as a special side series. You're listening to the very first episode of that series. It's based on a question I received from a friend of a friend.

I'll go ahead and address this question, and then I want to encourage you—if you've got questions that come up in your thought life and would like my biblical, theological response—I'd be happy to give it a shot. The idea is just “So Glad You Asked”. I truly am glad because it shows me that you care and are trying to think biblically about things.

My response is not a definitive answer, of course. I would never put myself out there dogmatically to say, “This is the exact answer.” The answers I share in this podcast will simply be my thoughts, based on my study through God's Word. They're certainly not definitive. I'll do my best to offer some resources at the end of this podcast. You can find them in the show notes, and you'll also be able to read this transcript on whatever platform you're using. But if you head over to my website, the full list of resources will be there in the show notes at JenniferGRichmond.com.

Under the Dwelling Richly heading, you'll see *So Glad You Asked* as a series, where I'll catalog these messages as I record them.

So, that's the introduction to today's episode, and we're going to kick it off with a question that was asked by a friend of a friend. Actually, quite a few questions were asked, but I'm going to tackle them one at a time. The first question begins right now. Here we go.

The question is: “I read in 1 Thessalonians 4 that “the dead in Christ shall rise first.” But in 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul said that “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” So how can the dead in Christ rise first? I thought they'd already be present with the Lord.”

Well, I'm so glad you asked. First of all, I want to clarify that the idea of “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” is not a direct quote, and I'll address that in just a minute. But let's move into my thoughts and response on this.

First of all, I truly am so glad you asked. It tells me that you're interested in thinking biblically and have a genuine heart to understand things better. I pray that my answer here will help you think things through more clearly and maybe give you some settled ideas on how to think about this important question.

How can the dead in Christ rise first if they're already present with the Lord? Great question. Jesus was very clear on the reality that death is final in the sense that once dead, you do not get to change teams. This is contrary to what the Jehovah's Witnesses teach. They teach an idea called “soul sleep,” where believers go into soul sleep before Jesus'

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second return. The Roman Catholic Church teaches an idea of purgatory, where the dead either suffer more or are purified as they await Jesus' return. But God's Word is clear: when a believer dies, they go immediately to be with Jesus in paradise.

Paul teaches that while we are "away from the Lord"—meaning while we're still alive in the body—when we are away from the body, we are at home with the Lord. He doesn't say, as we often hear quoted, "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." That's a paraphrase of what Paul says. Let me read it to you in context from the English Standard Version, beginning in 2 Corinthians 5:6:

"So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."

So that was 2 Corinthians 5:6-10 to help us have the context of this passage. But then why does the Bible also say that "the dead in Christ shall rise"? Wouldn't they already be with Jesus? Again, great question.

That passage about "the dead in Christ shall rise" is found in 1 Thessalonians 4. I'll read it in context, beginning in verse 13:

"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these words."

Here, Paul is saying that we are with the Lord in the sense that the Holy Spirit is with us, whether we are alive or dead. But when he says that "the dead in Christ will rise first," he's referring to the resurrection of the body. When our bodies die, our souls immediately go to be with Jesus. When He returns, our bodies will be reunited with our souls. The "dead in Christ shall rise" refers to the dead bodies rising to be reunited with the soul.

To summarize: those who are already dead, who are absent from their bodies, will be the first to be reunited with their bodies when Christ returns. Then, those who are still alive at His second coming will also be caught up with Him.

There you have it. I'm so glad you asked that question. It's a great question, and I pray that this gives you some clarity and maybe even opens the door to other questions. I would love to hear from you if you do have those.

I will be releasing these episodes in this series, and I look forward to engaging with you more as you listen and have other questions. Please share them with me, and always know that you are loved and prayed for. I'm so glad you asked. Bye-bye for now.