

We Will Always Be With the Lord

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 November 2017

[0:00] Amen. So I'm going to tell you up front what I really want to say this morning.

We do not have to be afraid of death because our Savior Jesus is risen and he will never die again. He is coming back for us and nothing, not even death, can stand in the way.

That's a reminder that we need over and over again, isn't it? I mean, there's a reason Paul tells us in this morning's reading from 1 Thessalonians 4 to encourage each other with these precious promises from God.

Because it hurts to lose the people that we love. Death is really tragic. And it does cause us to grieve even if we don't grieve as those who have no hope.

Now, I have been reminded of this a lot lately. I have something of a heavy heart this morning. Just found out yesterday that on Friday, a priest that I knew from Wisconsin, he was an administrator at the seminary that I went to, was Elaine's former boss and friend.

[1:38] He died Friday suddenly from a heart attack. And that is after just a few weeks ago when one of my favorite seminary professors died unexpectedly in a boating accident.

And I know it's not just me personally. I know that some of you are feeling the absence of your loved ones who are asleep in the Lord. I want to encourage you and to encourage myself this morning.

And we live in a world, even beyond the scope of our personal lives, that needs that reminder, that encouragement. I mean, just think, a week ago, people were gathered at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas.

As churches gather, someone comes in and murders 26 of them. Now, on a basic level, that sounds terrifying, doesn't it? Our hearts should go out to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are hurting as a direct result of what happened.

They certainly need our prayers. But we shouldn't be afraid. Don't be afraid of death. We don't have to be afraid.

[2:58] And we don't have to grieve as those who have no hope. Because Jesus is Lord and he stands in victory. Now, there are three specific points of encouragement I want us to focus on this morning from our First Thessalonians reading.

First, we don't have to grieve as those who have no hope for our loved ones who have died in the Lord. They have eternal life. Second, one way or another, all believers will meet the Lord when he comes again.

And finally, we have that incredible promise that we will always be with the Lord. Praise God. So please open your Bibles and look with me at First Thessalonians 4, starting at verse 13.

Paul writes, But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do 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. Now, the Thessalonian church that Paul is writing to here had a little bit of a problem.

[4:13] That problem that arises in pretty much every generation of the church of wacky end-time speculation. The Thessalonians were not exempt. Some of the people on the scene were convinced that the day of the Lord had already arrived.

Now, you can imagine how that might have been a little bit distressing for them, right? They didn't know what to expect, or what that meant if the day of the Lord had already arrived.

What it meant for themselves. What it meant for their loved ones who had fallen asleep in the Lord. So Paul sets out to give them correction and to encourage them. Paul basically says, Don't be in anguish about those you love who have fallen asleep in the Lord.

Just as Jesus died and rose again, God will bring those who fall asleep into his kingdom. You can practically hear Paul say, Don't worry.

God hasn't forgotten about them. He's not going to forget about them. He's not going to forget about his promise to come again and raise his people from the dead. They're not going to miss out when Jesus comes again.

[5:27] Now, we might not have the same misplaced fears that the Thessalonians had, but I think we do need the reassurance that we should not grieve as others do who have no hope.

Because it really does hurt to lose the ones we love. We really do grieve. But I'm reminded of what the great Anglican poet and priest George Herbert once said.

Herbert says, Death used to be an executioner, but the gospel has made him just a gardener.

Those we love who have fallen asleep in the Lord, we can say this about them.

Their bodies are sown, but they will be raised imperishable. They will have eternal life, never to die again. Death for those who die in Christ is not an executioner, but a gardener.

Because we have a risen Savior who trampled death under His feet and who now reigns in victory forever for us. So we read rightly in Revelation 14, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.

[6:44] And of course, that might be us one day, right? Will the Lord return in my lifetime or Yours?

Honestly, I have no clue. The only guarantee that we have, pretty much, is that we'll be wrong if we try to guess. But here is the amazing and important thing.

Whether we're still living or we're sleeping, we will meet the Lord when He comes. Which is this morning's second point. We read, 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 perceive 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. Now in case you're wondering, I'm not going to draw out an end times chronology chart using these verses this morning.

[8:01] Because here's the main thing. Jesus is coming back for us, my brothers and my sisters. That is the main thing. He is coming back to claim us for Himself forever.

And nothing, certainly not the minor details like whether we're alive or not, doesn't matter to Him, is not going to stand in the way. So what will happen?

The Lord will descend from heaven with a cry of command. The trumpet of God will blow. And all those who have died in Christ will rise from the grave. And every believer who has ever lived, those who have fallen asleep and those who are still alive when our Savior comes, will rise.

And will meet their Savior in the air. What a glorious promise that is. So again, the Thessalonians were confused.

They thought maybe the day of the Lord had already arrived. But here we see Paul clearly saying, this isn't something that's going to slip by you unnoticed.

[9:09] Have those who have fallen asleep in Christ been raised? Have you noticed that happening? Have you who are left, who are still alive, as well as the dead who have been raised, met the Lord in the air?

Now it is a pretty easy thing to give a yes or no answer to those questions. And if the answer is no, the day of the Lord hasn't happened yet. Pretty straightforward. And here's the reassurance.

We don't have to worry. Jesus isn't going to forget about us. He's not, in the words of Peter, slow in keeping his promise to us. Jesus is coming back to claim us and we will meet him when he comes. Which leads to our final point for this morning, which I want to spend a fair amount of time on. We can be assured no matter what, that as believers, we will always be with the Lord.

What a comfort that is, isn't it? We will always be with the Lord. In life, in death, in eternity, we will always be with the Lord.

[10:19] As I thought on this passage, the first question in the Heidelberg Catechism came to mind. I'm on a two-week streak of quoting catechisms and sermons.

But the Heidelberg Catechism asks this, What is your only comfort in life and in death? The answer given is this. Well, part of the answer given is this.

That I am not my own, but belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven. In fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

I belong to Jesus Christ. In life and in death, my sins are paid for, I'm set free from the devil, and I know that all things must work together for my salvation.

[11 : 26] So I have the promise that I will always be with the Lord. Nothing, not even death, can get in the way of that promise.

I know that my Savior lived the perfect life that I have failed to live. I know that my Savior died the death that I deserve.

I know that my Savior rose victorious from the grave. So what does that mean? It means this. My Savior is with me in life, my Savior is with me in death, and my Savior is with me in the resurrection. Praise God. As believers, we belong to Him, and so we will always be with Him. Now here's a short contrast.

My guess is that in give or take a century, no one living will remember me, maybe not even care that I existed. I don't want to throw all of you under the bus, so to speak, but it's probably true of you as well.

[12 : 38] It's a little sobering, isn't it? The Moravian Bishop Nicholas von Zinzendorf is reported to have once given this instruction to preachers.

He said, preach the gospel, die, and be forgotten. That pretty well sums up my life goals. But the amazing thing is that even if men forget us, our Savior will never forget us, and He's the one who counts.

So do you know Christ as your Savior? Do you know that promise, the promise of eternal life, the promise of victory over death, the promise that you will always be with the Lord and that He will return for you?

And if you know that promise this morning, rejoice with me, brothers and sisters. Rejoice. I'll be honest, it can be pretty easy to forget to rejoice.

Life can be pretty hard. We live in a world where people can be sitting in church and be viciously murdered. We live in a world where just a couple of weeks ago, my teacher and mentor, a godly man and a good priest, went out to sail in the nice fall weather and didn't come back alive.

[14 : 01] We live in a world where each breath could be our last. And that is precisely why our Savior said, Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. Now, let's be clear.

Moth and rust might claim our possessions. Moth and rust might claim these mortal bodies of ours. But moth and rust can never claim the promise that those who are in Christ will have eternal life and will be with Him forever.

We have a treasure that moth, rust, and thieves can never take away. Our loved ones who have died in the Lord have a treasure that moth, rust, and thieves can never take away.

How do we know? We know because Jesus died and rose again and He says so. Here are the words of our Savior this morning.

[15 : 18] This is the will of my Father that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life and I will raise Him up on the last day. He is coming back for us.

Encourage one another with these words. In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.