

Waiting on the Lord

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Preacher: Devin Toh

- [0 : 0 0] All right, well, why don't I pray? Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight. Lord, my rock and my redeemer.
- In Jesus' name, amen. Well, in my life so far, there have been two funerals which have had a huge impact on my life. The first one was when I was in year nine.
- One of my friends was just training in the school gym when he collapsed. And at the time, we thought it was nothing. But we found out two days later that he actually had a blood clot in his brain and he wasn't going to make it.
- And he passed away two days later. And I was pretty young at the time, but I was just in disbelief. This was someone I had known for over five years of my life and someone I played tennis with in high school.
- And I couldn't contemplate what it would be like and what it meant that I was never going to see this person again. I attended the funeral later that week at school.
- [1 : 0 0] And although there was a great sense of solidarity in that moment, there was also just this deep sense of finality. My friend had died and I would never see him again.
- And that realisation hit home pretty hard. The second funeral I attended happened about four years ago, but this time it was my own dad. And he had a brief battle with lung cancer and seeing him get weaker and weaker was just heartbreaking.
- But the strange thing was that even though this was probably the most painful moment of my life, his funeral was different. See, this funeral was filled with confidence and hope.
- So even though the pain and the hurt was real, it was definitely there, there was a true sense of comfort and hope even in the midst of loss. So this is the question we need to answer today.
- What made these two funerals different? Why was one coloured by finality while the other one filled with hope? Well, I think it's because one had the hope of Christ's return while the other one didn't.
- [2 : 1 0] And our passage today is going to show us how it is actually the hope of Christ's return that radically changes the way we view death. And it also radically changes the way we view life too.
- Now at this point, I just want to acknowledge that for a lot of you here today, this hits pretty close to home. I know many of us have lost loved ones and this might be a difficult passage for us.
- Death is often something that's just, it really hurts to think about, doesn't it? But my prayer and hope for you today is that you would be encouraged by the future hope we have because of Jesus.
- So first let's see how Christ's return impacts the way we respond to death. Because death is a sure sign, isn't it, that this world is broken. That things are just not as they should be.
- Because with death comes so much pain, especially for the people that are left behind. And the thing about death is that it feels like there is a permanent severing or a permanent breaking in relationship.

[3 : 13] I will never see that person again. I'll never get to talk to that person again. Tell them how I feel. Give them a hug. Share my life with them. What we are left with are just memories.

Memories of the good times that we shared. So grief is only natural, isn't it? And I think the Thessalonians here were actually having similar feelings.

See, it may have been the case that some people within the church had recently died. And the people were just left absolutely heartbroken. And they may have actually been worried about what would happen to these people who had passed away.

So what Paul was doing here, he's writing to transform their outlook on death. Have a look at verse 13 there of chapter 4. Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death.

Why? So that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope. And what Paul is saying here is that we Christians, while we grieve, we do not grieve without hope.

[4 : 16] No, the Christian view of death is full of hope. So what's the basis then for this incredible sense of hope, even in death? It's the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

Look at verse 14. For or because 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.

Isn't it interesting here that Paul describes these deceased believers as having just fallen asleep? See, Paul wants us to know that those who believe in Jesus, for them, death is no longer final.

Death is no longer the end. Actually, there's going to be the day where these people wake up when Jesus returns. But compare that with Jesus, because it doesn't say that Jesus fell asleep, but it says that Jesus died.

See, Paul is trying to draw out something here. See, Jesus has endured the full horror of death. See, because we all sinned, we all deserve a death, which is final. One without any hope.

[5 : 18] We deserve to be completely separated from God for all eternity. But because Jesus has taken that death for us, he has absorbed that death for us on that cross.

Now we never die, but we just sleep. Jesus, through his death, has transformed our death to one which is now filled with hope.

But not only did Jesus die for us, but he rose again and so conquered death once and for all. And what Paul is saying here is that Jesus rising from the dead, well, that's just the beginning.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 puts it like this, which is on the slide. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. See, Paul is saying here is that the resurrection shows us exactly what is going to happen to us when Jesus comes back again.

[6 : 20] When Christ returns, we too will rise again. God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. Isn't this amazing news? So now when we are confronted with death, though there are tears, these are tears that are filled with hope.

I don't know if you do this, but, you know, sometimes when we console people who have lost loved ones, we often say something like, well, at least he or she is in a better place.

And sometimes it just can feel like wishful thinking, can't it? Just a very small consolation. But Paul actually wants us to be 100% confident that our future hope is not just wishful thinking.

But this is exactly what Paul has learned from the Lord Jesus himself. It's almost like Paul is saying here, don't you remember when Jesus said all of this himself? Look at verse 15.

Paul writes, according to the Lord's word, not his own. We tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

[7 : 26] And although we can't be sure, I think Paul is actually taking this, what he's received, from Matthew 24, where Jesus himself described what it would be like when he comes again. And it's pretty similar to what we see here in our passage of verses 16 to 17.

If you have a look at this table on the screen, it gives a bit of a comparison. And what you'll see is that the description of Christ coming again is pretty vivid. The Lord will come down from heaven with a loud trumpet, and with the voice of an archangel and 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. And the picture we get here is that Christ's return is going to be a grand consummation.

Jesus is going to come like a victorious army to put all things right. And because Jesus is coming to put an end to death once and for all, verse 16 says that the dead in Christ will rise again to meet with Jesus.

Then those who are still alive will be reunited with Christ too. What a great picture of salvation we have here. Jesus is coming for us so that we get to be with him forever. Are you getting a sense?

[8 : 42] Are you getting a sense how Jesus is radically transforming the way we see death? Do you see how much hope now we have because of Christ? I remember when I was young, I loved visiting my grandparents in Sydney.

And I'd spent about two weeks up there and I'd absolutely love going to Sydney to visit my grandparents. But when it came time to coming home, I used to cry. I hated the thought of having to come home to Melbourne because I would just miss my grandparents so much.

I guess it's a product of being an only child. But you know what softened the blow? What made it easier to handle? It's knowing that I would see them again in just a few months.

And that's something I could hold on to. Something that I could look forward to that gave me hope for the future. And in the same way, we get to look forward to seeing our loved ones again in heaven when Christ returns.

And more than that, we're all going to be united together with Jesus, our Lord. So now at funerals for Christians, it's no longer a permanent goodbye.

[9 : 47] No, it's a, I'll see you again soon. It doesn't mean that we don't miss them in the meantime. But we have this firm confidence that we will see them again.

And we will join with them to be with Jesus forever. See, we grieve with hope. But I know that for many of us here who have lost loved ones, friends and family, these people may not have been Christian.

And although we don't ultimately know whether in their last moments they believed in Jesus or not, we can't change the past. But this passage gives us a great hope for our lives.

And it magnifies the urgency, doesn't it, for us to share the hope of Christ's return with the people that don't know him yet. See, we all desperately need this assurance, especially for those of us who are worried about the future, because our lives are so uncertain.

It only takes one phone call to alter the course of your life. Whether we get a call about a diagnosis, which just isn't good, or maybe we get a call about a tragedy that has just happened, it only takes one phone call to change your life completely.

[11 : 03] But the good news of Jesus' return is that we don't need to fear death anymore. Actually, through Jesus, we can find true freedom from our fears. Because of what Jesus has done for us, whether we live or we die, we will always be with Jesus.

So don't lose hope. Death is no longer the end. Actually, it's just the beginning. The beginning of a time spent face to face with Jesus forever. Okay, so we've seen how the reality of Christ's return profoundly impacts the way we view death.

But we're also going to see how his return also profoundly impacts the way we view life. And this is the shocking thing. Christ's return will be a moment of great joy for those who belong to him.

But you know what? It's going to be a day of complete horror for those who don't. The problem is not with those who have died in Christ. They're fine. Don't worry about them.

No, the real problem is for those who live in darkness. Because when Paul refers to the day of the Lord in chapter 5, verse 1, I think Paul is thinking again of Matthew 24.

[12 : 13] And this day relates to when Christ returns in judgment to divide those who are his and who are not. And all people are going to face judgment either to everlasting life or to everlasting wrath.

And Jesus in Matthew 24 gives us this example of Christ's return, which is going to be on the slide. Jesus says, Two men will be in a field. One will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill.

One will be taken and the other left. The day of the Lord was also a recurring theme in the Old Testament. For example, we heard today in our first reading, Isaiah chapter 13, about the day of the Lord.

And you see that Isaiah 13, it painted a pretty bleak picture, didn't it? Because this is what Christ's return is going to be like for those who don't place their trust in Jesus.

Those who oppose God will be judged and punished. See, as much as this day is going to be a day of salvation and joy for God's people, it is going to be a day of wrath and tragedy for those who do not know Jesus.

[13 : 19] And because of this, some people have become so preoccupied with trying to calculate the exact date when Jesus is going to come back. Actually, there's even this website called rapturewatch.net, and they have made up some crazy calculation.

I don't know how they've done it, but they've tried to predict exactly when Jesus is coming back. So they ended up with this date in between about the 20th and the 25th of September next year. And, you know, people have produced charts and graphs like this one.

I don't even know what that is. Because we've become so obsessed with that date. But you know what? Paul asks the Thessalonians here to adopt a completely different mindset.

Look at verses 1 to 3. Now, brothers and sisters, about the times and dates, we do not need to write to you. For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, while people are saying, peace and safety.

Destruction will come on them suddenly as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. See, it's pretty clear that we're never going to know when Jesus is coming back until it actually happens.

[14 : 25] And when Paul says that Jesus is coming back like a thief in the night, it means that it's going to take you entirely by surprise. Just as a thief doesn't ring up your house before and warn you that he's about to rob you, you know what?

You can chart away all you want. You're going to have no idea when Jesus is actually going to return. But even though the Thessalonians here, see, they were acutely aware of the imminence of Christ's return.

But you see, for us, we have the opposite problem, don't we? See, we don't seem to live with any awareness that Jesus is coming back at all. I mean, is it ever something that crosses your mind that impacts the way you live?

Because what Paul is saying here should actually be a driver, something that motivates us to get ready for when Jesus comes again. We're very blessed, aren't we, to live in a great country like Australia.

And unlike other parts of the world, Australia is pretty immune from war, which is a real grace from God. But it also means that we are probably going to be the ones who are more likely to say peace and safety, like in verse 3.

[15 : 33] See, we can get too comfortable with life here. We can aim to secure a nice job, a nice house, a nice family. And we can forget that Jesus is coming back.

But this is the reality. Jesus is coming back. And when he comes again, it will be final. There will be no more time to repent and get right with God. There will be no more time to preach the gospel so more can be saved.

It's like how Paul says in verse 3, You can't delay a pregnancy when the labor pains come. If you go into labor in the middle of the night, you can't say, Too tired, I'll deal with you in the morning.

You can't, right? When it's on, it's on. This kid's coming out whether you like it or not. And so it will be when Christ comes again. It's happening whether we like it or not.

So let me ask you, if Christ came back right now, would you be ready? It's a question we have to ask ourselves because the answer to that question will determine your eternity.

[16 : 37] It will determine whether this day is a day of great celebration or whether it's a day of tragedy. So you may have this attitude. This attitude goes something like this.

I'll pursue what I want to do now. I'll enjoy my life now. And maybe I'll worry about God later. I know a lot of my friends say, I just want to live my own life now, you know? I want to do what I want to do. And when I get older, maybe I'll think about God.

And this all seems well and good, doesn't it? But there's just one major flaw in this logic. How do you know when Christ will come back? How do you know the right time it is to come back to God?

How do you even know how long you're going to live for? You may actually find that we can't plan as well as we had hoped for the future. And actually, there is absolutely no reason why Jesus couldn't come back tomorrow.

So Paul's actually going to push back on that kind of thinking and he's going to warn us of the deep risk that comes with thinking that we can have our cake and eat it too. And this is what our passage does today, doesn't it?

[17 : 42] It confronts us with a choice. We can either repent of our sins, turn to Jesus and be saved, or we can choose to ignore him and face wrath on that last day.

Because if what Paul is saying is true, it's going to change everything. So if you're just not sure, come and speak to one of us. It's not a decision you want to take lightly without considering all the information.

You could even sign up to do a Christianity Explored course with us at church. because the consequences are so big if Christianity is actually true. But for those of us who have placed our trust in Jesus, Christ's return should not lead to a crippling fear, but it should actually encourage us to be prepared.

I remember a couple of years ago, I was sleeping in bed and I heard probably the loudest bang of thunder I've ever heard in my life. And it came from nowhere. I was just sleeping, right? And in that moment, when I heard that, I came to the conclusion that Christ had returned.

So I freaked out. I jumped out of bed and just started repenting for all of my sins. But thankfully, this passage encourages me that although we should live with an awareness of Christ's return, we do not lead to constantly fear it.

[19 : 07] Be alert, but not alarmed, I guess. Follow along at verse 4. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day.

We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. No, for those of us who belong to Jesus, we belong to the day. We are children of the day. See, for those of us who have placed our trust in Christ, we no longer belong to the darkness of the world.

No, we belong to the true light of the world, who is Jesus. See, when we place our trust in Jesus, we are delivered over from the kingdom of darkness into the Christ's glorious light.

And because we're on his side, Jesus' return is not going to be a day of tragedy for us. It's going to be a day of triumph. And because we belong to Jesus, Paul then exhorts us to live a life which reflects our true position with Christ in the light.

Have a look at verse 6. So then let us not be like the others who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night. And for those who get drunk, get drunk at night. And so we should not live like those who are in the darkness, those who are unprepared for Christ's return.

[20 : 21] You know how in the movies, when it comes to night time and things start to get a little bit dark, you just know something's bad going to happen, right? You just know somebody's going to die.

It's the same here. Dark activities are associated with the night time. And this is the parallel Paul is drawing here, that the night time is synonymous with getting drunk and getting complacent or sleeping.

Here he's talking about activities which conform to our sinful desires or our sinful nature. Activities that show that we don't care about Christ's return at all. My friend sent me this picture, which is on the next slide.

And I think it perfectly illustrates what it means to be unprepared on the last day. Moral of the story, don't be like that guy. I have his consent to use that photo, by the way.

You can take it down there. But the daytime is different, all right? The daytime is completely different. See, when we think of the day, we normally think about being awake, being sober or self-controlled in all our conduct.

[21 : 24] Not even the world gets drunk during the day, right? So how much more us, we who have been saved out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. See, what marks a true Christian is someone who is prepared and ready for Jesus to return at any moment.

We were talking about going into labor before, which is something I'm glad that I don't need to experience myself. But I love this idea of having our bags packed and ready to go by the door so that when the time comes, bang, bags packed out the door, we're ready to go.

So we don't need to be preoccupied with exactly when Jesus is coming back because our bags are always by the door. And so Paul shows us three ways then we can prepare for Christ's return.

And you'll actually see it's those three things again that we've seen all throughout this letter. Verse eight. The image we get here is of warfare, isn't it?

Getting ready for battle. So Paul says we need to put on a sure faith in God, which endures and perseveres in times of hardship, a love which provides and cares for the needs of others, and a hope for our future salvation when Christ comes again.

[22 : 49] I'm actually so encouraged by you guys. I know for a lot of you, life has not been smooth sailing. Life has actually been rough. But seeing you guys continuing to serve your brothers and sisters so faithfully, continuing to persevere in hardship, it just shows that you are ready for Jesus to return.

So my encouragement for you is to keep persevering, keep grinding away, keep serving, even when it's hard, because it's all going to be worth it.

Not that how we live saves us or makes us right with God, but our readiness is showing here that we do truly belong to the day. In verse nine, Paul says, for God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live together with him. And so like the apostle Paul says, because of this, because of Jesus, whether we live or die, we don't need to worry because God has appointed us to receive salvation.

In death, we'll be with Jesus. In life, we will be with Jesus too. I don't know about you, but sometimes I like to often think about what it would be like at my own funeral.

[24 : 14] I wonder who would come. I sometimes wonder what people would say about me. I'd like to think that people would be at least a little bit sad, not kind of hooray, hooray.

But what I really hope is that it wouldn't be a funeral that grieves without hope. No, what I would love is for there to be a real sense of hope that I was with God, living together forever with him.

So if you know someone who's grieving right now, why not encourage them with the hope that we get from this passage? Why not enter into their grief and remind them of the goodness of Jesus, who he is, what he's done for us, and what awaits us?

And let's keep reminding each other that Christ is coming back so that we would definitely be ready for that glorious day that is to come. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you that you have transformed our sorrow into joy. Thank you that because of Jesus, death has been transformed into life.

[25 : 28] Help us to grow in hope as we await for your return. And we pray that we would be ready for you to come back as long as we long to be reunited with you forever.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.