

Death and Resurrection

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Our scripture for today is taken from Job chapter 14 verses 1 to 14 and 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 13 to 18.

! Job 14. Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers.

He flees like a shadow and continues not. And do you open your eyes on such a one and bring me into judgment with you? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing?

There is not one. Since his days are determined and the number of his months is with you and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass. Look away from him and leave him alone that he may enjoy like a hired hand his day.

For there is hope for a tree if it be cut down that it will sprout again and that its shoots will not cease though its roots grow old in the earth and its stump die in the soil.

[1 : 09] Yet at the scent of water it will bud and put out branches like a young plant. But a man dies and is laid low. Man breathes his last and where is he?

As waters fail from a lake and a river wastes away and dries up, so a man lies down and rises not again till the heavens are no more.

He will not awake or be roused out of his sleep. Oh, that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath be passed, that you would appoint me a set time and remember me.

If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my service I would wait till my renewal should come. 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 13-18 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.

[2 : 27] 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 will we always be with the Lord.

Therefore, encourage one another with these words. The word of the Lord. Thank you very much, Demetria, for reading for us.

And what a joy and a pleasant surprise it is to have two of my mother's sisters and one of her brothers. Visiting with us this morning right here on the front, the second row, so beautifully dressed, so good to see them this morning.

[3 : 47] One of the realities of growing old is that you attend a lot of funerals. You attend the funerals of family members.

You attend funerals of coworkers and friends and neighbors. And even when you don't attend these funerals, oftentimes you pick up the obituary and you see the faces of people who you recognize.

They're your contemporaries, and you watch them exiting the scene. And if we're thinking properly, what it should do for us is it should cause us to think about our own death.

It should cause us to think about the fact that as these who are our contemporaries are dying, that our own death is drawing near.

But this reality of death is not just confined to older people like me. It is also relevant for younger people, because if you pick up the obituary again, you would see that young people are dying, and oftentimes younger people than those looking at the obituary.

[5 : 04] Sometimes you see infants who are dying. And even though we're surrounded by death, death is not a topic we like to talk about.

I imagine that even for some of you this morning, as you gathered on this resurrection Sunday morning, and you saw in the bulletin that we're going to talk about death and resurrection, and you heard the passage from Job about how the days of man are few and filled with trouble.

His days are numbered, and he's going to die one day. You probably wonder, why are we talking about this on such a happy morning? But the truth is that if there's anyone who should talk about death is those who know Christ.

Those who have been translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's own dear Son. And if we know Christ, we've been reconciled to God, our sins have been forgiven, then we should be able to think about and talk about what Job says in verse 5 of chapter 14 that was just read for us.

That the days of our lives on this earth have been sovereignly set by the Lord. He has set limits for us on this earth, and none of us will pass the limit of the days that the Lord has allotted for all of us.

[6 : 46] And brothers and sisters, one of the blessings about thinking about death, and our death in particular, is that it helps us to live more wisely. This is what Moses prayed in Psalm 90 when he said, O Lord, would you teach us to number our days that we might apply our hearts to wisdom?

And I don't know of a better time for us to think about death than on this morning when we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. Jesus Christ conquered death in his death.

And he didn't just conquer death in his death. He gave a promise to all those who believe in him that death is not final for them. Death will not have the final word.

And so this is a wonderful truth and promise for us to renew in our hearts this morning. That although death is approaching for all of us, those of us who have put our trust in Jesus Christ can look death square in the face and hold on to the promise that Jesus has given to us that death is not final for us.

And so this morning, I want us to consider this hope that we have, this hope of a future resurrection that we have because we have put our trust in Jesus Christ. But first, let me pray for us.

[8 : 13] Heavenly Father, we are so grateful that we can gather on this morning when we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. And Lord, we thank you that we don't gather to celebrate Christ's resurrection in a vacuum, to consider it as an event.

But Lord, we want to consider the implications that it has for our own lives. I pray that you would draw near to each of us. Lord, you know where each person is this morning.

And would you help us to hear your word and then to appropriately respond to your word. Lord, would you give me grace to preach?

Would you give all of us grace to hear? And Father, would you give us grace to respond to your word? We pray and ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. The context for this passage that we are considering this morning is that the members of the church of the Thessalonians were grieving the death of fellow believers.

[9 : 25] And what is clear is that their grief was so deep. This was not ordinary grief. These are not people who were just going through the normal course of grieving of loved ones.

Their grieving was so deep that Paul had to address them in this letter that we are considering this morning.

Paul addressed them because they were forgetting an important truth. They were forgetting that Christ's resurrection gives assurance of his people's resurrection.

They were forgetting that Christ's resurrection assured them that those they were grieving about one day were going to rise again.

And this overwhelming grief comes when we forget this truth about those who have died in Christ and that death is not the final word for them.

[10 : 27] And again, the best time to think about this is on a morning like this when we remember that Jesus Christ did not remain in the grave. Jesus Christ arose from the dead.

And so in our remaining time this morning, I want us to consider three realities about death and resurrection from this passage in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 13 to 18.

The first reality that we see in this passage is that there are only two ways to die. There are only two ways to die and every one of us will die in one of those ways.

Now, there are countless different ways that people meet their death. Too many to number. But when we open the obituary every single time or whenever we hear about the death of a person, what we know is this.

They died in one of two ways. They died in Christ or outside of Christ. They died in one of two states, one of two conditions, in Christ or outside of Christ.

[11 : 43] There is no in between. There is no in between. Those are the only two ways in which people die. Paul points to this in verse 16.

Look again at what he says. He says, For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

So Paul identifies those who will rise first at the coming of the Lord as those who are dead in Christ. Now, obviously, he's not talking about every single person. He's not talking about those who die outside of Christ.

And this should cause us to think about this reality about being in Christ and being outside of Christ. the truth is that every single one of us and every single person born into the world is born into the world outside of Christ.

David picks this up in Psalm 51 verse 5. He was not just talking about himself, he was talking about all of us when he said, Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me.

[13 : 10] The doctrine of original sin teaches us that the entirety of Adam's race was born into this world as sinners with original guilt before God.

That is the condition we come into the world. It doesn't matter how beautiful that baby is, it doesn't matter how innocent that baby looks, that baby was born in sin and therefore outside of Christ.

And that's the condition of all of us. The apostle Paul brings us face to face with this reality in a slightly different way in Ephesians 2.1 where he tells us that we were all dead in trespasses and sins.

So we all start out from, that's the condition that we come into this world. We are born into this world spiritually dead. when a baby comes out of the womb and is not making any sounds or crying, the doctor would spank the baby or do something to cause the baby to cry.

There is no human action that can bring a child from spiritual death to spiritual life.

[14 : 23] life. There is no human action that can bring a child to show any evidence of spiritual life. Only God can do that.

That is a divine act that God himself must do. And here's how Paul puts it in Ephesians chapter 1 verses 3 to 7.

He tells us that God purposed to do this before the foundation of the world. God purposed to bring people, particular people, from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Here's how he says it beginning in verse 3 of Ephesians 1. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy, and blameless before him.

In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved.

[15 : 42] In him we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace. another way we can describe what Paul talks about in these verses is the new birth.

Paul is talking about the new birth. We were born in a spiritual state of sin which is to be outside of Christ and we were born again into a spiritual state of salvation which is to be in Christ.

Christ. So we're born into this world outside of Christ we are born again in Christ.

That's how we move from being outside of Christ to being in Christ and it is not something that we can do for ourselves it is not something anyone else can do for us it is a divine work that God himself does by his sheer mercy and grace towards sinners.

And so it is a miracle and a mercy that those of us this morning who know with conviction of soul that we are in Christ that God did that that wasn't a prayer that we prayed that wasn't a resolution that we made that was a divine act of God to bring us and to place us in a state of salvation in Christ.

[17:20] And so I'm going to ask us this morning what is your current state? Is your current state your original state that you are outside of Christ?

Or is your current state by the mercy and grace of God that you are in Christ? you are born again. Is that your state that you're born again?

Friends, the sober reality of this truth this morning is that if you are outside of Christ and you die in that state you will be eternally lost and separated from Christ and no amount of prayers no amount of things that some do to try to change that reality it cannot be changed it is final and so it behooves us this morning to consider where we stand in Christ or outside of Christ and as Paul says that we would seek to make our calling and our election sure.

Jesus said to Martha on the occasion of the death of Lazarus I am the resurrection and the life whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Do you believe this? and this question is appropriate for us this morning. Do you believe this? Do you believe these words of Jesus?

[19:07] And I pray that you do if you have trusted in Jesus Christ that you are assured of a future resurrection in your heart if you have put your trust in Jesus.

And may I remind you this morning that this is not just a mental agreement this is not just a yes I believe that. Now this is a conviction of soul. To believe in Jesus Christ is to stake every bit of our existence our being our faith in him and the evidence of that would be a transformed life.

Not a perfect life but a life that is clearly transformed from what it used to be to what it now is. That's what it means to believe in Jesus Christ.

It is to rest in him to trust in him wholly to lay our all upon him seeing him as our only hope. And he does a defining and a real work in our lives that we will be new creations new people transformed because we have moved from being outside of Christ to now being in Christ.

And that's the kind of life that being in Christ will produce. So all of us will die in one of two ways.

[20:36] We will die in Christ or we will die outside of Christ. And when we die, whether we die in Christ or we die outside of Christ, those we leave behind will grieve for us.

And about this grieving, the Apostle Paul points out that there are two ways to grieve. Two ways to die and he says that there are two ways to grieve, which is my second point.

Look at what he says in verses 13 and 14. 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.

The first way that Paul points to about grieving is grieving without hope. Grieving without the hope of a future resurrection for the deceased person.

[21:56] That's what he describes in verse 13. But Paul writes these words to the Thessalonians and indeed to all believers that when they grieve over those who have died in Christ, they must not grieve the way those grieve who grieve over unbelievers, who have no hope of a future glorious resurrection.

And Paul gives us the reason in verse 14. He says, for since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

What is Paul saying? Paul is saying that those who die in Christ will not be forever separated from those who are grieving over them who are also in Christ.

Paul is making the point that though death is hard, though death seems final, death is not final for the one who dies in Christ and those who are in Christ and who are grieving over them.

Paul says it's coming a day when God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. And this is the basis for our faith and our hope in a future resurrection for deceased brothers and sisters and loved ones who die in Christ.

[23:33] And it's the basis for our own hope of a future resurrection, Christ's resurrection. resurrection. So what Paul calls those who are in Christ who are grieving over those who die in Christ, he's calling them to hopeful grief, not hopeless grief.

A hopeful grief that this is not final, this is not forever, this will come to an end one day in the future. Those who have gone on before us in Christ, they are not lost forever. This was the comfort that Jesus gave to Martha, that her brother was going to rise again.

That those who believe in him, even though they die, they will not finally die. They will live again. So we don't grieve the way unbelievers grieve.

We grieve with the hope of a future resurrection through the Lord Jesus Christ. I think it's important to point out that Paul is not saying that we don't grieve.

[24 : 50] He's not trying to make a case for us not to grieve at all. He's just helping us to have an informed grieving based on the truth of Scripture.

It is perfectly fine to grieve, and when we experience loss, we will grieve. And this is why it is so sad to go to funeral services and find that there are people who are doing deliberate things to try to prevent those who are grieving from grieving and calling them to put on their brave face and doing all manner of things to dampen the sense of loss.

Paul isn't saying that we mustn't grieve. He's saying when you grieve, you grieve with the hope over believing loved ones who die that death is not final.

Death, one day, will give way into life, and there will be a reunion between those who have gone before and those who are behind and in Christ.

One of the realities about death as well is that when we die, the moment we die, whether we die in Christ or outside of Christ, we go home.

[26 : 22] We have a home. We have a home. We have a home. We have a home. We have a home. In Christ, we go to be with the Lord, and outside of Christ, we go into separation from God, awaiting a judgment, a damnation.

And so funeral services are not home-going services. The deceased has already gone to his or her home.

home. So Paul says there are two ways to die, and there are two ways to grieve. But that's not all that Paul addresses in this passage.

Paul addresses something else in this passage, and it's actually the main point of this entire passage. What Paul addresses in this passage is that there is only one way to be comforted.

While there are two ways to die, two ways to grieve, there is only one way to be comforted. We find that in verse 18. Look again at what he says.

[27 : 42] Therefore, encourage one another with these words. The King James in the New International Version used the word comfort. Comfort one another with these words.

Now, some of you might be looking at this section in your Bible, and I believe your Bible is just like mine, and the section, verses 13 to 18, is captioned the coming of the Lord.

Your Bible probably has the same thing. But when we read in context, this section is not primarily about the coming of the Lord.

This should better read the believer's comfort in death, because that is what Paul is addressing in this section.

To make this point more strongly, I want to share a quote from Professor Jean Green, who insightfully wrote the following about these words of the Apostle Paul in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians.

[28 : 55] This is what he writes. The previous passage has suffered much ill, as it has been mined to provide clues concerning the timing of the rapture of the church.

Will this great event occur before seven years of tribulation in the middle of this period or at the very end? In the haste to answer this question, the real purpose of 1 Thessalonians 4, 13-18 is overlooked.

This teaching was presented to comfort those in grief by connecting the confession of the creed, Jesus died and rose again, with the reality of the resurrection of the dead in Christ.

This is not the stuff of speculative prophecies or bestsellers on the end times. The text is located at the funeral home, the memorial service, and the graveside.

It is placed in the hands of each believer to comfort others in their time of greatest sorrow. The decidedly bizarre pictures of airplanes dropping out of the sky and cars careening out of control as the rapture happens detract from the hope that this passage is designed to teach.

[30 : 21] And brothers and sisters, this is the point of the passage. The point of this passage is comfort. It's not speculative prophecy. It is to comfort grieving believers in their time of loss and grief over the loved ones who have died in Christ.

The first comfort that Paul brings to us is that the spirit of those who have died in Christ is with the Lord.

Notice again he says that in verse 14, since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

In order for God to bring them with Jesus, they have to be with Jesus. And this is one of the scriptures that refutes the Seventh-day Adventist teaching that when we die, we just sleep in the grave, we just rest in the grave somewhere.

No, we go to heaven, those who die in Christ. And Paul says God will bring them with Jesus. And so that's the first comfort that we should all have, brothers and sisters.

[31 : 46] That if believing loved ones have died and gone on, they are with the Lord. They're with the Lord. And they really are more alive with the Lord than they've ever been in these fallen bodies that we occupy on this earth.

But Paul gives another comfort. He says, even at the Lord's coming, he says, they're going to partake in the Lord's coming before you do. Notice what he says in verse 16, in the very last sentence.

He says, the dead in Christ are going to rise first. But he speaks about the dead in two ways. Notice that. He talks about them in verse 14, that they are with the Lord, the Lord is going to bring them. with Jesus, obviously referring to their soul, their spirit. And then in verse 16, he talks about them rising. So clearly he's talking about their bodies rising and being a resurrected body, and their spirit is going to re-inhabit their resurrected body.

And they would be immortal, never to die again. second. Paul says that's going to happen to the believers first.

[33 : 09] And then he says, the living goes second. The living goes second. And then those of us who are alive will be caught up together with them. And so we will ever be with the Lord.

Notice the comfort that Paul gives in verse 17. He says, and so we will always be with the Lord. That means no more separation. That means for all eternity, those who belong to Christ, the living and those who died in Christ, God will reunite together with one another and with himself, and they will always be together with one another and with the Lord, never ever to be separated again.

This is the comfort that we have in death when the death is that of believing loved ones.

And so this is the point that the Apostle Paul is making. And brothers and sisters, this is the only true way to be comforted.

Oftentimes people would resort to saying, well, just remember the good times. Look at the albums, look at the videos, look at all the reminders of the wonderful and full life that your loved one had.

[34 : 40] Recount the old stories, refresh the memories. Brothers and sisters, they may bring some comfort, but they do not bring lasting comfort. As a matter of fact, sometimes as you recall those memories, they deepen the grief.

Sometimes events happen that bring loved ones to mind who have departed, and it brings grief. On Friday evening, Alexi and I attended the Bahamas Christian Chorale that Troy sings in, and one of the songs that was sung reminded me of my mother.

It was a song she taught me. God be with us, God be with you until we meet again. And I remember her telling me when she learned that song about an evangelist who would visit and would have revivals, and each time he was leaving, they would sing that song, and she taught me that song, and I remembered that song on Friday evening sitting in that concert.

And the first emotion I had was a sense of loss. And then I had the presence of mind by the grace of God to remember that I will see her again.

I will see her one day again. The real comfort was not in the memory of the song. The real comfort was in the promise that one day I will see her again.

[36 : 20] And brothers and sisters, this is the comfort that we must hold on to in death, in the death of believing, loved ones.

It is fitting and proper in the time of loss to extend ourselves to brothers and sisters and to serve them in any way that we can. But the greatest way that we can serve them is to comfort them with the words of scripture when they are grieving over lost loved ones, to remind them this is not final. One day you will be reunited again, never to be separated again. one of the things that should be obvious to us is that Paul does not address unbelievers in this passage.

He's addressing believers and so he does not address unbelievers. And the clear implication is that when an unbeliever dies, who is a loved one to us, someone dear to us, we don't have the same opportunity to grieve as we do over a believing loved one.

That is a sad but certain reality that is clear in this passage even though Paul does not explicitly say so. He's only addressing the death of those who die in Christ and encouraging those who have been left behind who are in Christ to weep for them in an informed way.

[37 : 57] And one of the things that this should do for all of us brothers and sisters is this should stir our hearts to hold out the gospel to all those we know who do not know Christ.

This is not a passage that we can just pick up and just rejoice about, oh, I'm going to see my departed loved ones who died in Christ. No, this passage should also convict us of the reality that those we know and love who do not know Jesus Christ are outside of Christ, and if they die, they will die outside of Christ.

And if they die outside of Christ, there is no hope of a glorious resurrection for them. The Bible says that they will be raised to the resurrection of damnation, and so let us, by the grace of God, let us hold up the gospel to our unbelieving friends and loved ones and those who are near and dear to us.

We can be comforted in this life when a believer who is near and dear to us dies, because we remember we'll see them again.

But there is no comfort in this life when a loved one one when someone near and dear to us dies outside of Christ.

[39 : 24] There is no comfort in this life. The only comfort we can look forward to is the day that the Lord returns, when he promises that he will wipe away every tear from every eye.

And the only reason that we will not grieve in heaven over lost loved ones who die outside of Christ is because God will be merciful to us to cause us not to mourn, cause us not to weep over those we love who die outside of Christ and who are eternally lost.

Brothers and sisters, let us allow the reality and the certainty of these truths about these two ways to die, and there's no way to adjust it, no way to change it once we've died.

and let us hold up the gospel to those we love. And let us especially do it on this day. Let us especially do it as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, because it's not just the resurrection that we celebrate.

We celebrate the mercy of God that sent his son to come and live. Live a life that none of us can live, a perfect life that God credits to those who believe, and then to take our place as our substitute on the cross and to die the death that we all deserve to die for our sins, so that we might be reconciled to God, forgiven of our sins.

[41 : 04] And then he rose again. And so the resurrection of Jesus Christ contemplates and takes into account both his living and his dying that he did for all of us.

And so I pray that conversations that we would have, I pray that prayers that we will pray, that we'll be praying, oh Lord, open their eyes to believe the gospel, open their eyes to trust in Jesus Christ. This is our only hope. This year began with what I think is the most funerals I've ever attended in a short period of time.

As a reminder, brothers and sisters, God keeps us honest. Someone older than me, younger than me, have a funeral next Sunday.

We're surrounded by death. And let us not assume that our day is further away than it really is. I think if we were able to interview people who have died, I think most would say they believe they had more time.

[42 : 20] Most would say they believe they had more time. And so, brothers and sisters, let us just do what the psalmist says. Let's number our days.

And let us apply our hearts to wisdom. And may we rejoice in a Savior who has died and risen again and promised that all those who die in Christ will rise again.

Let's pray. Father, we are so grateful that Jesus Christ has come and lived and died so that we might be forgiven and reconciled to him.

thank you, Lord, that even in death we have a hope. We have hope that does not die in death. We have a hope that endures beyond death. And that hope is that if we die in Christ, we will be raised to life eternal.

[43 : 48] Lord, I pray first of all that this would bring comfort to the hearts of your people concerning that loved ones who have died in Christ.

I pray you would give them comfort about their own death. And then, Lord, would you burden all of our hearts with the spiritual state of those who do not know Christ.

And may we be faithful to proclaim the gospel to them. And, Lord, may you be merciful and bring them to yourself. We pray this in Jesus' name.
Amen. Amen.