

Death and Resurrection

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[0 : 00] Over the past two weekends, I attended three funerals.

! In addition, at the moment I have two immediate family members who are facing illness, as well as numerous other family and friends who are also facing illness.

The truth is that attending funerals and facing illness should cause us to think about death.

But we don't like to think about death. And this is even true when we go to funerals. Sometimes we go to funerals and we really are never made to think about death.

People are asked to wear bright colors. You can pull me down a little bit. People are asked to wear bright colors. They sing happy songs. They think happy thoughts. And they tell lots of jokes.

[1 : 19] And sometimes pastors are even able to get through a sermon and hardly mention death or if they do just in passing.

But even though we try to ignore death and we minimize death, try to redefine death, death is really unavoidable.

It is an unavoidable reality of life. And we need to think about it. And we need to prepare for it.

And really, I don't know of a better time for us to think about death and to prepare for death than on Resurrection Sunday.

And that's what I want us to do this morning as we open God's Word. So please turn your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

[2 : 26] And we're going to be reading verses 13 through 18. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 13 through 18.

Please follow along as I read. 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.

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive and 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.

[3 : 36] 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.

This is much more. That's right. Heavenly Father, we are grateful this morning that we are able to gather in this place.

We are able to do so with the fixed hope of a resurrected Christ who has promised that those who die in him will live again.

Lord, I pray this morning that all over this room, Lord, I know that I'm not the only one who is being caused to think about death through funerals and illnesses that are facing friends and other loved ones.

[4 : 52] And so, Lord, I pray today that you would cause us to think about this topic that society seeks to avoid and seeks to minimize.

Lord, help us to do so with the amazing hope that belongs to believers in Christ that we find in your world.

Lord, I pray that you would grant me grace to be faithful to proclaim your word and grant us all grace to hear and to apply your word.

Lord, I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. In this passage before us, members in the church of the Thessalonians were grieving death.

They were grieving the death of loved ones, fellow believers in their midst. And what is clear from the context of the letter is that in the midst of what evidently was overwhelming grief, the Thessalonians were forgetting something that they ought to have been remembering.

[6 : 04] Thessalonians were forgetting that Christ's resurrection gives believers hope for their own resurrection.

They were forgetting this very, very important truth, that Christ's resurrection gives believers hope for their own resurrection, and the result was overwhelming grief.

Grief so overwhelming that the apostle Paul thought it was necessary to write to them about it. And he points out to them that they were not being mindful of the hope of future resurrection that their deceased brothers and sisters in Christ had.

And the experience of the Thessalonians has been my own experience as well. I remember some 18 years ago when my father passed away, I experienced unimaginable grief.

But as I thought back, it was unimaginable and sometimes even unbearable when I forgot that my father, when he was 23 years old, professed faith in Jesus Christ.

[7 : 29] And then he lived the rest of his life giving evidence and giving testimony that he had been genuinely converted. And whenever I remembered my father died in Christ, the grief was lessened.

The grief was lessened. It didn't go away, but the grief was truly lessened. And this morning, what was true of the Thessalonians and what was true of me, I imagine is also true of me.

When you face death, when you face death, the death of loved ones, loved ones who die in Christ, when you forget that they have been promised a future resurrection, your grief is increased, your grief is increased.

And when you would remember this truth, your grief will not overcome you. It will be lessened. And again, I know of no better time for us to be talking about this than in this morning, when we celebrate and commemorate our Savior's resurrection from the dead.

I want to take the remainder of our time this morning and want us to consider this passage that we just read. And I want us to consider three realities about death and resurrection, which I pray will bring comfort and assurance to all of us in the time of death, whether the death of loved ones or indeed our own death.

[9 : 11] If in the providence of God, we are of sound mind and be able to see death coming to us. The first reality is this.

There are only two ways to die. Apostle Paul tells us in this passage, there are only two ways to die. Now, while there are countless ways in which people meet their death, there are really only two ways to die.

If you were to pick up the obituary on any given Thursday morning and you were to read the different profiles of people, different ages, and quite interesting, you read them and they're from different places different islands and different circumstances.

There's one thing that's true about all of them. They all died in one of two ways. They either died in Christ or they died outside of Christ.

Those are the only two ways, the only two states, the only two conditions in which people die. And the Apostle Paul points out these two ways in this passage.

[10 : 30] Notice in verse 16, he refers to the dead in Christ. Obviously, he's not referring to all the dead people. He's referring to the dead in Christ.

There are people who die outside of Christ. But it's important to know that all people are born outside of Christ.

Not all die outside of Christ, but all people are born outside of Christ. And this is what the Psalmist David tells us in Psalm 51. He tells us that we were all born in sin.

We were all shaped in iniquity. And then the Apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 1, he tells us that we were all dead in trespasses and sins.

This is the condition that every single human being is born in. We're all born spiritually dead. Or to think of it this way, when we come into the world, we are born dead, spiritually dead, on arrival into the world.

[11 : 37] So when a baby is born and the baby doesn't come out crying, the doctor would spank the baby or cause the baby to cry. And you can get evidence that the baby is physically alive when you hear the crying.

But when it comes to spiritual death, there is no human activity that can bring spiritual life to any human being. No human action can bring it about.

Only God can. Only God can raise the spiritually dead to spiritual life. And this shouldn't be hard to believe. Because if we are all born dead and outside of Christ, then there's no way that those who are dead can give life themselves, spiritually speaking, or give life to others, spiritually speaking. This is what the Apostle Paul writes. In Ephesians chapter 1, verses 3 through 7, you don't need to turn there, I'll be projected for you. He writes, In love he predestined for us to be, sorry, in love he predestined for us, he predestined us for adoption through Christ, Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his word, to the praise of his glorious grace, with the grace of his grace.

In the heavenly places, he says, 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 for us to be, sorry, in love he predestined for us, he predestined us for adoption through Christ, Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his word.

[13:16] To the praise of his glorious grace, with which he hath blessed us in the blood. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

So those who experience God's saving mercy, through the new birth, they move from spiritual death, being outside of Christ, to spiritual life, being in Christ, or being saved.

And so it is by the sheer mercy of God that one moves from being outside of Christ to being in Christ, so that one dies in Christ.

That is the mercy of God. And absent of that mercy, we will die the way we were born outside of Christ. And so bearing that truth in mind, I want to ask a question, really, a personal question, of each of us this morning.

I know the state that all of us were born in. We were all born outside of Christ. My question this morning is, what state are you now in?

[14:32] Are you in Christ? By the mercy and grace of God, who has brought you from being dead outside of Christ into Christ?

Or are you in the same condition in which you were born, you're still outside of Christ? It's an important question that we all need to consider this morning.

If you understand that question, as young as you may be, you need to seriously think about that question. The only way that we move from spiritual death outside of Christ into spiritual life in Christ is through the mercy and grace of God.

The only way that we move from spiritual life is through the mercy of God.

And you may be saying that. And you may be saying that you are not about that. You may be saying that you are not about saying who is going to heaven or who is not going to heaven. That's not the purpose of the year. But largely, it has become the purpose of the year.

[15:59] And at least in this country, one's a liar time. And everybody goes to heaven. Listen to these words of Jesus.

In John 11, 25 and 26. It was already referred to this morning. Jesus speaking to Martha says to her, 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? Notice the irony in the words of Jesus.

The same contradiction in the words of Jesus. Though he die, yet shall he live. And then he says, those who believe in me will never die. Now obviously, he's talking about physical death.

Yes, you physically die. And spiritual death. Those who die in Christ. Those who believe in Christ. No, they will not physically, sorry, spiritually die.

[16:59] And it will not be eternal. If you're in Christ this morning, you want to consider the words of Jesus. This question that he asked, do you believe this?

Do you believe that because you are in Christ, whenever death meets you, that you are going to live again?

And you will not be eternally lost. Friends, this promise is only given to those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ. It's given to nobody else.

And no minister of the gospel has the authority to extend it to anybody else. It is only given to those who are in Christ. And these words are given to us as a comfort.

When death comes to us, and when death comes to loved ones of ours, who have trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior and the Lord.

[18 : 00] So all of us this morning will die in one of two ways. We will die in Christ, or we will die outside of Christ. And when we die, those we leave behind will grieve and mourn our deaths.

And about this grieving, the Apostle Paul points out that there are two ways to grieve. And that's my second point. Two ways to grieve.

Two ways to die, he says there are two ways to grieve. And he addresses these two ways in verses 13 and 14. He 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.

The first way is grieving that is uninformed by the truth of the resurrection. And Paul describes this way of grieving in verse 13.

[19 : 16] And he says, People who grieve this way have no hope. But he tells us, In verse 14, That believers are a part of a second group.

Those who grieve over lost loved ones in a way that is informed by the truth of the resurrection. So he says in verse 14, For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

So Paul is reminding the Thessalonians that theirs is a hopeful grief. That theirs is not a hopeless grief. Theirs is a hopeful grief.

A hopeful grief because these individuals in the church died in Christ. They died as believers. This was the comfort that Jesus gave to Martha.

When he reminded her that he is the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in him, though they die, yet they shall live.

[20 : 35] Those who believe in him will never die. And this should inform the grieving of all believers who mourn for other believers.

I don't want you to hear me to be saying this morning that we should not grieve. I'm not making a case against crying and against mourning when we lose loved ones.

Paul was not doing that, and I certainly am not doing that this morning. But it saddens me when I go to funerals. And I was at one yesterday, an uncle of mine who passed away.

And to hear the contradictions and to watch the contradiction that this is a father who's leaving a wife behind and leaving children behind and other grieving loved ones.

And it's called a celebration. It's called a home-going service. And it's neither of those. It's not a celebration because it's a time of death.

[21 : 45] And the Bible says that death is an enemy. The Bible says death is the last enemy to be destroyed. Nothing to celebrate when death comes to us. God did not create us to die.

He created us to live. That's why death is not going to be a part of the new heavens and the new earth. And it's not a home-going service because my uncle went home to be with the Lord about two weeks before.

And whenever a person dies, whether they die in Christ or out of Christ, that person goes to wherever their home is. They're already gone. So when we have the service, it's not a home-going. They're already gone. The funeral is about paying last respects to the mortal remains, whether a body or whether ashes. And it is fitting to mourn.

In the Old Testament, the children of Israel were given 30 days to mourn when someone passed away. And the God who created us created that as well that we would have a time to mourn.

[22 : 52] And the indication is that it takes time to grieve. It's not something we should try to stifle. It's not something we should try to ignore.

It is a natural part of the process of dealing with death. The Apostle Paul tells us that believers who grieve over dead believers should do so in form by the fact that their dead loved ones have a hope beyond the grave.

And that hope is possible because Jesus Christ himself rose and defeated death. And oftentimes we hear this scripture read in 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

It was read yesterday. And verse 50 through 58.

And here's what Paul writes. He says, I tell you, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

[24 : 07] Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we should all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed.

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable. And this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, the mortal puts on immortality. Notice, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting? Sting of death, sin, the power of sin is in the law. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory over our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, this is not true yet. Paul says, it is only when the imperishable, it is when the perishable takes on the imperishable, when the mortal takes on immortality.

[25 : 22] He says, then will be brought to pass this saying, death is swallowed up in victory. Christ has defeated death to give us a hope for our own death, that our own death will not be final.

But we're not to go to funerals now and say, this has happened, it's not happened yet. Death is still an enemy. Death still has a sting. But there's coming a day when the Lord himself will return and when he will resurrect those who have died in Christ.

and then this saying will come to pass that is written, death is swallowed up in victory. So we demonstrate ignorance when in the face of death we laugh and we do other kinds of things.

Death is no friend to us. Death is not a joyful occasion. But, in the midst of the grief we can have hope when it comes to the death of a loved one who died in Christ.

I want to ask you this morning, if you were to die today, how would others who know you, who know Christ, grieve over you?

[26 : 57] Would their grief be informed by the hope of the resurrection that you died in Christ? Or would their grief be a hopeless kind of grief?

because they don't know that you died in Christ. And I know some may be thinking that I'm getting onto dangerous grounds and speculating concerning this.

Some people would say, well, you know, you never know what happened between God and man in those last moments before that person breathed their last breath. And when they make a statement like that, they have in mind some kind of a deathbed conversion.

I'll just say two things about deathbed conversions. The first is, I think people make too much of it.

I think people make too much about deathbed conversions. They make too much about this possibility that a person will have a sober moment to pray to God and say, God, forgive me of all my sins and then they'll be okay.

[28 : 20] I remember several months ago reading about a shooting that took place and this one lady was consoling herself by the fact that she and her friend was laying in her own blood and about to die.

She said, I let her in the sinner's prayer. And so, the last thing she was doing before she died was she was repeating the sinner's prayer. When we look at scripture, scripture has one example of what you can consider or you can categorize as a sinner's prayer is the thief on the cross.

The thief on the cross said to Jesus, Lord, remember me when you enter into your kingdom and Jesus assured him that he would and I have no doubt that he did.

And many people reference the thief on the cross but what they forget is there were two thieves on the cross and they both had an encounter with the Savior one on either side and one died cursing and reviling him and the other confessing.

So here we have in scripture two deathbed experiences one occasion two deathbed experiences only one comes Christ. My second response is that people who believe in these deathbed conversions so strongly they have a very unbiblical understanding of how people are saved.

[30 : 15] There are those who believe that people are saved when they make up their mind when they decide that they're going to live for Jesus and they go to God they knock on his door and they say Lord come into my heart and save me and help me to live for you.

Brothers and sisters that's not the biblical witness. The biblical witness is that sinners are dead in trespasses and sins. The biblical witness is that if God does not act no one will be saved.

and the only sinner who moves towards God is a sinner on whom God himself has moved. And we have no guarantee that in those last moments of death that the sovereign Lord who alone saves will move upon that heart to grant repentance to pray a prayer that is truly from the heart and not just

from the lips.

Brothers and sisters God is the one who saves. Prayers don't save. I don't want you to hear me at this point to say that God doesn't save in that way.

He clearly has. There are many people who have prayed sinners prayers repeated after someone and they have come to faith. But all I'm saying is that it isn't that mechanical repeat after me that saves anybody.

[31 : 43] Above all that is a sovereign God who works in spite of that and who saves. But what is so sad is to watch and listen to people who would repeat these prayers and believing like in magic once you pray those words then you automatically are saved.

And again that's not the witness of scripture. I've been around a few persons who have died and one came to mind as I was preparing who lived as an unbeliever and just died very, very miserably. I can tell you Christ and repentance were not on his mind as he lived. he died terrified he died fearful he died without Christ on his lips.

so I want to say to us this morning if you're here and again you can understand what I'm saying don't gamble to think that I'm gonna ask for forgiveness right before I die if I have not already asked for forgiveness.

the Bible says today is the day of salvation now is the accepted time today is the day to call on the Lord and trust him and if you do he will upon the glory honor so we've considered two ways to die and two ways to grieve but that's not all the apostle Paul addresses in this passage the apostle Paul also addresses another aspect of death that aspect is comfort the apostle Paul in this passage is addressing comfort and that drains me to my third and final point the third reality that the apostle [33 : 56] Paul gives us in these verses is that there's only one way to be comforted there are two ways to die there are two ways to grieve but there's only one way to be comforted Paul wanted to help this grieving church in the wake of deaths among them to experience comfort now if you have a bible like mine there's probably a heading well not probably if you have a bible like mine it has a heading coming of the Lord but most bibles tend to have the same headings and one could because of the heading wonder is this really about comforting believers since it has the coming of the Lord but I think when we read it in context we are able to say yeah this is about comforting believers not giving us instructions on the

Lord's return though we can learn some things about the Lord's return from this passage that's not the primary purpose that the apostle Paul wrote it the primary purpose that he wrote it is to get comfort that's the word the King James version uses verse 18 it says comfort one another with these words to help me make this point I want to lean on reading college professor Jane Green who insightfully wrote the following in his commentary on 1st Thessalonians on this section referring to 1st Thessalonians 4 13 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 1st

Thessalonians 4 13 through 18 is overlooked this teaching was presented to comfort those in grief by connecting the confession of the creed Jesus died and those 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 time the text is located in the funeral home the memorial service on 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 and so contrary to the section titled the coming of the

Lord this passage is about comfort now what's very interesting about this passage is again Paul has said there are two ways to die and there are two ways to grieve but he tells us there's only one way to receive comfort or to receive encouragement in the face of death and notice again in verse 14 that the apostle Paul tells us that the ground for our comfort is in the resurrection of Christ he says for since we believe since we believe that Christ died and rose again even so through Jesus God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep now here what Paul is doing is he is not mentioning unbelievers in a direct way he is primarily addressing believers and so he is primarily seeking to give them comfort in the face of the death of loved ones who die in Christ he's saying that Christ's resurrection should give them hope for the future resurrection of those dead believers who die in Christ over whom they are grieving notice again the details that the apostle

Paul gives us at verses 14 through 17 first in verse 14 the apostle Paul reminds grieving Thessalonians that their dead believing loved ones are his Christ he says in verse 14 God will bring them with Jesus he will bring them with Jesus who have fallen asleep the only way he can bring them is that they are with him and notice that this is one passage that refutes the erroneous teaching of Seventh-day Adventists that we sleep in the grave and that when people die believer or unbeliever they all sleep in the grave nobody goes anywhere in terms of eternal destiny this passage says that God will bring them with Jesus

[39 : 54] I notice in verse 16 the very last sentence Paul refers to the dead in Christ rising first he says the dead in Christ will rise first so here Paul speaks about the dead in two different ways in verse 14 he tells us that God will bring them with Jesus obviously referring to their soul or their spirit and then in verse 16 he speaks about them rising obviously speaking about their physical bodies their bodies being resurrected and we read in the book of Revelation that wherever those bodies are in the earth and the sea they're going to they're going to be resurrected and when Christ comes the spirits of those who died in Christ will with him will re-inhabit those resurrected immortal bodies that they in the earth in verses 15 and 16 the apostle

Paul assures the Thessalonians that their believing loved ones will precede or go before them are the Lord's coming in essence Paul is really saying to them they're not eternally lost he says as a matter of fact they're going to be their resurrected bodies their spirits are going to inhabit them and they're going to be with the Lord they're going to go before you actually then you'll all be part of together with the Lord and be forever with the Lord Paul's point is because this is true do not grieve with a hopeless kind of grief again not saying to them don't mourn he says just don't do it as those who have no hope he's saying don't grieve the way unbelievers grieve over unbelieving loved ones and this hope of resurrection and an eternity with Christ is the only real comfort that is held out to us in them and the degree to which we remember it is the degree to which our grief will be somewhat mitigated and we will experience divine comfort when we grieve in this way over loved ones who have died in Christ but sometimes we forget and so therefore we need to be reminded the Thessalonians need to be reminded and we need to be reminded and one of the ways we are reminded is we are reminded of our brothers and sisters who join near to us in our times of sorrow and loss and they remind us as I reminded Troy that I died in Christ so I reminded my aunt that a husband died in Christ and we have this comfort because Christ died and Christ rose again can I imagine for some this is not quote unquote happy thoughts the resurrection Sunday morning not beaming thoughts the sober thoughts but rightly received there's great joy in knowing this there's great joy in knowing that we don't know the moment of our death we don't know the circumstances of our death but we can lay hold on this truth and believe that

Christ's resurrection gives us hope for our own resurrection and for those we love who are in Christ and I think that this should affect our hearts in two ways one give us comfort in that but it should also I believe challenge us to consider loved ones who we know are outside of Christ and it should be an impetus to us to pray for them an impetus to us to share the gospel with them to reach out to them as best we can so that they too may come to Christ so that they too may know this hope that is found in Jesus Christ alone the one who said I am the resurrection I am the life those who believe in me though they die yet shall they live again that is the greatest hope that we can have in this life for the greatest thing negative thing that could happen to us in this life which is death so I pray that today we would rejoice in this sober truth that God will help us to remember this in the day of death the death the blood ones who die in

Christ and these they are going to death that's possible