

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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: 28 April 2013

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 0 0] See you all this morning. We're going to continue our series in 1 Thessalonians this morning. You know, one of the things that I think is great about being a pastor is that I get to meet with people a lot, and just to get to know them, just to really talk with them about what's going on in their life. And, you know, most of the time we talk about pretty everyday stuff, love, relationships, family, work, profession, calling, those kinds of things. And, you know, what's great about Christianity is that this, we know actually that this everyday stuff is more than just every day. When we look at Genesis 1 and 2, we're told that humanity was actually created for love and for relationships, and created for work and for labor. You know, God created Adam and Eve and told them to be fruitful and multiply. Then He put them in a garden and told them to till it and keep it, and to bring beauty and order and culture out of the world that God has made. So I love being a pastor and get to talk to people about that. And, of course, we know that our love life and our work life have been deeply broken since the fall, but what we've been looking at for the past two weeks in our first Thessalonians series is actually how the gospel of Jesus Christ, the biblical message of

Christianity, enters into those very areas, enters into our sex, and enters into our work, and how it begins to restore and heal us from the inside out. Maybe you're thinking, wait, that's what we've been talking about for the last two weeks? Yes, go back, listen to the MP3s. You know, if you think Christianity isn't very practical, think again. Become a Christian, and everything starts to change.

What God began in creation, including our love life and our work life, gets swept up into God's new creation. Well, today we come to another topic that affects every one of us. But unlike sex or work, it's one we'd actually much rather push to the side and avoid or ignore as long as we can. We don't talk about it, we try not to think about it, but in fact it's inescapable. Of course, the issue I'm talking about is the issue of death. And we've become very good at shielding ourselves from death and dying, haven't we? We have nursing homes and funeral homes to keep our actual homes free from death and dying. We idolize youth culture and do everything imaginable to stay young and healthy, or at least to stay looking young and healthy, right? And when we do actually interact with death, it's usually through the medium of gory TV crime shows, which it seems like there's another one introduced every week, which ironically don't give us a real opportunity to seriously consider death. You know, in these shows, rather, death just becomes a pretext for another sort of hour-long whodunit, right? Just a launching point for our own entertainment.

Well, of course, we can't avoid death forever. You see the doctor, and the diagnosis comes back with bad news. You get the phone call and tragedy strikes. You look in the mirror and see the signs of old age come creeping in. Our reading from the Old Testament this morning, the prophet Isaiah describes death like a veil that covers everyone. Sooner or later, death becomes very personal, very real for each and every one of us. You know, it's funny, I don't remember a lot of things, but I remember exactly where I was when I got the news that my father had died. I was in a youth hostel in Monterey, California, of all places, visiting a friend. We had just walked by the aquarium and seen the ocean, and then a phone call.

Fatal car accident was what my mother said. And the words were like puzzle pieces in my mind that I couldn't for a moment figure out how they fit together. Dad, accident, fatal.

[3 : 54] And of course, when you're confronted with it, it's understandable why we don't like squaring with death. Death is like a thief that steals the things we love the most. And it means pain and separation and loss and grief. And you know, death doesn't just steal the ones we love, but it has a way of stealing a little part of everyone that we love.

In a really searching essay on friendship, C.S. Lewis once made this observation about death. Lewis had this close circle of friends, and then one of those friends named Charles Williams died.

And Lewis realized afterwards that losing Charles meant not just losing one friend, but losing something in all of his friends. He writes, in each of my friends, there's something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself, I'm not large enough to call the whole man into activity. I want other lights than my own to show all their facets. But now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Charles joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him to myself now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald. That's how death works in friends and in family.

Death's like a cancer that eats away not just one part of our body, but begins to shut down the other parts as well. So this veil hangs over us all. And we have to ask, what does the gospel have to say in the face of death? Having had so much to say about our sex life and our work life, what does the gospel have to say when life comes to an end? In Hamlet, Shakespeare famously called death the undiscovered country from whose border no traveler returns. And if you saw Paul Giamatti say those lines at the Yale rep recently, you know that they came out with a lot of spit.

In that sleep of death, Hamlet says, what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil must give us pause. Does the gospel have anything to say as we stand on the brink of the undiscovered country? That's what our text is about today. We learned that some of the Thessalonian Christians had died and the church was grieving. And Paul, who's had so much to say in the first four chapters about faith and about love, at this point in the letter finally comes to Christian hope. Do you remember chapter 1, verse 3 that Greg preached on so many weeks ago? What does it mean to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ? What are the virtues that the gospel calls forth in our lives? Paul told us that right in the beginning. Faith, yes. Love, yes. But also hope. The gospel means hope. Hope for a dying world.

[6 : 50] Let's look then at 1 Thessalonians 4, 13 through 18. It's page 987 in your pew Bible if you want to turn there with me. 1 Thessalonians 4, 13 through 18. Paul writes this, we don't 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, 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 a voice of an archangel, with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

In this passage, Paul gives us the concrete shape of Christian hope. And he lays it out sort of stepwise in verses 15 through 17. We find there the return of Christ, the resurrection of the body, and the great reunion of the family of believers. Not just with one another, but with the Lord. And this morning, I want us to kind of unpack each one of those, and then we're going to look at what grounds the whole thing. But you know, as you're looking at this passage, you have to admit first that Paul's answer to the grief of the Thessalonians is somewhat surprising, isn't it? Think about it. What would you expect Paul to say if a group of Christians were grieving because a fellow believer and friend had died? I think we'd expect him to say something like he says in Philippians 1.23, right? To depart is to be with Christ. Or maybe he'd say something like he says in 2 Corinthians 5.8, to be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord. Or maybe he'd tell them Jesus' interaction with a thief at the cross. Today you will be with me in paradise, he says. And while all that is gloriously true and greatly comforting, you see, that's not ultimately how Paul is comforting the Thessalonian

Christians here. Instead, what does he do? He tells them about the return of Christ and the resurrection of the body. And that is so surprising to me that I had to ask why. You know, one theory kind of goes like this. Perhaps the Thessalonians were mistaken in their understanding of what happens at Christ's return. Maybe they thought that those who had already died before the second coming would in some ways be late to the party. They'd miss out on the opening festivities. And since the Thessalonian church was really looking forward to Christ's return, it made them extra sad to think that some of their fellow Christians would miss out because they had already died. And so the theory goes, maybe that's why Paul emphasizes the fact in verse 15 that the living won't precede the dead.

[9 : 46] When Christ returns. And why in verse 16 he says the dead in Christ will rise first. So maybe that's why Paul doesn't mention the typical comfort that Christians who are away from the body are at home with the Lord. Maybe he doesn't mention that because what's really going on in Thessalonica is that they're a bit confused about what would happen at Christ's return. And that's what was causing their grief. So Paul's got to sort of re-tinker with their eschatological expectations.

Now I do actually think that's a somewhat plausible explanation. Our theology gets weird all the time and that actually has really practical outcomes in our life. But I think it's also possible that in the face of their grief, Paul wanted to comfort them with the ultimate hope that we have. Think of it this way. Imagine you're not too excited about taking a transatlantic flight.

Now, how can I encourage you to get on the plane? I can say, you know, don't worry. They've got really great movies on the plane. You will watch Shrek 3 like 400 times. It will be a great flight. Or, I can encourage you by saying, Scotland. Ah, wait till you see it. It is the place of your dreams.

You'll love it. The rolling hills, the castles, the kilts, the accents, the haggis. Both are encouraging, right? Maybe not the haggis. Both are encouraging, right?

But what's going to actually get you on the plane? It's not the in-flight entertainment. That will help. But ultimately, it's the destination, isn't it? So Paul is saying here, look to the Lord's return. There's the ultimate hope in the midst of grief.

[11 : 30] Now, don't get me wrong. The fact that believers are immediately with the Lord upon death is a great and glorious truth and a great comfort in the midst of grief. The child whose life was swept away in infancy. The young believer who died in the prime of life.

The elderly saint who walked with the Lord for decades. Friends, they are with the Lord. But great as that is, it is not the destination. It is only what we sometimes call the intermediate state. Because you see, our greatest comfort, the destination, the rolling hills, the highlands, if you will, is the return of Christ and the resurrection of the body.

And the great reunion went together, as verse 17 says. Together, we will greet the Lord as he comes down to bring his kingdom to completion. So let's get a glimpse of our hope together, shall we?

First, verse 15, what Paul calls the coming of the Lord. The coming of the Lord. Now, as we've been working our way through 1 Thessalonians, you've probably noticed that Jesus' return is a constant motif through this whole letter.

Paul alludes to it in 1.10, and then at the end of chapter 2, and then the end of chapter 3, and now the end of chapter 4, and the beginning of chapter 5, and finally, almost at the very end of the book, in 5.23, he'll mention it once more, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's all over this book.

[12 : 58] And you know, Paul's not alone in this teaching. The entire New Testament affirms that the same Jesus who was incarnate, and lived, and died, and rose again, and ascended to the Father's right hand, will return bodily, visibly, gloriously.

And if you notice how verse 15 begins, Paul says, this is even what Jesus himself taught. I'm telling you this as a word from the Lord himself.

And when we read the gospel accounts, they bear that claim out. But friends, what are we to make of this claim? At first, it does seem a bit hard to wrap our minds around, doesn't it?

Maybe for some of us, a bit, I don't know, far-fetched. I mean, Jesus coming bodily, visibly, unmistakably, back to earth. Can you and I really believe such a thing?

But consider what the bodily return of Jesus means. Consider what it says about God's relationship to the world he has made. You see, it's harder to imagine a greater affirmation of the goodness of material creation and physicality than this.

[14 : 15] That God the Son, the eternal Son of God, took on flesh in the incarnation. And after the crucifixion was raised in a body. And now he hasn't left that body behind for some supposedly better spiritual existence, but will return in that same body to rule and to reign.

You see, Christianity is perhaps the most world-affirming belief system there is. Matter matters to God deeply. And the bodily return of Christ underscores that fact with bold and broad strokes.

It tells us that God has taken hold of this world, friends, in the most intimate way imaginable. And he won't let go. You know, the return of Christ tells us something even more than that.

And Paul alludes to it with the language that he uses here. You see, the word coming in verse 15, the coming of the Lord, isn't the ordinary word that you'd use for just kind of showing up somewhere. Like, hey, are you coming to lunch after church?

It's not that word. And in fact, if you've done some reading about Christian hope or Christian understanding of the last days, you might have even run into this word in the Greek. It's *parousia*. And in Paul's day, that word had a very specific meaning.

[15 : 35] It basically was the word that you would describe for an imperial visit. When Caesar or some other high-ranking official of the empire showed up in your province or your city for an official visit with pomp and circumstance, that's the word you'd use.

Parousia. Do you see what Paul's saying here? Jesus' return is the ultimate *parousia*. That will be the arrival of the world's true king once and for all.

His is the imperial visit that puts all the other supposed rulers or authorities or powers in their proper perspective. Friends, have you seriously considered which king and which authority is going to stand on the last day?

Have you considered who gets the last word or whose power is going to have the final say? Friends, it is Jesus Christ. And Christian, do you live as if that's true?

You know, it's not your boss. He or she does not sit on the throne of the universe despite what they may think. Their verdict is not determinative of your life.

[16 : 59] High schoolers, it is not your peers. Though some of them may think that they have the final say on who's in and who's out and what's cool and what's not.

At the end of the day, they do not. College students, it is not your parents' expectations. They are not the one who ultimately decides how the world turns.

There's a greater king. Live to please him. And as we look out at the world and see suffering and oppression and evil, we know that even those powers don't have the final say.

And perhaps most importantly, even as we consider death itself, we know that it's not death that gets the last word. And it's not death that has the final say. It's Jesus who died and rose again.

Paul assures the Thessalonians that being alive when Jesus returns won't give you any advantage over the dead. You won't get to the party any faster.

[18 : 03] You won't have a head start into the new heavens and new earth as if you sort of got to the running blocks quicker. Now why? Why not? You see, because Jesus' kingly rule will overcome even death itself.

Just like your boss or your peers or your parents' expectations have no ultimate claim on you, neither does death. Imagine Bill Gates comes to visit.

And you and your buddy meet him at the door. I don't know why he's coming to visit you. You're lucky. And you, well, you're broke. So what do you do? You just say hi and you shake his hand.

Ah, but your friend, your buddy, you see, he actually tries to slip Bill Gates a crinkled \$20 bill on his way in. And thinking that that's going to give him the in. And you look at your friend and you're like, this is utterly ridiculous.

What are you doing? \$20 doesn't make a difference to the wealthiest man in the world. He's got enough money to make us both fabulously wealthy for the rest of our days. What's \$20 when Bill Gates shows up?

[19 : 06] Friends, in the same way, what is death when the author of life shows up? He's our hope in the face of death.

That's what Paul's on to in verse 15. And in verse 16, he goes a step further. Christian hope is the return of Christ and along with that, the resurrection of the body.

You know, if you walk down Grove Street for a few blocks, past Woolsey Hall, on the right, you eventually get to Grove Street Cemetery. And if you look over the entrance, do you know what it says? Anybody know?

The dead shall be raised. I remember giving a friend a tour around town once. And I showed her this because we happened to be passing by and I think it's pretty awesome.

And she looked at it and her first response was, Ew. I'm not exactly sure what was going through her mind and why that was her first response.

[20 : 06] But, you know, think about it. If you're thinking about the resurrection of the dead through the lens of a zombie movie, through Evil Dead or something like that, I suppose the thought of people coming out of their graves isn't exactly a comforting one.

And of course, while that's not what the Bible has in mind, you know, it doesn't go in the opposite direction either. And this is what's very interesting. The Bible would not have us think about our ultimate hope and our future state as some kind of disembodied spiritual experience.

You see, in the ancient world, some people were very keen on that thought. Believing that the material world was bad and corrupt and that the body was a prison that you just had to escape from. That was essentially Plato and Gnosticism and a lot of Eastern thinking today.

And you can still kind of find it on sort of par. But you see, friends, that's not Christianity. God made the world and he called it good. And though it's falling, God will do a work of new creation out of the midst of the old.

So how should we think about the resurrection of the body? Well, you see, the lens that the Bible gives us to think through is actually the lens of agriculture. You put a seed into the ground and in a certain sense it dies.

[21 : 21] It dies. But when the time is right, it comes forth in brilliant, stunning life. Flower bulbs are kind of like that.

You know, bulbs are kind of dirty. They're not very attractive. And to me, they kind of look like onions. You can tell I'm not a gardener. I like eating onions, but I don't like looking at them, right?

But when you put a flower bulb into the ground and spring comes at the right time, what comes forth is beauty itself.

And you can gaze at a flower for a long time and take in the color and the scent and the shape and be captivated. Paul says that when Christ comes, he's going to issue an overwhelming, irresistible summons that will mark the right time.

Paul actually uses three images to try to capture it here. I think he's kind of talking about one reality, this sort of commanding cry, this angelic voice, this divine trumpet, all a way of sort of capturing the summons of Christ.

[22 : 35] And in that summons, the very voice that spoke creation into being, the creative, commanding voice of God will call forth his new creation once and for all.

The dead in Christ will rise like bulbs coming forth in flowering beauty. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul describes it like this, what's sown is perishable, what's raised is imperishable.

What's sown in dishonor is raised in glory. It's sown in weakness, but it's raised in power. Now you have to see that the hope of bodily resurrection makes a huge difference.

First, it means this, that God's plans cannot be overthrown. God created us to be material, physical creatures, to know him that way, to glorify him that way, to live in the world that he has made.

And our resurrection will be a great testimony to the fact that God's purposes always stand. And second, it tells us that our future state is going to be richly experiential.

[23 : 47] Just think, the most thrilling, sense-heightening experience you could possibly get in this life will be nothing compared to what awaits us in the future.

The description of the resurrection body that we just looked at from 1 Corinthians 15 would lead us to believe that what's ahead for believers isn't less experiential and less powerful and less glorious, but more so.

And don't you see that that utterly explodes, that you only live once mentality, that would tell us that we have to get as much satisfaction and thrill out of this life as we possibly can before it all ends.

Which, of course, is a burden and an anxiety that none of us can bear. How many of us are driven to have it all? The satisfying and meaningful job and the perfect family and the most cultured hobbies and the most exotic travels and the most accomplished tastes and the most impressive stories and the most deep and profound existential realizations.

All because we think that this life is all we've got. Friends, but if you believe in the resurrection of the body, then now isn't your only chance to eat a great meal.

- [25 : 18] Now isn't your only chance to hold hands and to dance late into the evening. Now isn't your only chance to meet new and interesting people who will tell you fabulous stories.
- Now isn't your only chance to feel the ocean wind blow through your hair. Friends, you can relax and actually enjoy this life because you know that the life to come will be even more richly, deeply experiential.
- God delights it to be so. But a third reason why the resurrection of the body is important, it actually takes us into the third point of our passage in verse 17.
- We see there that Christian hope involves not just the return of Christ and not just the resurrection of the body, but also the reunion of the family of believers. The Christians who are alive when Christ returns, Paul says, will be caught up together with those who've been raised.
- That same passage that we've been talking about in 1 Corinthians 15, and actually Zach read it for us earlier in 1 Corinthians 15, 51 through 55, tells us that the living two will be given glorified resurrection bodies.
- [26 : 32] We shall not all sleep, Paul says, but we shall all be changed from perishable to imperishable, from mortality to immortality. Now some have thought that this particular verse here in 1 Thessalonians teaches a secret sort of whisking away of the church from the earth, sometimes called the rapture.
- But you know, the language that Paul uses here doesn't actually lead us to that conclusion. In fact, just like the word coming that we talked about earlier, the word meet in verse 17 was also another pretty technical term in Paul's day.
- You see, when a dignitary paid an official visit to a city, what would happen? The citizens of that city would go out to meet that person as he approached. And then, they would basically form a welcome committee and escort that dignitary back in.
- And the celebration would begin. And that's the word that Paul's using here. You see, the picture's very clear. Christ is coming.
- And we're going out to meet him as he comes all the way down to rule and to reign and to renew all things. But you see, Paul's main point is that in that moment, we will be together again.
- [27 : 57] Together with those we love and have lost in Christ. And together, not just ethereally or spiritually, but dwelling in bodies free from death and sickness and decay.
- Truly with one another in all of our fullness. not less than who we were, but gloriously and irreversibly and permanently more.
- And not only will we be with one another together, but we'll be with the Lord. And think about it, friends. If in the death of a friend, we lose not just that friend, but something in all of our friends.
- Just imagine what that reunion will be like. Think about the fullness that it will call forth in one another. It will be like water let loose from a dam.
- Lewis actually picks up that thread in his essay on friendship. He says, In heaven, the very multitude of the blessed, which no one can number, increases the fruition which each of us has of God.
- [29 : 06] For every soul seeing Him in her own way, doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest. You see, friends, as we dwell together with Christ in that personal communion and fellowship that we have with Him as our Creator and our Redeemer and our friend, He brings out something unique in each one of us.

But then that gets communicated around to others and we share in one another's joy. one writer put it this way, On that day, God will be all in all and His people will be enthralled by the immediacy of His ineffable holiness and everything we do will be to the praise of His glorious grace.

When you talk about the future state, you've got to use words like immediacy and ineffable and holiness because it's so good. Friends, that's the destination.

That's the highlands. Except there you see the sights won't get old and the wonder won't wear off. I remember when I first moved to New Haven, I loved it because it reminded me of Oxford and it had this sort of mystical sort of feeling to it.

Now that I've been here for eight years, I still love New Haven, but you know, the architecture just doesn't do it for you anymore. It wears off. Every once in a while you get that sort of pang of longing and joy, but...

[30 : 35] Friends, the glory of the Lord, we're told in Scripture, is unfathomable. You can cast your measuring rope down into its depths deeper and deeper and deeper and yet you've not even begun.

And as that unfathomable glory reflects in and through each one of us, the wonder will be greater still. Friends, so here is the contour of Christian hope, return and resurrection and reunion.

And of course, there's more that could be said. In Romans 8, Paul talks more about the renewal of creation than he does here. Next week, Matt's going to pick up even more of what Paul has to say about the return of Christ. But for the grieving Christians and Thessalonians, this is what Paul wants them to hear.

This is what he wants them to take hold of. And he wants them to take hold of this, not because it's nice, wishful thinking. That's often what we mean by hope, isn't it? Sort of wishful thinking. No, Paul says, this should be your confident expectation.

That is Christian hope. Confident expectation for the future. And why confident? Paul lays it out in the first half of verse 14. Did you see it there?

[31 : 47] We believe that Jesus died and rose again. friends, that's the center of it all. What is the ground or assurance we have of Christ's return and the resurrection of the body and the glorious reunion?

Paul says, it's the very gospel itself. We believe that Jesus died and rose again. And since we believe that, we know that the rest will follow.

You see, friends, the death and resurrection of Jesus doesn't just tell us that it's possible for God to raise the dead, but that it's his plan to do so. We're told in 1 Corinthians 15 that Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Another agricultural metaphor. The first fruits were the initial part of the harvest that told you what was in store for what was to come. Imagine looking at a dam and suddenly you see a spray of water come shooting through the middle.

Any engineers? You know that's trouble. I talked to Andrew. He said that was true. If you see the spray of water coming out, friends, that dam is going to give way any moment and the water is going to come rushing forth.

[32 : 56] Looking at the resurrection of Jesus Christ is like looking at that stream. A moment will come when the dam gives way. It's inevitable, friends. There's nothing that can hold it back because in the incarnation, Christ has joined himself to us with the deepest bonds and he took on our flesh and on the cross he took our sin and our death and he's been raised to life so that all those who belong to him can know that their sin has been dealt with and that they too will be raised.

So in the face of death, how does the gospel make a difference? Paul says, I don't want you to grieve as others who have no hope. And you see, friends, on the one hand, that means that Christians will still grieve. Christianity is not just grimly accepting one's fate.

It's not pretending like death isn't a big deal. Death is an enemy and it separates us from the ones we love. And Jesus himself was weeping and was infuriated when he stood before the tomb of his friend.

Don't be ashamed to grieve, friends. In fact, one of the main ways that we actually grieve without hope is by denying that death is as awful as it really is. And Paul says, you don't have to do that.

You can and should grieve. But on the other hand, you don't have to grieve without hope. When my father died, I was 21.

[34 : 31] Was there grief? Of course. He was stolen from life in his 40s. I would never get to speak to him again in this life. He would never meet my wife and he would never meet my children.

My son and daughter would grow up never knowing their dad's dad. And we wept because death is an enemy. And yet, when the grieving ran out, when we poured out the last drop of our tears, you see, underneath it all, there was something more profound than grief.

There was a reality that stood after the wind and rain of grief had come pounding down. The Lord Jesus himself saying, I'm the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live.

You see, friends, Christians are the only ones who can stand over a grave with tears in their eyes and grief in their hearts and sing a hymn of resurrection.

[36 : 02] Because Jesus died and rose again. In Christ, God has taken hold of us, and on the cross he was pierced with the sting of death, our sin and our guilt so that all who believe in him will die a stingless death.

Friends, death is not a dying if you die with Christ. We grieve, but not without hope. And finally, Paul says, encourage one another with these words.

The gospel means real comfort and real strength in the face of death. And we are to offer it to one another. We're not alone in our grief and we are not without real comfort.

I love this. The opening question of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, what is your only comfort in life and in death? And the answer, that I am not my own, but belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

I think that's one of the most beautiful things Christians have ever written outside of the New Testament. Christians encourage one another with these words, here is your strength, here is your courage, your comfort in the fullest sense of the terms.

[37 : 29] Finally, this morning, if you're not a Christian here, if you're not sure what you believe, let me ask you this. How do you square with death? As you stare into that undiscovered country, do you pause at what dreams may come as Shakespeare says?

Of course, none of us can know how many days we will have or how long our life will be, but what's your comfort? What's your strength in the face of death? Is it your work?

Is it your reputation? Is it the family you'll hope to have beside you that you'll leave behind? Is it your aspiration that you sought to live well and be a good person?

Don't you see, friends, none of these things will survive the tides of death. They are not strong enough. They will not stand.

But there's one who is. The one who died and rose again. He has gone into the undiscovered country and he's come back again. So what or who are you building your hope on this morning?

[38 : 40] call out to Christ and plead that he takes hold of you because he's strong enough to be your comfort and to be your hope in life and in death.

Build your hope on him. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, for the hope that we have in you, we are humbled and we are thankful.

Lord, would you increase our faith and our love and our hope and may we be a people who grieve but not like those who have no hope.

Lord, and in our grieving would you be honored and would you be glorified as we sing our hymns of the resurrection and as we look forward to the great harvest when you return and we will be raised and we will enjoy one another forever in the life to come.

Lord, we ask all this in Christ's name. Amen.