

- I. Good evening, and welcome back to our Wednesday night Bible study.
 - A. We are grateful that you all continue to choose to make Wednesday nights a priority.
 1. I know that many of you value what you have found here through Bible Study and small groups.
 2. I know that for many of you this is an opportunity to be soothed and calmed by a boring sermon and surrounded by safe people.
 3. I know many of you value what you manage to learn in spite of my failings as a teacher.
 4. So let me say that if you find something valuable here, make sure you invite your classmates to share it with you.
 5. If you learn good news here, then they can too.
 - B. Are you guys feeling good about our memory verse?
 1. Alright, let's do it together.
 2. 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, "16 May ___ Lord Jesus Christ ___ and God our ___, who ___ us and by his ___ gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen ___ in every good ___ and word." LK
 3. 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, "16 May ___ Lord ___ Christ ___ and God our ___, who ___ us and by his ___ gave us eternal ___ and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen ___ in every good ___ and word." LK
 - C. Before we pray and get into our message for this week, let's quickly review last week.
 1. Towards the end of our lesson last week, we spoke on idleness and being a busy body, but we focused most of our time on sanctification and God's will for us.
 2. And while I think we did ok working through the text and some of the language and theology involved, I want to read from John Stott's commentary on our passage from last week.
 3. He does a really good job at summarizing and emphasizing the heart of 4:1-12.
 4. We work as for the Lord, and we love, as for the Lord.
 - D. All of that being said, in chapter 4, Paul addresses 3 different groups of people.
 1. The first two he addressed last week in verses 1-12, those who may be tempted to selfish self-love in their sexuality and marriage and those who are tempted to lazy idleness.
 2. In our text for tonight, he will address those who are confused and hurt because of the grief of having lost loved ones.
 3. The title of tonight's message is this: Those who have died in Christ.
 - i). We will be covering verses 13-18.
 - ii). Just 6 short verses.
 - E. So, since it is not long, let's read them all at once and then address them one or two at a time.
 1. Without further ado, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, "13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught

up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.” LK

2. Let's pray and then take this passage a little at a time.

II. When we look at Verse 13 we can understand that misinformation is a reality in EVERY age.

A. Paul says “13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren about those who are asleep.” LK

1. In this verse, there are two types of misinformation going on.

- i). The first is a lack of information.
 - a). We have seen this kind of misinformation throughout Paul's letter.
 - b). The whole reason he sent Timothy to the Thessalonians was because he couldn't stand not knowing how they were doing anymore.
 - c). He wrote this letter to them so that they would have information on what he has been up to and why he hasn't come to visit.
 - d). So, a lack of information was troubling to both Paul and the Thessalonians.
- ii). The second kind of misinformation is bad information.
 - a). Where information is lacking, especially when it comes to important information, we tend to fill in the gaps with all sorts of things that might make sense but are not correct.
 - b). Paul himself was concerned for the Thessalonians and imagined in chapter 3 that the tempter might be deceiving them, making Paul's labor among them vain.
 - c). Sometimes we run the risk of letting our minds fill in the blanks with all sorts of anxious thoughts and possibilities that paralyze us from action.
 - d). Sometimes we let those thoughts dictate to us the worst possible situations and we believe those for true, even though the reality is, we don't know.
 - e). Like the other night, Thursday night, around 11:40, when the fire alarm went off at CSC and no one could find Jordan.
 - 1). I thought Jordan might be dead.
 - 2). Fortunately, I have been in enough of those kinds of situations to know what I don't know, and I didn't assume, but I went and checked on him.
 - f). Paul also knew what he didn't know, and sent Timothy.
 - 1). In other words, even though he had concerns because of his lack of information, he didn't let that lack get filled in with disinformation or useless anxiety.
 - 2). He took action to get the right information.
 - g). His concern for the Thessalonians here, is that where they lacked information about those who have died in Christ, they would fill that lack with bad information.

2. Paul's fear was that they would take lessons regarding death from “those who have no hope.” LK

- i). Broadly speaking, we shouldn't assume that Paul is unaware of other religions or of various philosophies that circulated in Macedonia.
- ii). While Paul was in these various places, the book of Acts attributes to Paul a remarkable knowledge of various beliefs and belief systems (see especially Acts 17).

- iii). If we assume that Paul is aware of other beliefs about an afterlife, then what might Paul have meant when he said they “had no hope?”

B. The first thing that Paul likely meant is that they had no grounding in reality.

1. In other words, other religions might have beliefs about the afterlife or salvation, but they are not based in reality, only in speculation.
2. Paul’s claims of hope in the resurrection are not based on mere speculation and possibilities, but based on eyewitness testimony regarding the literal death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
3. Other philosophies and religions don’t have that level of historical grounding regarding their beliefs in an afterlife.
4. Since we have discussed that in previous messages, you can just go read 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Peter 1:16-21 to get an idea of what I mean.

C. The second thing that Paul likely meant is that even those religions and philosophies that have an idea of an afterlife and god don’t have this kind of afterlife.

1. Stoics were pantheistic rationalists. Those are my summary terms of their beliefs.
 - i). What I mean is that they believed that there was a single divine principle or entity that unified the universe: they called it rationale, or god.
 - ii). For them, in the face of death, they believed you just had to man up, accept that death was a “natural” part of life, and move on.
 - iii). Don’t give in to feelings of grief or anger but buck up buttercup and deal with it.
 - iv). Virtue and living in the present were more important for them, than considering what may come after death.
2. Eastern religions don’t have preservation of personhood from one life to another.
3. Greek and Roman Paganism had neither glorified bodies nor glorified relationships with the gods.
4. Today, in our world, we see much of the same or similar understandings all over the world.
 - i). These beliefs have persisted because we all die.
 - ii). We all face death, what are we supposed to think about it?
 - iii). If you want a rather lengthy article about it from a famous British woman, you can look up Diana Athill in the Guardian, with an article titled, “It’s Silly to be Frightened of Being Dead.”

D. Allow me to make one point about death before looking at verses 14 and 15.

1. Let me start by saying something that may seem counterintuitive.
 - i). Death is not a natural part of the human experience.
 - ii). Now, you may be wondering how I can say that, since we all go through death eventually. (Dr. Boley likes to say on Sundays that there is a 1/1 chance that we don’t make it out of this world alive.)
 - iii). No one, with the possible exceptions of Enoch (Gen 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), gets through life alive.
 - iv). Moreover, as our bodies decay, they really do break down into their component parts which really do fertilize the ground and give life to plants and then to animals and so on in a real “cycle” of life and death.
 - v). So, isn’t it natural?

- vi). No, not according to the Christian worldview.
- 2. In the beginning we were made to live eternally with God.
 - i). In Genesis 2, Adam and Eve walked with God in the cool of the day and in the presence of the tree of life.
 - ii). Had they not sinned, they would have lived forever with God and would have never experienced death.
 - iii). Death is not the natural end of this life but is rather part of the curse of rebellion.
- 3. But we have lived so long with sin, and its result; death, that we have come to believe that death is a natural part of life.
- 4. Yet, this goes against everything in us as human beings.
 - i). When someone we are close to dies, we experience painful emotions.
 - ii). We mourn at their end, and we mourn at our separation from them.
 - iii). While thinking about death before we experience death can help to temper those emotions, the emotions themselves are good things because death is unnatural.
 - iv). Those emotions of anger and grief clue us in to the reality that something is wrong.
 - v). They clue us into the fact that it wasn't meant to be this way.
- 5. The unnaturalness of death is easiest to see when a death is unjust.
 - i). When people die of starvation.
 - ii). When there is a bus crash that kills dozens.
 - iii). When war and famine run rampant.
 - iv). When assassinations and murders and mass shootings and infant mortality are common in our world, it is easy to understand that something is wrong, and it is right to be both alarmed and angry.
- 6. In John 11:1-45, one of the friends of Jesus, a man named Lazarus, died.
 - i). Jesus, knowing that He would raise Lazarus from death, was "deeply moved within" (38) and wept (35).
 - ii). Jesus, God Himself in the flesh, wept over the state of humanity even knowing that He would offer eternal life by His own sacrifice.
 - iii). Christians recognize that death and the separation it brings are not what we were made for.
 - iv). We can and should have emotions, we can and should grieve.
- E. If that is true, how should our mourning be different from the mourning of those who have no hope?
- III. Let's turn to verses 14-15 which tell us that the resurrection of Jesus means a sure and certain hope for our resurrection.
 - A. 14-15: "14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep." LK
 - B. The first thing to say then, is that Jesus defeated death.
 - 1. In Romans 6:1-10, Paul really expands on verse 14 by talking about how baptism links the Christian to both Christ's life and death.
 - 2. Baptism is symbolic for the "burial" into Christ's death, a "watery grave" if you will.
 - 3. But it is also symbolic for the raising up into new life.

4. Hebrews 2:14-18, describes how Jesus defeated death, "14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." LK
 5. When Christ was hung on the cross, the devil celebrated his victory.
 6. He had enticed humankind into killing their savior, God Himself.
 7. Yet it was through that very death of His human body that the Son of God overcame death as an innocent sacrifice, indeed as a scapegoat for the rest of us.
 8. Our hope doesn't come from how good we are, or from speculation about what might be, but our sure and certain hope comes from the fact that God Himself defeated and defanged death, using death itself.
 9. With that defeat of death comes the promise to all who believe in Him, that they too have an assurance of resurrection life.
 10. That is very different from stoicism, from naturalism, from Eastern religion, and from anything else than anyone else has to offer.
- C. But then Paul uses some language that has occasionally tripped up Christians through history.
1. What does it mean to "sleep" in Jesus?
 2. I won't spend a lot of time here because I don't think most of you are at risk of believing wrongly, but let me just say plainly that sleep is a metaphor for physical death.
 3. It is a metaphor in three ways.
 - i). The body lies still in death, much like it does in sleep.
 - ii). The person rests from their toils and labors, much like the body rests in sleep.
 - a). And here, let me say as a side note, that for those who die apart from Christ, this rest is a rest from sinful toils.
 - b). They sin no more and so death is a mercy even as it is a curse.
 - c). But for those of us who die in Christ, it is rest from the hardship of life.
 - iii). Finally, and most dramatically, death, like sleep, is only temporary -we gonna wake up!
 4. The second thing he says that has tripped some people up has been Paul's statement that those who remain alive will not precede those who have fallen asleep.
 - i). It seems that in their lack of information, the Thessalonians were anxious that those who had died would in some way miss the glory of Christ's return.
 - ii). That death was somehow a judgment against them or that it would in some way reduce their honor in Christ's return.
 - iii). In other words, as Paul would later say in Romans 8, "38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." LK

D. So, in verses 14-15, Paul assures the Thessalonians that even those who are asleep in death in Christ, are not lost in any way to the all powerful and loving God.

1. What an assurance that death is no longer a thing to be feared.
2. As the contemporary worship song declares: no guilt in life, no fear in death! That is a solid Christian anthem.

IV. When we turn then, to verses 16-7, Paul elaborates, just a little bit on what this resurrection will look like, “**16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.**” LK

A. Last week, when I gave the introduction, I said that Paul turned his attention from narrative in chapters 1-3 to ethics and eschatology in chapters 4 and 5.

1. Last week we dealt with ethics.
2. Tonight, what we have been talking about eschatology without saying it aloud.
3. Eschatology is the Christian discussion of the end times or of the “last things.”
4. What will it look like for human history in the end?
5. Is there a direction and an endpoint.
6. While verses 14-15 hint at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, verses 16-17 shout about it.

B. It will be obvious and announced - angels and trumpets.

1. Other places of scripture, make allusions to the worldwide nature of the 2nd Coming.
2. No one will miss it when Christ returns.
3. I think sometimes we get a little bit too caught up in trying to figure out exactly what the voice of the archangel will be like or what the trumpet of God is, when the point is that when you see and hear it, you will know. There won't be any question!
4. If you are wondering if this event has happened in your lifetime, then it hasn't.
5. Rest assured you have not and will not miss it.

C. Not only is it announced, but Paul says the dead will rise first.

1. What does THAT look like?
2. Put in the simplest terms possible, it means bodily, physical resurrection for those who have died.
3. It means that if you are one of the faithful departed, you receive your glorified bodies slightly before the living faithful.

D. Now, I do want to address something that is related and more contemporary to our time.

1. There have been people who have asked me about or expressed to me concern about those who have been cremated.
2. They are worried that because they were not buried, or perhaps because their bodies have been mixed with the earth or the ocean or other dead bodies in a crematory, that somehow, they will miss out on the resurrection.
3. As if God is unable to separate out what was really their body from other bodies and atoms.
4. If that were true, then we would have a lot more problems than just cremation.
 - i). What about people who have been dead so long their bones are dust and mixed with the earth and then eaten by animals, pooped out, and taken up by plants?

- ii). What about those who were lost at sea?
- iii). What about those buried in mass graves?
- iv). What about the fact that human bodies change every day and that roughly every 7 years no cell in your body is the same as 7 years ago?
- v). If cremation is a problem, then we have a lot of other practical problems too.
- 5. The deeper problem though, is a problem of erroneous theology.
 - i). I just read from Romans 8 where Paul says that NOTHING in all of creation can separate us from God.
 - ii). If you think cremation can separate us from God, then you don't have a big enough or a strong enough view of who and what God is capable of.
- 6. So, the dead will rise first and then verse 17 says that we who are alive will be caught up with them in the clouds and we shall all be forever with the Lord.
- E. Guys, what Paul describes here is not some temporary fairytale love story ending.
 - 1. "Happily ever after" doesn't end for us like it does for Disney.
 - 2. Nor is it a temporary resuscitation, as it was with Lazarus from John 11, who later died.
 - 3. Rather, it is a forever resurrection where we will have glorified bodies.
- F. What exactly does it mean that we will have glorified bodies?
 - 1. We don't have all of the details, but we do have some good information.
 - i). When we look at the resurrected body of Christ, which is also called the "glorified" body, we recognize a few things.
 - ii). First of all, that body is a physical body that is somehow connected to or similar to our bodies now.
 - a). When Jesus met with His disciples after His death, He broke bread with them, He touch them and they touched him, He sat at table with them in Luke 24.
 - b). Jesus showed them the scars from His crucifixion in John 20.
 - c). Non-physical things don't physically interact with physical things in this way.
 - d). Ghosts and spirits don't have scars.
 - e). In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is clear in verses 17-19 that if Christ has not been resurrected, then we are the most pitiable among men because we have lied about God and put our hope in falsehood.
 - f). So, the glorified body is physical but is also very much our bodies.
 - iii). Secondly, we learn that the glorified body is very much superior to this one.
 - a). It doesn't suffer sickness, disease, or death.
 - b). We see that in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, Revelation 21:4, and in Philippians 3:21.
 - c). The maladies that assault our flesh here in this life will assault us no more once the fulfillment of the resurrection arrives.
 - d). And, as Paul says in verse 17, we will live forever more with Jesus Christ.
 - iv). Thirdly, we learn that the physical body we will have a heavenly or spiritual foundation.
 - a). When Paul speaks of the glorified body in 1 Corinthians 15, he speaks of it as a heavenly body as opposed to an earthly or fleshly body.
 - b). What he means is that sin and selfishness are eradicated, not just from our souls, not just from our wills, but also from our physical existence.

- c). Of all the worldviews in this world, none do as much good for body image and affirmation of embodiment than the Christian resurrection.
- d). Christians believe we were created with bodies and that we will live forever in bodies and that those bodies were made to be good and will be made good again.
- v). We will have an immortal body that is not controlled by sin and one that doesn't even struggle with sin.

G. C.S. Lewis, in his work *Mere Christianity*, says this about life during and after the resurrection, "The command, 'be ye perfect' is not idealist gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command... He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into... a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such love and energy and joy and wisdom as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful, but that is what we are in for."

1. How many of us think about that when we attend the funeral of a loved one?
2. How many of us, when we share the gospel, have this in mind?
3. How many of us, when we go to work or to class, do so with the end in mind?
4. We mourn sin. We mourn death. But we do not mourn as those who have no hope.
5. We mourn as those who see what the world is supposed to be and who long for that blessed existence to come quickly and not delay.
6. The reason that Paul speaks about eschatology and ethics together is that our eschatology, our understanding of the purpose and end of humanity ought to determine our ethics now.
 - i). If we will be sinless then, if we are justified now and being sanctified, then let us pursue our sanctification now.
 - ii). If we will reflect perfectly God's radiant brilliance then, let us strive to reflect it as much as we can now.
 - iii). If we shall be perfectly loving and selfless in our relationships then, let us pursue love in all things now.
 - iv). Our view of the resurrection ought to lead us in the opposite direction from sexual immorality, from idleness and gossip, and certainly away from fear and grief conceived in hopelessness.
 - v). Though we live in these mortal bodies now, we know that we are citizens of a different kingdom, let us live as such, as far as we can, by His Spirit.

H. Before we close on verse 18, let me say that I considered taking the message another way tonight.

1. We could have spoken much more about Christian history.
2. We could have spoken about differing theological viewpoints about the rapture that we see in verses 16 and 17.
3. But instead of cramming them in tonight, I think there will be a better opportunity next semester.
4. Next semester on Wednesday night, John Miller is 99% sure he will be doing a study through the book of Revelation, so I will let him tackle the Millennium and the rapture.

5. For us, tonight, the focus is on the pastoral heart of Paul's letter to those who were mourning.
- V. That is why Paul wrote about the 2nd Coming of Christ in this chapter.
 - A. Listen again to verse 18, "**18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.**" LK
 - B. Just as eschatology should shape our ethics, so should it bring us comfort in our sorrow and hope in our mourning.
 1. No doubt that grief is hard.
 2. Separation from loved ones is hard.
 3. There is a certain level of human uncertainty and pain involved with death.
 4. We cannot and should not want to escape those feelings for they point to the disordering of creation.
 5. But we look to Christ, His resurrection and especially His return.
 - C. Let God's goodness and promise redeem your mourning and grief into something that has a purpose.
 - D. As we close, I want to pose a series of questions.
 1. Of all of the understandings and beliefs regarding death, which one makes the most sense of life and death together? Which one gives the most comfort?
 2. Is it one of the various other religions?
 3. Is it one of the various philosophies?
 4. Or is it the one that affirms that life and embodiment is good, and that we were made to love our creator and our fellow creatures now and forevermore?
 - E. In preparation for this sermon, I listened to a sermon by Timothy Keller on the same passage.
 1. I would like to end tonight in the same way that he did, by reading from George Herbert's *Dialogue-Anthem* between a Christian and death personified.
 2. Christian: "Alas, poor Death! Where is thy glory? Where is thy famous force, thy ancient sting?"
 3. Death: Alas, poor mortal, void of story! Go spell and read how I have killed thy King.
 4. Christian: Poor death! And who was hurt thereby? Thy curse being laid on him makes thee accurst.
 5. Death: Let losers talk, yet thou shalt die; these arms shall crush thee.
 6. Christian: spare not, do thy worst. I shall one day be better than before; thou so much worse, that thou shalt be no more.
 - F. Live in the recognition of that reality.
 1. Let that reality permeate the way that you live.
 2. Let it permeate the way that you grieve.
 3. Let us pray.