



## Christians Have Hope in the Face of Death

*Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)*

Be honest. What is your initial gut reaction every time you've received the news that a loved one has died? Whether sudden or long-expected, a tragic accident or grandma passing quietly in her sleep, our hearts sink because we know that despite our world's talk of death being "a natural part of life," life and death have absolutely nothing in common. Death is an unnatural and unwelcome intruder that barged its way into God's perfect world when Adam sinned (Rom. 5:12). We weep and grieve because we love and will miss the person who has been taken away. Such grief is entirely natural and human, nor is it sinful—even our Lord Jesus who came to defeat sin and death, broke down and wept at the grave of his friend, Lazarus (John 11:35-36). However, with these words the Apostle Paul encourages us not to be overwhelmed by the grief of death because unlike the rest of people living in this world, we Christians have hope.

Sadly, those who are ignorant of Christianity and don't trust in Jesus are terrified and overcome by the fear and uncertainty of death. If they've bought into the atheistic philosophy of evolution, they assume this brief life is all there is and death is the end of conscious existence. If they've been lured into following any of the world's religions, there isn't a one of them that holds out any confidence when you die. You can only pray that you've been good enough, tried hard enough, made up for all your wrongs and meditated rightly because otherwise there's no hope for you.

Believers in Jesus are blessed because we enter death holding onto the sure words and promises of God, already evidenced in the death and resurrection of our Savior. Although we may not know every detail, we already know what is going to happen to us. When Jesus died on the cross his body and soul separated, and his soul was reunited with his Father in heaven (Luke 24:36). So too when we die our souls will leave our bodies and immediately go to be with God. But just like death was not the end for Jesus, it will not be the end for us either. Three days later Christ's soul and body were reunited, and he rose from the dead. He is the first human being to receive the perfect heavenly body, which God has waiting for all of us (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35ff).

For that reason, when we hear of a fellow-Christian's death we may be sad, but we need not be overwhelmed because they've gone to be with Jesus and will return with him on the Last Day. In fact, Paul maintains that the dead in Christ will actually have it better than those who are still alive on Judgment Day. At that moment everyone on earth will see Christ coming in all his glory with all his angels and the souls of all the redeemed. They will hear the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God will reverberate across the world. Then the bodies of dead believers will be raised, and they will experience the new life first. Afterwards those who are still alive will be transformed and glorified and lifted up to meet them with the Lord in the air (cf. also 1 Cor. 15:51-53).

Because of Jesus' resurrection we have a hope that conquers death and dries our tears and gives us peace. Death is not the end because Christ is coming.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, your empty tomb proves that you are the victor over death. Through faith in you, you now give us your victory and make death no more terrifying than sleep. When we breath our last and close our eyes we will awaken to be with you in heaven. When you return on the Last Day, you will awaken our renewed bodies to be with you forever in the paradise of the new heavens and the new earth. May these promises always comfort and encourage us until we personally enjoy what you have won for us. Amen.*