

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

“Will You Be With The Lord?”

Sermon

NAS text

Tim Black

1.

Introduction

1.

There is hardly a more vexing question for the unbeliever, than “What will happen to me when I die?” My mother went to a funeral of an unbeliever once and came back disgusted with what the pastor had said...the pastor had said, “This man who died is in a better place now, *perhaps*. He is enjoying the bliss of heaven with God the Father,

perhaps

! He is no longer in pain and suffering,

perhaps!

” The pastor could not bring himself to state the stark truth—that this unbeliever who had died was

not

in heaven, was

not

with the Lord, was

not

in a better place now. He was suffering in hell. Because this pastor would not speak of the

absolute certainty

of the torment in Hell which awaits all who do not believe on Christ for salvation, neither did this pastor extend the

absolute certainty

of the eternal blessedness which awaits those who believe on Jesus Christ. In fact, he was allowing those present at the funeral to grieve like unbelievers must, who have no certain hope.

2.

You see, if you ask the unbelievers around you this question -- “What will happen to you after you die?” they have no satisfactory answer. Some will claim they will **go to heaven**, perhaps on the basis of their good works, perhaps on the basis of God’s kind generosity. But this is a false hope; while God certainly delights to forgive our sins, He will by no means forgive a sin which He has not punished in Christ, and Christ only laid down His life for His own sheep—not to spare the lives of the goats. He laid down His life for those whom He has elected to save, and not for those whom He has destined for wrath. If you ask other people this question -- “What will happen to you after you die?” they will answer that **they**

just don’t know

what will happen. After all,
has anyone ever died and lived to tell about it?!

:) Others, more honest, might tell you an answer much closer to the truth—they don’t know much about what will happen after death,
but

they fear it

.
Death scares them

. They’re afraid that they might be punished for all their sins, punished even in the pains of hell forever. And in truth every unbeliever, whether they admit it or not, knows this one fact—that God’s wrath is coming on their sins.

Romans 1:18, 19

says that

1.

the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

2.

They know they are guilty, they know that they deserve God's wrath and that it is coming on them in the end, and for this reason **Hebrews 2:15** tells us that unbelievers are in slavery to the fear of death all their lives.

3.

It is this kind of fear that can grip you when you face the fact that you will die, you will face the Lord on the judgment day, when He will send

some to everlasting life in communion with Him in glory, and banish the rest to everlasting punishment. What will happen to you when you die? Will you be with the Lord, or will you be cast out of His blessed presence forever?

4.

God tells you in this passage today that he does not want you to be ignorant and grieve like those who have no hope. Paul says in **1 Thess. 4:13**,

1.

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.

2.

You see, it is so easy in this world to think about death with the eyes of unbelief. The unbeliever looks at death and remains ignorant; he is uninformed about how he can be saved from this terrible curse of death. He can only expect wrath, and judgment, and condemnation, something fearful on the other side of death. And if he sugarcoats his fear by telling himself that there remains something good, something pleasant, for him on the other side of death, the unbeliever can have *no certainty* that his pleasant hopes will come to fruition. In fact, he has no hope--no real hope of God's blessing in the life to come. And so because he is ignorant, because he has no hope, he *grieves*

. He says to himself at a funeral, “Oh, look at what a terrible thing has happened to my grandfather! He’s died, and I don’t know where he has gone! I’ll never see him again, and there is nothing I can do about it. And one day this terrible thing is going to happen to me.” What a horrible, unrelenting grief this is to those who do not have the Christian hope. They are without

knowledge

, without

hope

, without

comfort

. They do not have

the

knowledge of the resurrection

, and so they do not have the

hope of the resurrection

, and so they do not have the

comfort of the resurrection

.

3.

But Paul tells you today,

1.

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.

2.

If you believe on Jesus Christ for your

salvation, then you are not uninformed, because you have the *knowledge* of the resurrection. And you are not like the rest who have no hope, because you have the *hope*

of the resurrection. And so you need not grieve like they do, because you have the *comfort*

of the resurrection. So we will consider these 3 points this evening: first,

The Knowledge of the Resurrection (13-14),

second,

The Hope of the Resurrection (15-17)

, and third,

The Comfort of the Resurrection (18)

.

1.

Body

1.

The Knowledge of the Resurrection (13-14)

1.

First, Paul tells you of the knowledge of the resurrection in **v. 14**. He says,

1.

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.

2.

This is the core of the gospel; this is the very foundational belief of every Christian—“**that Jesus died and rose again.**” If you believe this one thing, that Jesus died and rose again, then don't you see, this is the foundation of every other hope which God gives to you in the Christian life. Believe the truth that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and the great pain and anguish of despair will find no place to rest in your heart. My friends, have you come in this door to worship the Lord on a Sunday but found that your heart is weighed down by the most terrible

feelings of hurt, and anguish, grief, or despair? The woman who was your sweetest friend no longer loves you, your dearly beloved grandfather has died, and there is no one to comfort you, your companions and your loved ones have all been taken from you, and darkness is your only friend? Have you been there? My dear friends, if the Lord brings you to that point in your life, and all you can see is your pain, cling to this one thing—remember this! “ **T**
hat Jesus died and rose again.

” Remember that Jesus died and rose to conquer death, to be victorious over the grave, to defeat our enemies of sin and misery, of sin, and death, and hell. And if you know this Jesus as your Savior, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord--even Lord over death—and if you believe in your heart that God raised Him

from the dead, if you know this Christ and the power of His resurrection, then I tell you, that even as you will be united with Him in the likeness of His death, so also you will certainly be united with Him in His resurrection. “

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.”

(
4:13
)

3.

Do you grieve the loss of one whom you love? Do you grieve that someone you know has died? Do you grieve that your own bodies are subject to decay, to

deterioration, to the loss of your physical health, your mental ability, even your emotional well-being? Do you grieve because of the misery of this life which is bound up with the final curse of death? Do you grieve over your sins, our sins, which have brought on us this misery, this suffering, and finally, death?

4.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, then I *exhort*

you to remember, to remember that there will come a day when God will take away all mourning, and crying, and pain, for the old order of things will have passed away.

God will say, “
the old is gone, the new has come,
” because in Christ you will be a new

creation.

5.

But further, do you not see that because you believe on Christ even now, He has begun to make you a new creation? He has given you a new heart, a new spirit, a heart that longs to worship God, to serve Him, to love Him, to do all you can to bring glory to His name. A heart that longs to be in the courts of the Lord, a heart that knows how lovely is His dwelling place. A heart that has received God's saving love, and now longs to share it with those who are in need. God has given you a working faith, and so now you have a laboring love. A love for God and

your neighbor that can weather the afflictions of this life, because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and because He who raised Christ from the dead is now at work in your mortal bodies, is now at work in you giving you *resurrection life*, even this very second. You have begun to experience the living reality, and you have begun to experience the deep certainty, of what God tells you in

Rom. 8:11

, that

1.

if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will

also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

2.

And greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

3.

You see, if you know that Jesus has risen from the dead, then you know that you too will rise from the dead at the last day. You know that He who began this good work in you will be faithful to complete it in you unto the end. You

know that He will be faithful to “establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”

(
1 Thess. 3:13

) You have
the knowledge of the resurrection.

4.

The Hope of the Resurrection (15-17)

1.

The more deeply you grow to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, the more wholeheartedly you cling by faith to the death and resurrection of Christ as the foundation of your very life, the greater and greater hope you will have for this life and for the life to come. You will not look to the future with fear, but with hope. You will not look to the future expecting for sin and death and *misery* to prevail, but rather you expect your Lord Jesus

Christ

to prevail over the gates of Hell. If you know in your soul that Christ has conquered the last enemy--death--then who are you to worry that He will somehow fail to implement that victory

in your experience on the final day?

You see, if you have

the

knowledge

of the resurrection

, then you will have

the

hope

of the resurrection.

2.

Paul speaks of this hope in **1**

Thess. 4:15-17

in this way, saying

1.

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.

2.

The Thessalonians wondered whether those who have died would be able to participate fully in our final glorious meeting with Christ when He returns to take us to glory. After all, the dead are dead. How will they be able to know that Christ has returned? Will they miss out on these great events? Have they become disadvantaged, and defeated, by their final enemy, death? Has Christ truly defeated death? *Or not?!*

3.

You can see how this fear is understandable, but you can also see how this fear does not reckon with the greatness of Christ's absolute victory over death. He has *fully* conquered death. So who are you to worry that somehow He will fail on that final day? Paul shows us how in fact Christ will not fail, and therefore, why we should not look on that final day with fear, with worry, even with grief and anguish, but rather with the fullest joy and hope and expectation.

4.

Paul focuses in on one main point here: he focuses in on the *order* in which the living and the dead will meet the Lord. He speaks only of believers here, believers who are either described as the “

dead in Christ

” in

v. 16

, or the “

we

” who “

believe that Jesus died and rose”

in

v. 14

▪

5.

Now in what order will the living and the dead meet the Lord when He comes? Will the dead somehow be “left behind?” In fact, no, they will not be left behind. In fact their souls have already passed into glory! **2 Cor. 5:8** says that believers who are absent from the body are at home with the Lord, just as Jesus told the thief on the cross, “

Today you will be with me in

Paradise.

” If anything, the dead in Christ are in fact greatly advantaged beyond us, for they have already gone to be with the Lord! It is for this reason that Paul speaks of those who are alive using a word that means that

we

are “left behind.” “

We who are alive and remain

until the coming of the Lord.

” It is not the dead but rather it is

we

who are left behind already!

6.

But Paul has a further point to make here. When Christ returns, we will not meet Him without the dead being fully included with us in that glorious meeting. This is because Christ has truly conquered death! And so He will come with a commanding shout, commanding that the dead rise from their graves,

commanding death to
relinquish its hold on their
bodies, announcing His coming
with the awesome voice of the
archangel, and with the trumpet
blast of God. Christ will come
with a commotion and an
authority that will *wake the
dead*. My
friends, their dead bodies may
look like they are “sleeping”
before the moment Christ
arrives, but they will be fully
awake when He commands
them to come out of their

graves. And so then the souls of those who have died in the Lord, those who are believers who have died, their souls will be reunited with their bodies so that they can join in with those of us who are still alive in ascending to meet the Lord in the air, when He comes. They will not be left behind, and neither will we. They will not be left behind, because Christ has conquered death. “

...

when this perishable

body

will have put on the
imperishable, and this mortal
body

will have put on immortality,
then will come about the saying
that is written, "DEATH
IS SWALLOWED UP in victory.
55 "O DEATH, WHERE
IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH,
WHERE IS YOUR STING?

"

(

1 Corinthians 15:54-55

)

Christ has come to make His dwelling with you, in your heart, and throughout your life, and will be with you always, even to the very end of the age. He will not abandon you to the grave, but will be your comfort, your soul's chief treasure, both in life and in death. In a most blessed way, you are "wanted," whether you are dead or alive. And not only does He desire to dwell with you, but in fact He will be with you from the moment you believe on Him for salvation,

on into all eternity. And so,
Paul tells us, “
and so we shall always be with
the Lord.
”

7.

The Comfort of the Resurrection (18)

1.

Is this not the greatest comfort you have in this life? That you are not your own, but that you belong, in body and soul, in life and in death, to your faithful Savior Jesus Christ? That He will never leave you nor forsake you, that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord? What a glorious blessing we have in Christ our Savior, that He has won the victory over death! What a comfort the resurrection is to us!

2.

And so Paul says in **v. 18**,

1.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

2.

You see, the unbeliever does not know for certain that there is any escape from the sting of death, from the victory of the grave. They do not know that Christ has risen from the dead, no, in fact they deny Christ's resurrection to the day they die, however morbidly futile that denial is. They do not have the knowledge of the resurrection. And so neither do they have the hope of the resurrection, and therefore they grieve. What a terrible, terrible lot for those

who do not believe that Jesus died and rose.

3.

But do you see that *you* are tempted to grieve in this same way? You see the death of your family members, of your brothers and sisters in Christ, you see their bodily deterioration, you even see their sin, their misery. Not to mention your own. And you *grieve*

over these things, for they are evil; they are the consequences of our sin. But you must not grieve as those who have no hope. For you have the hope of the resurrection. You have the *knowledge* of the resurrection. Therefore you truly do have the *comfort* of the resurrection.

4.

Our preaching is not in vain, and your faith is not in vain, for our hope in Christ is not for this life only. Those who have fallen asleep in Christ have not perished. No, but rather, as **1 Cor. 15:20** reassures us,

1.

20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

21 For since by a man came

death, by a man also came
the resurrection of the dead. 22
For as in Adam all die, so also
in Christ all will be made alive.
23 But each in his own order:
Christ the first fruits, after that
those who are Christ's at His
coming, 24 then comes the end,
when He hands over the
kingdom to the God and Father,
when He has abolished all
rule and all authority and power.
25 For He must reign until He
has put all His enemies under
His feet. 26 The last enemy that

will be abolished is death. 27
For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS
IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS
FEET. But when He says,
"All things are put in
subjection," it is evident
that He is excepted who put
all things in subjection to Him.
28 When all things are
subjected to Him, then the Son
Himself also will be subjected to
the One who subjected all
things to Him, so that God may
be all in all.

2.

We have the great assurance in this life that one day Christ will raise us from the dead, for we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Paul tells us in **Romans 8:31ff**

what a great victory God has accomplished for us over our sin and misery, guilt, anguish, grief, suffering, and especially, over death and hell, saying,

1.

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right

hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through

Him who loved us. 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.

2.

Conclusion

1.

Therefore my friends, I exhort you to remember these things. Speak the good news of Christ's resurrection to your soul when you are downcast, as David did, saying

1.

11 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. (**Psalm 42:11**)

2.

Remember that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, Jesus

Christ is risen indeed. He is risen, and because He has risen from the dead, so will He will raise your mortal body from the dust on that final day, to meet Him in the air, therefore comfort one another with these words.

1.

Will you be with the Lord? If you believe on Christ for your salvation, you will *always* be with the Lord. Oh my brothers and sisters in Christ, long for that day when you will see Him face to face, as Job did so long ago by faith in his faithful Redeemer, and so say with Job that

1.

25 I know that my Redeemer
lives, and that in the end he will
stand upon the earth. 26 And
after my skin has been
destroyed, yet in my flesh I will
see God; 27 I myself will see
him with my own eyes-- I, and
not another. How my heart
yearns within me! (**Job**
19:25-27)