

Theme: Christian hope, anchored in Christ Himself, defeats death by guaranteeing believers an uninterrupted union with Jesus - from death, through resurrection, and into eternal life.

## I. The Shocking Death of Sirius Black

- A. An important, loved character in the Harry Potter series
- B. Through 4 books, the good guys win; then Sirius dies
- C. JK Rowling helping kids wrestle with the complexity of life, disappointment, and death
- D. The Thessalonians faced a similar struggle about loved ones who died before Jesus returned - what happened?

## II. The Need For Hope In Death

- A. Central question: What about believers who die?  
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. <sup>14</sup> 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**. <sup>15</sup> 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**. <sup>16</sup> 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**. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16
- 1. The central question here is about the fate of believers who die before Jesus returns.
  - a. Be careful of trying to make this about other topics!
  - b. The Thessalonians were upset and questioning about loved ones who had died - this is the focus.

- 2. Fall asleep (3x) is a euphemism for death
  - a. Death obviously looks like sleep!
  - b. Paul speaks of them as "dead in Christ" in v16.
  - c. But as we will see, for a believer, death is merely sleep for the believer's body until the resurrection!
- 3. Paul specifically speaks of believers who have died
  - a. 'In Him' (v14), 'the dead in Christ' (v16)
  - b. The focus here is not on everyone but on believers - and this will be our focus as well.

### B. Even in the face of death, we have hope!

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. 1 Thessalonians 4:13

- 1. Paul is writing to make sure they are not ignorant regarding this important topic!
- 2. When facing the death of a loved one, we grieve, but we do not grieve without hope
- 3. Thus, the hope we have in Christ is not just for life - it is also for death!

### C. Paul makes the same points in 1 Corinthians 15

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have **fallen asleep in Christ** are lost. <sup>19</sup> **If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.** <sup>20</sup> But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of **those who have fallen asleep**. 1 Corinthians 15:17-20

- 1. 'Fallen asleep' (2x) - the same phrase & implications
- 2. This is about those who fell asleep 'in Christ'

3. v19 - our hope is not just for this life, but includes facing death itself!
  - a. In fact, if our hope does not include death, Paul says we are to be pitied!
  - b. Walking with Jesus in this fallen, corrupt world brings extra challenges - but it gives hope for this life and for the life to come!

### III. Christ Our Hope In Death

#### A. Our hope is anchored in Christ Himself

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**. 1 Thessalonians 4:14

Then those also **who have fallen asleep in Christ** are lost... <sup>20</sup> But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, **the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**. 1 Corinthians 15:18, 20

1. The whole context in both passages is offering hope about those who are 'in Christ'.
2. Our hope is not in ourselves or our ideas but rather in our union with Christ - we are 'in Him'.
3. To be 'in Christ' means that my whole life is in union with Jesus - including my death and resurrection!
4. This is why Jesus is the 'firstfruits' - our resurrection is united with His resurrection.
5. Because He has conquered death and is raised from the dead, everyone united with Him experiences His victory over death and resurrection! It is theirs as well!

#### B. We have a firm hope because the spirits of believers who die are immediately with Jesus.

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**. 1 Thessalonians 4:14

1. To fall asleep 'in Him' ('in Christ') means that we are still united with Him even in our death.
2. It is our body that sleeps until the resurrection; our spirit is with Jesus immediately upon death.
3. Paul teaches this more clearly in 2 Corinthians
 

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. <sup>7</sup> We live by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:6-8

  - a. Paul is contrasting our lives before and after death
  - b. While we live in our current state, we are 'away from the Lord' and living 'by faith'.
  - c. But when we die, we are 'with the Lord' and live 'by sight'!
  - d. When a believer dies, they are immediately with Jesus in paradise, seeing Him and enjoying His Presence in a way never experienced in this life.

#### C. We have a firm hope because the bodies of believers who die will be resurrected when Jesus returns.

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**. <sup>17</sup> **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. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

1. When Jesus returns, the 'dead in Christ will rise.'
2. In fact, they will rise FIRST - before those who are alive are transformed in their bodies
3. (More on resurrection and transformation in AH)
4. Only 'after that' are those alive joined with Jesus in their newly transformed bodies.
5. Paul is saying that far from death being a hindrance to being with Jesus, those who die in Christ actually PRECEDE those who live in every aspect of being united with Jesus in fullness.

D. We have a firm hope because believers who "sleep in Jesus" are with Him through all eternity.

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. <sup>17</sup> 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.** 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

1. Our hope is firm because we are united with Jesus by the Spirit during this life.
2. Our hope is firm because we at death our spirits are immediately in the presence of Jesus and our faith has become sight.
3. Our hope is firm because our bodies will be resurrected at His return.
4. Our hope is firm because we are united with Jesus forever!
5. Our hope is firm because nothing can separate us from Jesus - not life, not death, not eternity!

## IV. Applying the Word

A. This is meant to encourage us!

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... <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage each other with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 18

1. This passage is given so we will not be ignorant of the reality of what happens to believers who die!
2. This passage is meant to encourage me when I have lost someone I love!
  - a. This does not mean there is no grief when someone we love dies - we grieve!
  - b. But we do not grieve like those who have no hope - for we have a firm hope that is stronger than death itself, for it is anchored in Christ!
  - c. Our grief does not overwhelm us because we know that the one we love is experiencing what they have longed for all their lives!
  - d. Our grief does not overwhelm us because we know that death is not the end. We will see one another again - and oh what a day of rejoicing that will be!
3. This passage is meant to encourage me when I face my own death!
  - a. This does not mean there is no fear or grief as we face the prospect of our own death - there can be!
  - b. But if we meditate on these truths, they will fan the flames of hope to burn away the fear and grief!
  - c. We need to speak these truths to one another to fan the flames of hope to burn away the fear and grief!
4. This is how we apply these words of truth to have hope in life - and in death!

## B. The Table of Living Hope

1. As we have seen, the means of grace sustain hope!
2. This Table is a prime means to sustain hope
3. Christ instituted this meal on the night of His betrayal, fulfilled it in His crucifixion, and meets us here until He comes again!
4. Confession of faith - 1 Corinthians 15 summary
5. Come and receive living hope from your risen Lord!

### Christ Our Hope In Death

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

August 17, 2025

Communion

Philippians 3:10-11

Teaching keywords: Eschatology; second coming

May you know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, attaining eternal life and the resurrection from the dead.  
Philippians 3:10-11

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<sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage each other with these words. 1

Thessalonians 4:13-18