

Theme: Because Jesus died and rose again, death cannot separate believers from Him — their spirits are immediately with Christ at death, their bodies will be raised when He returns, and nothing in life, death, or eternity can break their union with the Lord.

I. Helping Grandkids Deal With Death

- A. Tim reading Harry Potter to kids; death of Dauby
- B. JK Rowling helping kids wrestle with the complexity of life, disappointment, and death
- C. BRCC has 3 families who lost loved ones recently
- D. How can we have hope in the face of death?
- E. The Thessalonians faced a similar struggle about loved ones who died before Jesus returned - what happened?

II. Hope When Facing Death

- A. Central question: What about believers who die?
But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are **asleep**, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him **those who have fallen asleep**. ¹⁵ 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**. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And **the dead in Christ** will rise first. 1 Thess. 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. Asleep (3x) is a euphemism for death

- a. Death obviously looks like sleep!
 - b. Pagans, Jews, and Christians all used this metaphor
 - c. Paul speaks of them as “dead in Christ” in v16.
 - d. 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. ‘the dead in Christ’ (v16); these are “with Him” (v14)
 - 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!
 - 4. This is not “positive thinking” – it is a holy hope!
- ## C. Paul makes the same points in 1 Corinthians 15
- And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have **fallen asleep in Christ** have perished. ¹⁹ **If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.** ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of **those who have fallen asleep**. 1 Corinthians 15:17-20

1. 'Fallen asleep' (2x) - 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 Even In Death

A. Our hope is anchored in Christ Himself

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will **bring with him those who have fallen asleep**. 1 Thessalonians 4:14

Then **those also who have fallen asleep in Christ** have perished... ²⁰ But in fact Christ has 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 holy hope because the spirits of believers who die are immediately with Jesus.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, **God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep**. 1 Thessalonians 4:14

1. To fall asleep as a believer 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

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather 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. When we die, we are 'with the Lord' & 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.
- e. More on this important topic in After Hours

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

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. **And the dead in Christ will rise first.** ¹⁷ **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. 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. Only 'after that' are those alive joined with Jesus in their newly transformed bodies.
 4. 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.
 5. The ultimate Christian hope is not disembodied existence after death, but the resurrection (or transformation) of the body!
 6. We will live forever with Jesus in glorified bodies!
 7. (More on resurrection and transformation in 2nd AH)
- D. We have a firm hope because believers who "sleep in Jesus" are with Him through all eternity.
- For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ 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.** 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17
1. We have a holy hope because we are united with Jesus by the Spirit during this life.
 2. We have a holy hope because at death our spirits are immediately in the presence of Jesus and our faith has become sight.
 3. We have a holy hope because our bodies will be resurrected or transformed at His return.

4. We have a holy hope because we are united with Jesus forever!
5. We have a holy hope 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... ¹⁸ 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 holy 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 as I await Christ's return!
 - a. Life in this broken world can be very hard!
 - b. We struggle against sin as we try to live in holiness in this sin-soaked age as we await Christ's return.

- c. We struggle as our bodies age, and as we see all of the brokenness that makes it seem as if evil is going to win.
- d. But Christ's resurrection means the new age has dawned, and all that is sad is coming untrue!
- e. Meditating on this great truth can give me hope when I am tempted to despair!

4. This passage is meant to encourage me when I face my own death!

- f. This does not mean there is no fear or grief as we face the prospect of our own death - there can be!
- g. But if we meditate on these truths, they will fan the flames of hope to burn away the fear and grief!
- h. We need to speak these truths to one another to fan the flames of hope to burn away the fear and grief!

5. This is how we apply these words of truth to have a holy hope in life - and even in death!

B. The Table of Living Hope

- 1. The means of grace are given to 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!

Philippians 3:10-11

Teaching keywords: Death; eschatology; second coming; hope; intermediate state; resurrection

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

A Holy Hope

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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Communion