

Saints Triumphant Sunday
November 15, 2020
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Saved From Death by Christ

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (NIV84)

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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Dear Friends in Christ,

A widow marches slowly out to bury her son in the town of Nain. But Jesus interrupts by touching her dead son and raising him to life. Death is defeated! Jairus learns that his twelve year old daughter has died but Jesus interrupts the mourners by telling her to get up and she does. Death is overcome! Mary and Martha tell Jesus that their brother is very sick. Jesus arrives after Lazarus has been in the tomb four days but Jesus tells Lazarus to come out and he does. Death loses again. The women and the disciples hide and mourn after Jesus is crucified but Jesus interrupts their mourning by rising on the third day. Death has lost its sting!

Over and over again, Christ showed his power over death while he walked this earth. The apostle Paul looks ahead in our text today to the time when death is finally and completely defeated. He tells us that there will be a time when we are saved from death by Christ. It is true for us now and will become even more real for us on the day Christ comes down from heaven.

Ignorance is Not Bliss

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.

Someone might ask, "Pastor, why are we talking about death? Isn't that a morbid topic?" Yes, it is. "Why talk about death? Isn't it a depressing topic?" Yes, it is. "Why talk about death? Couldn't we just talk about love and joy and peace, things that make me happy?" No, the inspired Scriptures today tell us that we cannot ignore and be ignorant of this topic of death. Paul wants us to know all about it. You've heard the saying, "Ignorance is bliss." Paul tells us the opposite today. Ignorance is not bliss.

Some may convince themselves that if they don't think about something bad happening, it will not happen. Ignoring death is not going to make it go away. The Bible only records two people who did not die. Enoch and Elijah were taken to heaven before going through death. And there will be a generation of believers who are alive when Jesus returns who will be taken directly to heaven. There is a small possibility of not tasting death, but it is very small. Might as well be

prepared and know something about it.

Paul says there is a big difference between those who are ignorant and those who know about death. This is even among Christians, for Paul is addressing the believers in Thessalonica. Some are grieving for their loved ones who have died as if they will never see them again. Some, even among the Christians, were grieving without any hope of the resurrection. They believed those who had fallen asleep in death were forever gone and therefore grieved deeply their loss. Since some were ignorant about what would happen to believers who had died, Paul tells them:

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.

Ignorance of the facts leads to sorrow without hope. But knowledge leads to a certain hope. Those who fall asleep in Christ, those who die with faith in Christ are not gone forever. They will rise again to life and live with Christ. How do we know this about our loved ones? How can we be certain that this is our future too? We have two facts of history on our side. These two facts of history prove that what seems impossible is actually certain. We will live even though we die.

The two facts are simple: Jesus died and rose again. Of course, some might say that Jesus' death and resurrection are only true in our minds and by faith, not historical realities. But this is what separates Christianity from many other world religions. The events in the Bible are historically accurate and actually happened. We have many independent witnesses of these events who recorded them: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul and Peter to name several of them. But these accounts are all in the Bible, some will object. True, these independent authors have been collected into one book but they wrote their books and letters independent of one another. We also have historical records from outside the Bible that tell us the of Christ's death. Jesus Christ died. This is a verifiable historical fact.

The resurrection of Christ is also a historical fact. The same authors testify to it. Paul was changed from a persecutor to a believer by seeing the risen Christ. Most of the disciples died as martyrs rather than deny the resurrection of Jesus. When one digs into the details of the resurrection of Christ and the arguments against it, the clear conclusion is that Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus died and rose again. It is as simple as that. It is as certain as that. Because Jesus died and rose again, we have hope. He overcame death and so will all who fall asleep in Christ. He lives forever and so will all who die in Christ. All because he died and rose again.

To Be With the Lord Forever

Paul describes the hope we have in Christ and the joy all believers will have when Jesus returns.

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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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.

Some of the believers in Thessalonica seemed to be under the impression that those who died before Jesus returned were going to miss out on the glories of that day. But no one will miss that

day. In John we learn that believers and unbelievers will be raised on that day by the voice of Christ. Our text today only focuses on the believers.

Just ask anyone in my family and they will tell you that I can sleep through almost anything. Thunderstorm, sirens and certainly the alarm clock. But not even the dead will sleep through the arrival of Jesus. His voice and his command will raise the dead back to life. Accompanying his voice will be the trumpet call of God. One trumpet in this sanctuary can overpower all other instruments. Imagine the trumpet of God! This is the sound of victory as Christ gives his believers what he has promised – resurrection to eternal life.

At that time believers will be with the Lord forever. This is the best part of eternal life, to be with our Savior. Jesus suffered and died as the sinless sacrifice needed to redeem us from our sins. Jesus showed his love for us by willingly giving his holy and precious blood for us on the cross. On that day we begin a time without end of being with the one who loves us more than any other.

And maybe the second best part of that glorious day will be when every believer, those who were just raised to life and those who were still living, are caught up together with the Lord in the air. We will be with every other believer of all time. Of course, you are probably not thinking about all believers of all time. You are likely thinking of a few specific believers who have gone before us. You might get a lump in your throat or a tear in your eye when you think of them. For we believers still mourn. But we do not mourn without hope. May part of that lump in the throat and tear in the eye be because you are going to see them again. May our mourning be mixed with the hope and joy of the day our Lord reveals to us when we will certainly live forever with our loved ones in the Lord.

Think about the families Jesus gave a foretaste of the day of his return. He gives a widow back her only son on the day of his funeral. He gives a young daughter back to her father. He gives a beloved brother back to her sisters. While those families were in the midst of the death of their loved one, they mourned. Death was sad and depressing and something they would like to know much less about. But think of what they talked about in the weeks and years after Jesus raised the son, daughter and brother back to life. How would they have described the day Jesus crashed the funeral of their loved one? It was no longer a sad memory. There would be laughter and joy and praising the Lord for he turned the worst day into a day of joy.

We are living in the time of the funeral. Loved ones fall asleep in the Lord and we miss them. We will also fall asleep in the Lord unless he returns soon. But all our sorrow and mourning will end on the day Christ returns. For then death will be overthrown forever. Life will be restored and we will live with the Lord and all believer forever. As we wait Paul tells us the same thing he told us last week. *Encourage each other with these words.*

Amen.