

## Living with the Hope of the Eternal – 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

My hope is that today's service will be a memorable one!

How many of you have been to a funeral? What was that experience like?

Before us today lies a casket but let me assure you there is no-body inside!

Today we get to experience a funeral without the reality of the loss of a loved one. Today we get to hear a funeral message before the need for it arises!

But... maybe the need for this kind of message is now! Maybe the best way to prepare for these moments, is to know what God has to say on the topic today!

I have been to a few funerals in my life, and I have officiated 14 of them, and I'm amazed at how different the atmosphere can be.

What I have witnessed at the funerals that I've been a part of is that people:

- Are looking for hope as they ponder the realities of death!
- Are asking the question "Is there something more than just this?"
- Grieve differently, as a response to what they believe!

The Thessalonian Christians believed that Jesus was going to return, but that it would be immediate. They were so excited about being a part of this event that the thought of missing out on it never crossed their minds!

But Jesus didn't return immediately, and their loved ones started passing away, and fellow Christians were losing their lives in the persecution.

It became unbearable for them to think that their deceased loved ones would miss out, & that all that they hoped for in Christ was lost in their death.

So Paul writes: **"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."** – **Vs. 13** Paul wanted to instill in them a hope from an eternal perspective!

That physical death is not the end of the story! Paul was convinced that if they understood death from God's perspective that they would grieve differently!

The good news of the gospel is that resurrection is a reality, both for Christ and for all who are "in-Christ" – meaning those who put their faith in Him!

**John 11:25-26 – "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives & believes in me will never die."**

Paul believed this and that's why he uses the word "asleep" here in vs. 13. Jesus died & rose again - that reality changes things for us & our loved ones.

Just as this casket is empty today, we can be assured that when the bodies of our loved ones in Christ are being laid to rest, that they are no longer present in the body, in the casket, but are eternally present with the Lord!

Paul tells the Thessalonians that **"For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep."** They're not only present eternally with the Lord, but they will be returning with Him one day at His second coming! – **Vs. 17**

*How does that change our perspective when we stand at a graveside?*

Our loved ones in Christ will be a part of Jesus' entourage when He returns & it will be their bodies that rise first & experience the full effects of His second coming! A new & heavenly body is in store for those in Christ!

**1 Cor. 15:54-57 - "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?... Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."** The sting of death is swallowed up in resurrection!

*How does that change the importance of people believe in Jesus Christ today?*

There is no greater joy for me, as a pastor officiating a funeral, when I know that the deceased was a person who put their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior!

For what is our only comfort in life and in death? **Heidelberg Catechism # 1**

Paul paints for us w/ his words a blessed hope for the coming Day of the Lord! It points us forward, to live in light of this eternal perspective!

Hope is truly found in what the popular hymn declares – "Living He loved me, dying He saved me, buried He carried my sins far away; rising He justified, freely forever, one Day He's coming – O Glorious Day"

*How does our anticipation rise for Jesus' return knowing what the future holds?*

My hope is that this empty casket funeral service today will instill in us a proper understanding of death and life, the eternal reality to life, and that we would go from here and live in response to our eternal hope in Christ!

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