

Topic	Death and Christian Hope
Reference	1-Thessalonians 4:13-18
Date	15 October 2017
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## **A. WE NEED TO FACE THE REALITY OF DEATH**

1 Thessalonians 4:13 (ESV) 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.

Here we have a situation where the Thessalonians have come to know Christ, but before Christ comes again, some of them have died. We don't know whether they died of natural causes or because of persecution which was rampant at that time in that particular locality but they have died and they basically grieve because they have lost this brethren, we don't know what happened to them and the grieve come to the fact that they don't really know what's happening.

Death pervades and it is close to our hearts but the rest of us don't think about it, because you don't have an experience where you lost somebody and that's when death becomes a reality in your life. We talk to older people and they tell us, they are afraid of death, because they don't know what is going to happen when you die. Nobody has been there come back. We lose ourselves, we lose someone we love. There is pain and suffering. Some people as they get older, their fear of death basically goes away but then they still fear the pain and death associated with dying and then there is loss of control. Jesus gives us an attitude to death.

John 11:33-35 (ESV) When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled .34 And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept

It's an anomaly, because you have got to raise the guy from death in 5 seconds and you are crying, why does Jesus do that? Actually the word is greatly moved is actually called 'embrimaomai', which means troubled. It is the word that describes the snorting of fiery horses. So Jesus is outraged, at people crying and moved in his spirit and then he cries. So why does he do that, what is happening here is that Jesus is troubled and outraged by the tragedy in evil of death. He knows all about death and when he sees people crying, tearing their hair, tearing their eyes out, he feels the power of sin over their lives and he is outraged, because he is the Lord of Life. He gives life and now that he sees death, which is an absolute tragedy in front of him, he feels outraged, he feels moved and he cries because he feels the grief and the pain of all the people suffering. The outrage is also because the people are crying as if they got no hope. Here are bunch of people and the way cry is like there is no tomorrow and he is outraged at that.

So therefore the Bible tells us, when to come to a funeral you are outraged because of the pain of sin, the evil of sin and yet you grieve with the people, but you do not grieve as others who have no hope. The problem is not grieving; it is a natural reaction. Bible tells us we should grieve, Jesus grieved with them, Jesus wept, Jesus felt their pain, but there is outrage but he doesn't grieve as if you got no hope.

This a first century papyrus letter,

*Isidorus to Taysenouphis, his most treasured friend, many greetings. First of all, I hope that you are in good health and I pray for you every day before the lord Sarapis. I was very grieved for your husband, as I was for my brother Germanus. Have courage and take it bravely, for this is common to all. May your children enjoy good health. My mother and brothers greet you .....*

Here is another letter Written to Lucillius and death of friend Flaccus.... 1 AD

*You have buried one whom you have loved; look about for someone to love. It is better to replace your friend than to weep. I know what I am about to say is a very common remark, but I shall not omit it simply because it is said by all.....I would prefer if you abandon grief than have grief abandon you; and you should stop grieving as soon as possible because even if you wish to it is impossible to keep it up for very long.*

This is Irene, an Egyptian, to a family that has lost a son

*"But, nevertheless, against such things one can do nothing. Therefore, comfort ye one another. Fare ye well!"*

This is the way the people at that time receive death. The trouble is no matter how much we dress up the animals, they don't think about death. They don't plan for the future, they don't write a will, it is only specific to human beings. Irvin Yalom is a professor emeritus of psychiatry at Stanford Uni,

*"forever shadowed by the knowledge that we will grow, blossom and, inevitably, diminish and die".*

That is the human dilemma. We actually have this dissonance in lives, you love smoking but smoking will cause cancer and kills you. Here we are at the pinnacle of our lives, emerge from nothing, have a name, consciousness, deep feelings and everything else but on the other hand we are going to die. We want to get involved in life but myself give up because no point, because in the end you die. So you have got this dissonance. Steve Jobs best illustrates this in his life. He writes,

*Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life," he said. "Because almost everything—all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure—these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart."*

So Steve Jobs is an Epicurean. He doesn't think about death, because there is nothing there. He doesn't think about as the same way; he doesn't think about life before birth. It is all empty. So he lives like this, but towards the end of his life he got pancreatic cancer. This is another interview later on about belief in God and the afterlife.

*"Sometimes I don't. It's 50-50. But ever since I've had cancer I've been thinking about it more, and I find myself believing a bit more. Maybe that's because I want to believe in an afterlife, that when you die it doesn't just all disappear. The wisdom you've accumulated, somehow it just lives on."*

Here you have Steve Jobs, arrogant brash person that believes there is no God, but towards the end of his life, he just doesn't know, because there is something inside, all the wisdom you have accumulated, somehow it lives on. So we actually have much of our thinking about death arises from this seminal book written by Ernest Becker in 1973. He won a Pulitzer Prize and there is another one called *Escape from Evil*. He actually postulates that the fear of death is the one that actually gives rise to all our behaviour. He writes in his book at the preface.

*"the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity—activity de-signed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man"*

He is saying, whatever we do, what jobs we take, how we form relationships are in some way related to somehow denying death. For example, death is such a horrible word, we never use it. We have euphemism for this word. We tell each other, he is departed, went away, lost the battle or didn't make it and we doctors have a new term, negative patient outcome, because we don't want to say death. It is very bad, it reflects badly for me and my surgeon, I just had negative patient outcome, because we don't want to mention death. We are repressing it.

In the Las Vegas shooting where about 59 people were shot dead and 500 were injured, this is one of the person who was there. He was shocked and he said, *"I said to myself, 'These girls aren't going to die. I'm not going to die. I need to get home to see my daughter. This is not happening. Not happening,"*

Do you think standing there and saying, it's not going to happen will stop the bullet, the bullet will not negotiate? He was very-very fortunate; he wasn't shot but we try to deny what's happening. What he is doing is that the bullets are falling all over the place, there is no shooting here, there is no death, I am not going to die. That's the picture of how stupid we are when we face death. Ernest Becker denies death; Steve Jobs ignores death. Later on working on the work of Ernest Becker is a group of social psychologist in 1986 and they wrote this idea of Terror Management,

*This fear has the power to motivate a life well lived. It stimulates us to cherish those we love, create enduring memories, pursue our hopes and dreams and achieve our potential.*

So somehow when we deny death, we manage the terror by using it to live and to create memories. There are two mechanisms to it. One is self-esteem. Scientist have found that the lower your self-esteem, the higher the fear of death. The higher your self-esteem, the lower is your fear of death. So therefore what we do is that we actually use self-esteem as psychological protection against death. So what raises your self-esteem is your CV, get another degree, get another bungalow.

The other one is basically illusions of immortality, what we do is we form world views to latch onto symbolic immortality. For example, if I am a rich millionaire, I am going to leave a legacy for children. My memory will live on; these are the symbols of immortality that we do in order to manage the terror. To manage this theory, we go back to Genesis,

Genesis 11:4 (ESV) Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

Here you actually have people building their own self-esteem, building a symbol of immortality that will last longer than they can last, why, because they are afraid of death. For the rest of us, we don't have enough money to buy, so we go and take picture of Twin Towers and we place it on Facebook, and on Facebook we can live forever. That is our attempt at immortality.

The culture of dieting is also a way in which we deal with the terror of death. They actually did a study on basketball players and what they did was they gave them a questionnaire and it included questions about death and mortality and then in another scenario the coach wore a dark shirt with a skull, just to remind them that death is around the corner and the guys who had the exposure to the thoughts or mortality actually did 30% better than the guys who didn't. So somehow the terror, the feeling of death causes you to react and try harder as it were.

In the last 2016 election in America, they have actually found that the more people were scared, because just after the San Bernardino shooting, the more they voted for Donald Trump. It is the politician who spouses more safety for you as it were. So we come to psychiatrist, they help people. They cannot avoid death but they help you accept death, acceptance, commitment therapy, positive thinking, cognitive behaviour therapy. CS Lewis when his wife died actually wrote these words,

*“If she is not now she never was. I mistook a person for a cloud of atoms and if life ends in death then it doesn’t really amount to very much”*

Because all the memories of his wife’s life is actually useless because we are just a cloud of atoms, which just die and there is nothing after that. Because life is totally meaningless or meaningful depending on what death is. That’s why we need to face the reality of death.

## **B. DEATH IS NOT THE END**

1 Thessalonians 4:13 (ESV) 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.

So Paul uses the word ‘asleep’ to tell you that death is temporary, it is going to be over soon.

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.

The problem with the scourge of the evil and the tragedy and atrocity of death is so bad, it is almost 100% mortality, but actually it is not, it is 99.999...%, this is because Jesus rose and once you have somebody rose you have a ray of hope. During Ebola virus tragedy in Africa, it is almost 100% for mortality but then some people did not die. The moment you have somebody who did not die then there is something in them. So they went to look for their blood and look for a vaccine based on antibodies.

Everybody died, only one person doesn’t die, Jesus Christ. He breaks the mold, he breaks out and so it is our union with Jesus, through Jesus Christ God will bring with him a close union, even closer than you and your wife. Whatever happens to Jesus happens to you. It is a close union, so therefore we will be resurrected. So therefore death is not the end.

## **C. RETURN OF CHRIST MUST DEFINE THE WAY WE LIVE**

We can either live like Ernest Baker said; denying death, managing death, ignoring death, or we could live with hope where the return of Christ must define the way we live. This is our hope.

**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. **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

This is the promise, this is the scripture, but people come from both ends of the spectrum. There are those who don't believe on the second coming. The Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins in the United Kingdom recently wrote that there is absolutely no certainty in the New Testament about anything of importance. That means second coming not important and they actually revolted against him, so that he wouldn't be consecrated as an Archbishop of Durham but they did. Interestingly enough when he was made Archbishop of Yorkshire, there was a lightning strike at the cathedral three days later on.

Some people cast the second coming as mythological, other say it is due to a spiritual descent. They say Christ's second coming is done, He is in your heart, so no need to come again. On the other hand, there are people who go not denying the second coming of Christ, they say he has already come. David Meade said 33 days after the total eclipse of sun Christ will come again that was 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2017, all of you are classified as left behind. He means; He came, you are still here, very sinful. According to his calculations Jesus was supposed to come, but he didn't come.

The return of the Lord is personal,

**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.

So the dead are not disadvantaged. When Christ comes, the dead will rise first and then only us,

**2** Thessalonians 1:6-8 (ESV) since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, **7** and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels **8** in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

When Jesus will come again, we will all see it

**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

The word in the air, if we look further

Ephesians 2:2 (ESV) the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience

This is Satan, so basically when Jesus Christ comes again in the air, it illustrates that He will come and the realm in which Satan is powerful in will be overcome by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 24:23-27 (ESV) Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. **24** For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. **25** See, I have told you beforehand. **26** So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. **27** For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

So Jesus will be glorious, it would be personal, it will be spectacular and the whole world will see it.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (ESV) 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.

There are four views on what will happen in the last days;

**1. Dispensational Premillennial View:**

which says that Jesus will come and then he will rapture us of and then there will be a period of tribulation for seven years and then Christ will come back down again and live with people for thousand years after which there will be a final judgment.

**2. Historic Premillennial View:**

There will be tribulation first and then Christ comes again and then we are with him until the final judgment.

**3. A Millennial View:**

Which means there is no thousand year rule, Christ will come, there will be judgment and resurrection for all.

**4. Postmillennial View:**

That this millennium and special age of the church has already occurred that means towards the end of this time there will be more people coming to Christ, Israel will not

come to know Christ and then there will be a Christ coming, judgment, new Heaven, new earth as it was.

Now it doesn't matter what view you take, because the Bible says very clearly, when he comes the dead will rise, you will be caught up with them and you will be with Christ, so it doesn't matter what happens after you are with Christ, because you will be with Christ forever and the word here is

**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. **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

The word coming is the very special word called the '*Parousia*', it is a very special word that denotes a time where a visiting dignitary will come, a governor will come to you. So here we the pictorial language. In chapter 5, God will come like a thief in the night, it will be like woman in labor and the '*Parousia*' is exactly how Christ will come, He will come like a visiting dignitary, we will meet him outside the city gates, we will accompany him back into the city in victory and he will rule forever. The picture comes from a Roman Triumph, when the Roman general come back in and everybody in town goes out to meet the general and follows the general back into the city. So how could we be assured that this will happen. Two things; since we believe that Jesus died and rose. If you believe Jesus rose and died for us again, then you have to believe he is going to come again because of his promises ring through them, it will ring through now

**14** For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, **15.** For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord

This word of Lord is something that is not written, it is actually spoken word by Jesus to his disciples, called *agraphia*. Now if we believe that Christ is coming again, Joyce McFadden a psychoanalyst and author says, "*Fear is about trying to survive something. Hope is about knowing why you want to*".

We can't spend our whole lives, ordering our lives around the fear of death. Joyce McFadden says and I agree, hope is knowing why you want to survive, hope gives our lives shape and meaning. If you look at past, present and future and the line that links all three is actually hope. For example, if I wanted to be a business man and run a big conglomerate, selling teapots, I will look back into my life and say I started at standard 5 when I was selling stamps, standard 6 I started the business selling newspaper, but I went bankrupt at standard 6 because I didn't know



the power of taking loan. So you describe everything in your life in terms of your hope. All your failures, all your success, all your strengths and shortcomings, everything is defined by your hope, the nature of your hope defines it. So hope gives our lives shape and meaning. Hope drives human achievement. Steve Jobs has got nothing to lose and he invents a phone that changes the way we talk. Paul, everything to gain, transforms the world and change the way we live by his writing a few letters based on hope that's what he does. Hope fuels human achievements. Hope is the reason we live in tents.

Hebrews 11:9-10 (ESV) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. **10** For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Here you have Abraham, living in a comfort in the lack of luxury, in his own town, city with his relatives, with his friends, with his kingdom, he gives that all up to go to Canaan to fend off bandits, live in tents, because he was looking forward to a city that God has built. He was not looking for the city of destruction.

Hope is the reason we live for holiness.

1 Peter 1:13-16 (ESV) Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. **14** As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, **15** but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, **16** since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy.

Our hope is on Christ coming, if we have that hope in Christ coming then our lives will be ordered, so that we will work towards being holy for him. Hope gives us the most realistic view of life:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (ESV) **6** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. **17** For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, **18** as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

So when we have this hope in our lives, when we look at our own bodies as it is wasting away and we look in our own political situation in our country as just wasting away we need to see with a special vision, a more realistic view of life, the hope of the eternal weight of glory. That whatever we suffer is really nothing, it allows us to get above our troubles. It allows us to transcend our troubles, it allows us to see life of what it really is.

#### **D. WE ARE NEED TO ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER WITH THESE WORDS**

1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 (ESV) 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. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The word encourage is a command, it is an imperative. The word is 'Parakaleo', which is coming alongside and I am going to call you. Do we actually encourage each other with these words.

A story was told of 'The Prince of Grenada' in Spain. He was locked up because of some trumped up charges and he is locked up for 30 years of his life and he was only given one thing to take inside his prison cell, a Bible. At the end of 30 years, he died. They cleared up his cell and they saw scratches on the wall lots of writing. This guy did Bible Study in the prison for 30 years, that means that he would write very profound things. So this is what he wrote:

- *Psalm 118:8 is the middle verse of the Bible;*
- *Ezra 7:21 contains all the letters of the alphabet except the letter j;*
- *the ninth verse of the eighth chapter of Esther is the longest verse in the Bible;*
- *no word or name of more than six syllables can be found in the Bible.*

It is like you sit down there for 30 years with the Bible and you kind of miss the point and it is the same for us. We can come to church for 30 years with electronic Bible and all you can do is, the longest verse is this and the shortest verse is that, and you really take nothing to enrich and give you a reason to live. When we come to the community we come to encourage each other with words which comfort and challenge.

There is no point just going off from the sermon, unless you know how the sermon applies. In 2004 in Switzerland they started Death Café, so they come together to actually over a cup of coffee to talk about death, they are various ideas but they are starting to become real and we as Christians need to use words, we need to become real and not hide from death and not talk about death. Most of us thinks that if we talk about death, it means that we will die. It doesn't mean that. We need to face up the reality of that and encourage each other. Hugh Hefner in his younger days wrote these words,

*"For most people life is a train trip, and you don't see anything out the window. It's all rushing past. And the destination is death. And you ought to get off the train and walk around. Live your life day to day. Because we're here for a moment. You've got to savor what you're doing. That's the heart of what it's all about. The most precious thing you have in the world is time. Use it the best way you can"*

So he used it the best way he can, he set up playboy and he made sex into the public space, many-many girlfriends, three marriages and then enjoyed his life but then towards the end an article came up, 'The Sad Secrets of His Final Days'. He spent the last few days of his life terrified about death. He was no more surrounded by bunnies anymore, he was surrounded by nurses and it is like a hospital in a playboy mansion and he has kept 2485 volume collection of scrapbooks, you know why, he is looking back on his train journey. He cannot look forward because it is nothing there. We can be like that too, or we can be like Mayor Caroline Goodman and Mayor Oscar Goodman. Every day the wife says to him, Carpe diem, which means seize the day and he says '#yolo' which means *you only live once*. **Is it that how we ought to encourage each other, just seizing the day?**

Sir Ernest Shackleton is one the greatest explorers of life. He took the ship called 'Endurance' in 1915 to Antarctica and got stuck there on the ice floor for 10 months and then the ship capsized and they lived on the ice for another four months and then they thought they are going to die, so they got in the little life rafts and they sailed for 1000 kilometers to an island called Elephant Island and there they know they will die unless they get help. So there were three more little ships but they take five men and he took that and he left 22 men back in Elephant Island and he took a 1600 kilometer journey through the rougher seas you could imagine and he landed in South Georgia, hacked across the mountains to the railing station there and got help. The people left behind for four months starving and trying to survive in the bitter cold, Frank Wild was the foreman and every morning he will say to them, ***"roll up sleeping bags, Boys the boss may come today"***

Day after day and one day the boss did come back and 22 men survived, not a single person died because they have looked forward to the day when the boss will come back again.

We don't have an Ernest Shackleton, we have Jesus Christ just as certain as Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, the boss will come back again. Every morning we should say Maranatha, Christ returns. Roll up your sleeping bags, the boss will return and that should power our life, that should drive our life, that should give us the desire to have a meaningful life.