

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 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.

Paul says: **“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.”** We live in a world of trouble and despair, and it has been my experience that this world offers very little real hope.

Friedrich Nietzsche was a famous German philosopher who said, “We have come from nothing and we return to nothing.” What a terrible philosophy that is! We come from nothing? Then a person’s life has no more value than that of an animal. We see the fruit of that philosophy in so many of the policies that have become entrenched in our society. If a child is conceived and it is not wanted, it can be discarded as easily as if it were nothing. And if Nietzsche was right, then when people are old and no longer useful, well we can discard them as well. If you were to treat a cat or a dog with the same disregard, you would be arrested for cruelty to animals. But human life? Human life means nothing in the eyes of the world.

Or what about the philosophy of the beer commercial a couple of decades ago? “You only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can.” Make out your bucket list and make sure that you have enough time and money to do everything your adventurous heart desires. Live life to the fullest. Live. Laugh. Love. Because if you are coming to nothing, then you have to cram into this short life everything you possibly can.

But what comfort is there in these wonderfully empty life philosophies? I went to the doctor a few weeks ago and he told me that in my right knee there was almost no cartilage left. The ex-ray already showed damage to the bone. So no more running, he told me. Only low impact exercise. The good news is that now I have an excuse for not training for a marathon. When you hear news like that, we grieve over the loss of our strength. You grieve when the doctors says that you are losing your hearing. You grieve when you are told that you have macular degeneration, and one day you may not be able to see at all. You grieve when your children tell you that you can’t drive your car anymore because you are a danger to other motorists. So here is the world’s great comfort. Just grab for all the gusto you can! But what do you do when you’ve lost your gusto?

If that were the only sorrows this world offered, I suppose we could just suck it up and grin and bear it. But what do you do with the sorrows of the grave? Perhaps you can meet

death bravely and the grave does not frighten you, but what about the graves of the people you love? When I was seventeen years old, my cousin a beautiful young woman who was attending Martin Luther College was killed in a car crash out in Glacier National Park. I will always remember what my grandmother said, with tears in her eyes. “It was hard when my husband died of a heart attack when he was only fifty-nine years old. It was harder still to lose my son to cigarette smoking when he was only forty-two. But my granddaughter was only nineteen. This was the hardest of them all!” What would the world say to my grandmother? You only go around once in life so grab for all the gusto you can. You come from nothing and you come to nothing. What comfort is that?

But here is what the Bible says. Here is what Jesus tells us. We don’t have to grieve like the rest of the world, which has no hope, because we have the hope of the resurrection to eternal life. We can look our sorrows in the face and say:

I WILL RISE!

I. Because Jesus rose!

Paul says, **“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.”** There is an intimate link between Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and your resurrection from the dead on the last day. Jesus said, **“Because I live, you also will live” (John 14.19).**

How can you be sure that Jesus rose from the dead? What if the modern church theologians are right, and the disciples just made those stories up? Friends, look at the evidence in the four gospels. The men who wrote those four gospels were either eyewitnesses of what happened or they spoke to eyewitnesses. If these were made up stories, they are unlike any made up stories you would expect. Can I give you an example? All four gospel writers put the women at the tomb to be the first witnesses of the resurrection. In those days, a woman was not permitted to give a testimony in court because the people then didn’t believe that a woman’s testimony was reliable. So if someone made these stories up, wouldn’t they have put men at the tomb first? Why did they put the women at the tomb? Because that’s what happened! They were reporting the facts.

Here’s another example. The gospel writers give us an incredible amount of detail to the stories of Jesus’ resurrection. John tells us that when he and Peter ran to the tomb, John got there first, but didn’t look in. Peter arrived a minute later. He looked in and saw the grave clothes neatly folded with the piece that covered the face set aside by itself. Then John went into the empty tomb as well. Does that sound like a fabricated story? Why were the grave clothes significant? Because grave robbers wouldn’t have bothered to neatly fold the grave clothes on the way out the door!

How many witnesses do you need to establish that something happened? Usually two or three. History records the lives of people like Socrates, an ancient Greek teacher and philosopher, who never wrote down a single thing. But his student, Plato, did. So on the basis of the testimony of one student, we accept the stories of Socrates as true. Paul tells us in the

letter to the Corinthians that there were as many as five hundred people who saw Jesus alive at the same time and they could corroborate the testimony of the disciples. We believe that Jesus rose.

And this is what that means. It means that we don't have to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. Let me take a minute to talk about a particular kind of grief that comes to people at the end of their lives. You look back over your life, and you have all kinds of regrets about things you did, and things you wished you would have done. I remember having that conversation with my father. He confessed to me that he wished that when we were growing up, he would have spent more time with his children. When your children are young, you get caught up in your work and providing for your family that sometimes you neglect them. On another occasion, I was at the bedside of an old war veteran, and he confessed to me that when he was in the war, he had done some bad things that he was ashamed of. I don't think that those experiences were rare. I think we look back in our lives and we all have those regrets. Sinful things haunt us to the grave.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could just have one big mulligan and do our whole life over again and get it right? I will rise! Jesus will raise me up on the last day. No more sins and no more shame. I will have all eternity to do it right. No more sorrow and no more pain. I will have all eternity to spend with my loved ones, who never got enough of my time and energy, nor I of 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."**

That, dear friends, is hope. And Paul continues by describing exactly for us what will happen on the last day.

II. Because Jesus will raise us up on the last day!

This is what Paul says. **"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."** Do you see the detail in Paul's description? My family – all the children and grandchildren – will be going to Houston right after Christmas to see my son, Abram. I think we'll get it all pulled together. At least I hope. But planning a trip like that for everyone has not been fun. I wish I had a trip planner who could do it all for me! I wish I knew exactly what we were going to do each day, because not knowing makes me nervous, even afraid, for this trip.

Paul tells us that Jesus has our trip on the last day all planned out down to the last detail. Here is EXACTLY what will happen. On that day you will hear a loud command. Paul doesn't say what the command is, but I think I know what it will be. Jesus will say, "RISE UP!" He will command every believer to rise just as he commanded Lazarus to come out of the grave. You will hear the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God. And then, you will

see all those believers that you have known rising from the dead and joining you in a wonderful procession to meet Jesus in the clouds.

Does that frighten you, to hear about that last day? My wife and her roommate in college were sometimes troublemakers, believe it or not. One night after studying into the wee hours of the morning, her roommate took her trumpet and they went down to the basement where there was a heating vent that connected to all four floors of their dormitory. So in the middle of the night, they blew the trumpet and some of the girls ran out of their rooms terrified, because they thought it was judgment day. So why were they afraid? They were afraid because it wasn't the real judgment day! It was just someone blowing the trumpet in the middle of the night.

Will you be afraid when the real day comes? You would be, if you didn't believe in Jesus. That day would be a terror for you. You would know in an instant that you blew your only chance to go to heaven. The Bible says that people will hide in caves and under rocks to try to escape.

Aren't you just a little bit afraid of Judgment Day? Of course you are. Admit it. If you had nothing to be ashamed for, you would have no fears. If you have no sins that haunt your thoughts, you would have no fears. The sinful nature inside of us dreads that day because he knows that when Jesus comes, he will be destroyed once and for all.

So will you be afraid on that day? You may have some fears now, but on that day, you won't have a chance to be afraid. And I'll tell you why. Paul doesn't say it here, but he does in that great resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. **"Here is what he says. "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."** You won't have a chance to be frightened on that day. If you believe that Jesus died and rose for you, in the time in which you can blink your eyes, Jesus will change you and glorify you so that you will stand perfect before him when he comes. You are holy and perfect, now, by faith, but you don't always feel it. When that day comes, you will feel holiness down to your bones. Fear will be the furthest thing from your mind! No more sin. No more shame. No more sorrow. No more pain.

And Paul says, **"And so we will be with the Lord forever."** Here is the hope that the resurrection gives us for those great sorrows in our hearts. What is it like to put your spouse in the grave? Some of you have made that journey. How do you get over that sorrow! How do you cope with the sorrow of putting a child in the grave? Some of you have done that as well. Or a grandchild. We do not grieve like a rest of people who have no hope. We believe in the resurrection from the grave and we look forward to that day when we will be with the Lord – forever!

Do people still have family reunions? I miss those from our childhood. Every summer, about two weeks apart, we would have a family reunion on the Degner side and on the Neitzel side. I loved those, because I would get to play with second and third cousins. There were so many children we could have a full softball game going all afternoon. When your heart is filled with the sorrows of this life, then think about the great reunion we will have in heaven. We don't have to grieve, like those who have no hope. Because we know that we will rise! Amen.

