

A DIFFERENT DEATH

1 Thess 4:13-18

INTRODUCTION

- A. These past couple of weeks have seen much grief in this congregation.
1. We lost Don Mash, a man who taught so many souls about the Lord Jesus and who loved the Lord & his church.
 2. We lost Richard Holder, one who served anyone & everyone he could.
 3. We lost Jane Ann, a sister for whom we prayed often & one who taught so many children the truth of Jesus.
 4. We lost Esther, a precious soul who always loved & served.
- B. Those four families hurt so very deeply over the loss of those four precious servants of God.
1. Yet, we have wept as a church, not just in fulfillment of the biblical instruction to “weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15), but because there is a deep hole in this church.
 2. Yes, life goes on & the work of this congregation will continue in the future as it has in the past.
 - a. But, the grief we feel is very real, and grief takes time to heal.
 - 1) People say that time will heal all wounds.
 - 2) I don’t believe that for one second – The reason the wounds of grief seem to heal as time goes by is that individuals have the time to work through the grieving processes.
 - b. Unless one deals with his grief appropriately, he cannot heal.
 3. This morning, I wish to help us deal with grief by looking at death biblically.
 - a. READ TEXT.
 - b. These words were written to help the Thessalonians deal with grief.
 - 1) Notice how Paul concludes this paragraph: “Encourage one another with these words” (v 18).
 - 2) It’s quite apparent that the Thessalonians had some real misunderstandings about the Second Coming & the resurrection of the dead.
 - a) That’s quite obvious, for Paul deals with the Second Coming in both of his epistles to the Thessalonians.
 - b) From what Paul writes in this morning’s text, it seems that the Thessalonians had understood the Second Coming would occur very shortly after their conversion.
 - i. Because the Thessalonians understood the Second Coming to be so near, they believed that all Christians would be alive when Jesus returned.
 - ii. Then, some of their brethren & close family members began to die, and the Thessalonians just didn’t know what to do or where to turn.
 - aa. According to their understanding, those Christians who died would miss out on the Second Coming & the glory of heaven.
 - bb. The Thessalonian idea of the Second Coming was “Must Be Present to Win.”
 - i) You might go to a carnival and sign up to win a brand new convertible, but if you leave before the end of the day, even if your entry is chosen you will not win.
 - ii) The Thessalonians believed that if you left this world before Jesus returned, you could not win the crown of life – you were just out in the cold.
 - c. In this morning’s passage, Paul informs the Thessalonians that they are forgetting about the resurrection of the dead.
 - 1) In explaining the truth to the Thessalonians, Paul sets up a series of contrasts: a) Paul contrasts the grief of Christians & non-Christians (v 13); b) He contrasts the experience of those living in Christ & dead in Christ when the Lord returns (vv 15-17); c) He contrasts being with the Lord forever & living on this earth (v 17).
 - 2) This morning, we wish to explore those contrasts that we might have a better understanding of death & the resurrection.
 - a) We’ll explore this passage in light of the contrasts Paul makes & speak of “***A Different Death.***”
 - b) The Christian’s death is “***A Different Death,***” for it brings A DIFFERENT DESPAIR, A DIFFERENT DEPARTURE, A DIFFERENT DESIGN, & A DIFFERENT DEN.

A DIFFERENT DESPAIR, v 13

- A. The despair Christians experience over death differs greatly from the grief of others: “We do not want you to be

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uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.”

1. Paul does not at all deny the real experience of grief; Scripture contains many examples of grief of the righteous.
 - a. “Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him” (Acts 8:2).
 - b. Paul himself knew that the death of a loved one brings grief. About Epaphroditus Paul writes, “He was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow” (Phil 2:27).
 2. Yet, the grief a Christian experiences differs greatly from the grief of others, for there is hope in the midst of pain.
 - a. The people of Paul’s day largely viewed death as a cessation of all life, of all consciousness, of all hope.
 - 1) Aeschylus wrote, “Once a man dies there is no resurrection.”
 - 2) Theocritus wrote, “There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope.”
 - 3) Catullus wrote, “When our brief light sets, there is one perpetual night through which we must sleep.”
 - b. Paul says that those ancients had it all wrong; there is hope after death.
- B. There is hope after death, Paul declares, for Jesus died & rose again (v 14).
1. Because Jesus was raised again, death has been conquered.
 - a. “As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22).
 - b. While exiled on Patmos, John hears the glorified Christ declare, “I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev 1:17-18). As the One with the “keys of Death and Hades,” Jesus is the One who has the power to release from death.
 2. Many years ago, the denominational preacher D. L. Moody said to a friend: “Someday you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody of Northfield is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it. At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone higher, that is all—out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal, a body that sin cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body fashioned into His glorious body. I was born in the flesh in 1837; I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die; that which is born of the Spirit will live forever.”
 - a. D. L. Moody preached much error, but he properly understood the biblical teaching concerning death & the reason Christians need not grieve like those who have no hope.
 - b. Do we who know the truth of God have the proper understanding of death?

A DIFFERENT DEPARTURE, v 14

- A. Those who die in Christ depart this world quite differently than those alive at the Second Coming: “Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”
- B. Because Jesus died & rose again, God will bring those sleeping with Jesus.
1. I’m not quite sure why the KJV translates this verse as it does.
 - a. The Greek, like the ESV, reads “Through Jesus, God will bring with him”
 - b. “Through” in Greek indicates the means by which something takes place.
 - 1) The Greek construction here strongly demonstrates that Jesus is the way God’s people shall be raised.
 - 2) God isn’t simply going to raise the dead through his great power; God is going to raise the dead because Jesus was raised from the dead and conquered death.
 2. Paul refers to the dead in Christ here as “those who have fallen asleep.”
 - a. “Sleep” was a common idiom for “death” in antiquity.
 - 1) The ancients likely used the idiom because a dead body looks as though it is sleeping.
 - 2) However, biblically, I’m convinced the idiom has much more to do with the fact that the dead in Christ will awaken at the Resurrection just as a sleeping person wakes in the morning.
 - a) After Lazarus died, Jesus says to the Twelve, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him” (Jn 11:11).
 - b) Before Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter, he entered the ruler’s home & found people in deep grief. Jesus says, “Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping” (Mk 5:39).
 - b. That separates the Christian from the non-Christian – for the child of God, physical death is only a sleep that leads to a richer & fuller life, but for the alien sinner, physical death is simply the beginning of true, eternal death.

DIFFERENT DESIGN, vv 15-17

- A. God’s design of entering eternity is different from the Christian who is asleep & the one who is awake: “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. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with

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- the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 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.”
- B. Paul makes clear that what he writes here is neither his opinion nor an educated guess.
 - 1. Rather, he declares this “by a word from the Lord.”
 - 2. The design for a dead & living Christian is sure, for it comes from the Lord himself.
 - C. Four things will occur at the end: The Lord shall descend from heaven, he shall give a cry of command, he shall be accompanied by the voice of an archangel, & he shall also be accompanied by the sound of God’s trumpet.
 - 1. Some people really want signs that will tell them when the world is just about over. There they are. When those four events transpire, you can be sure that the end of the world is right around the corner!
 - 2. The Lord shall descend & give a cry of command.
 - a. I strongly suspect that cry of command will be for the dead to rise.
 - b. That’s conjecture, but it fits with other Scriptures – e.g., “An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out” (Jn 5:28-29).
 - 3. The archangel shall also speak, but we aren’t told what he shall speak.
 - 4. The trumpet of God shall sound.
 - a. Again, I have an opinion about the trumpet call of God.
 - b. Under the Law of Moses, silver trumpets were used to gather the Israelites together.
 - 1) “Make two silver trumpets. Of hammered work you shall make them, and you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for breaking camp. And when both are blown, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the entrance of the tent of meeting” (Num 10:2-3).
 - 2) I suspect that the trumpet here is a call for all of God’s people—living & dead to gather themselves before the Lord.
 - D. The dead in Christ will rise first.
 - 1. This seems to be the truth that the Thessalonians so desperately needed to hear – Their loved ones who had died in Christ would not miss out on the Second Coming & the glory of heaven.
 - 2. In fact, their dead loved ones would experience the glory of the Second Coming before those who were alive. They will experience the wonder of being raised from the dead, something living Christians will not experience.
 - 3. There’s “*A Different Design*” – the dead in Christ shall rise to meet the Lord before those Christians who are alive.

A DIFFERENT DEN, v 17

- A. Both living & dead Christians shall have a different den after the Resurrection, for they will dwell with the Lord: “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.”
- B. No longer will we live in a world of sickness & death, but we will be with the Lord.
 - 1. Being with the Lord will be a wonderfully glorious experience.
 - a. We will no longer experience the hurts & frustrations of this life.
 - 1) “They are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7:15-17).
 - 2) “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:3-4).
 - b. When we are with the Lord, we shall be as he is: “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2).
 - 2. Of course, those we have lost in the last couple of weeks have not yet entered heaven.
 - a. No human being is in heaven at this moment: “No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man” (Jn 3:13).
 - b. They are, however, in the Paradise of God, the same place Jesus promised to take the thief on the cross, the same place where Lazarus received comfort with Abraham.
 - c. While Don, Richard, Jane, & Esther aren’t in heaven this morning, they are in a place of bliss waiting the consummation of the ages when they will indeed enter that kingdom.
 - 1) The life they now have is far better than the life they experienced on this earth: “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil 1:23).

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- 2) A little boy struggled terribly with car sickness.
 - a) He would travel for 20 miles & throw up. He soon developed an inferiority complex from his childhood because his parents would apologize for him whenever they would ride with someone else.
 - b) It so happened that his grandma lived 100 miles from home, and the trips to grandma's were always terrible.
 - i. But once he arrived, he would take off his shoes & roam through the beautiful country. Grandma would bake the most delicious cake and always say "yes."
 - ii. For two or three weeks, he would thoroughly enjoy his stay at grandma's, until it was time to return home.
 - c) While he was at grandma's, the little boy had forgotten all about the car sick trip that took him there.
 - i. Once we get to the Paradise of God, we will forget all about the horrible trip through sickness, decay, & death that took us there.
 - ii. Are you prepared for that journey this day?