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# 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

2021 Various: The Resurrection Promise

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It seems like in the last couple years many of us have lost ones we loved—parents, siblings, friends, to covid, to cancer, to sickness of all kinds. As I've been thinking about my dad's death, and those of you who have lost someone, I wanted to preach a message that could encourage us, and remind us of some of the resurrection hope God has given believers.

But I also recognize that as I preach this, me sharing my personal story of loss might bother some of you, it might be too much. So this is a content advisory, which I guess is the new way of saying trigger warning. If it's too much to hear my story, no one will be offended if you need to go inside or go for a walk. Let's pray.

If you could only summarize the gospel message, the heart of Christianity, with one word (besides "Jesus") I think that word would be the word, "resurrection." The resurrection is the true story that Jesus died and then had the audacity to come back to life again, even new and better than before. And it even gets better because Jesus extends the resurrection promise to any who will repent and believe in him. If you will put your whole life on Christ, he promises he will never forget you as you walk through life's hardships and on that final day when your story draws to a close, he will not forget you in your death, but will raise you back up again.

This really matters! As I was sitting with my dad in the hospital with a face mask, a face shield, gloves, and disposable scrubs we talked about the resurrection. I read most of John 6 to him and re-read this verse:

**John 6:40** (ESV)

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

I thought my dad was getting better, but still there was something deeply assuring to talk about the resurrection. My dad believed that if he looked to the Son, and believed in him, he would have eternal life and one day Jesus would raise him up again. And I know many of your loved ones believed the same.

After my dad died, I turned to another Scripture passage about the resurrection that I want to share with you today. The Apostle Paul wrote this passage to some really new Christians who were wondering what happens to believers when they die (1 Thess 3:10). Paul explains God's resurrection promise—that one day Christ is going to return, and bring back the dead in Christ too. Today I want to tell you about the resurrection promise and how it can give us hope for our future and for today.

## The Resurrection Promise:

I find **two truths** contained within the resurrection promise that give me comfort.

### 1) The dead in Christ are only "sleeping."

Look at how Paul describes those believers who have died. Does he even describe them as "dead?" How does he describe them? Twice, he says they're "sleeping."

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-14** (ESV)

13 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. 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.

Paul describes Christians as “sleeping” because he wants to redefine how we understand death. Death feels so permanent and awful, but what if for Christians, it’s more like a really long nap, from which they will awake? I don’t mean soul sleep, that those who die will be unconscious till the resurrection. When we’re absent from the body, we’re present with Jesus (2 Cor 5:8). But rather, to those who are left behind it’s good to think about it like sleeping because it’s only temporary.

I think it’s really interesting, really providential, that the first week I was back in Colorado, prior to my dad’s death (my dad’s sleeping), Mark preached on John 11, Jesus’ raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Lazarus’s sisters, Mary and Martha, send for Jesus because Lazarus is sick and they know Jesus can heal him. But when Jesus hears that Lazarus is sick, he doesn’t go rushing to his side. First he says this:

**John 11:4 (ESV)**

But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

Now we know the story. This illness does lead to death! Lazarus does die. But, that’s not the end of the story. Jesus is going to use Lazarus’s death to bring glory to God the Father and God the Son. And you know what, that’s exactly what Jesus is going to do with my dad, and the ones you love who trust in Jesus. My father’s covid does not lead to death, but to glory. Who here has lost someone recently who they know trusted Christ? What were there names? Patt and Douglas and Turnice’s illnesses do not lead to death, but to glory. Jesus is so confident in this he describes Lazarus’s death as sleeping.

**John 11:11-15 (ESV)**

11 After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.” 12 The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, 15 and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

Jesus had a plan. He had a plan to call Lazarus out of the grave and that’s his plan for our loved ones as well. While those who have died and been buried or cremated feel so separate, so far away, in Christ, it is but a temporary state. They are with him right now, feeling more joy and love and happiness than they’ve ever known, and one day they will awaken to new resurrected bodies.

Are you afraid of death? If you’re someone who worries about death, I want you to know that you don’t have to be afraid. Imagine it like sleeping. I like sleeping. Now of course, for those of us who die it won’t be like sleeping because we’ll be with Jesus. But it will appear like sleeping to those who we leave behind.

The first resurrection promise is that the dead in Christ are only “sleeping.” The second is this:

## **2) The dead in Christ will return with him and rise again.**

I love what Paul says after this, because we’re supposed to trust it, and let it sink deep in our hearts. Paul says he got this directly from Jesus. This is what the Lord says will happen:

**1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 (ESV)**

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. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

One day, on a day we do not expect, Jesus will appear in the sky in the clouds and all around the globe every eye will see him (Matthew 24:40-41). This will absolutely terrify the inhabitants of the earth who don't know Jesus and worship the true and living God.

### **Revelation 1:7 (ESV)**

7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

Accompanying Jesus's appearance there will be "a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of a trumpet of God." So there will be some sort of cry, some sort of voice, and some sort of trumpet blast that will resound throughout the whole universe. Every living being and every inanimate object will hear it, it will reverberate through every fiber of their being, and they will know that Christ has come.

At that time Jesus will call to our loved ones like he did to Lazarus, "Paul, come out! Patt, come out! Douglas and Turnice, come out!" You fill in the name, "\_\_\_\_, come out!" And you'll probably hear it too unless Jesus comes back in your lifetime. At that point, the souls of our loved ones who knew Jesus, and ours too if we've already died, will go from being spiritually in-heaven to rushing into our bodies.

Those who were buried and their bones are still in their coffins will have their flesh reknit and their skin regrown. Their hearts will begin to beat and their eyes will open. Their bodies will be made better than they ever were in their lives. Paul says this elsewhere about the type of transformation our bodies will experience.

### **1 Corinthians 15:42-43 (ESV)**

42 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. 43 It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.

Our bodies will be completely transformed. No more cancer. No more sickness. No more tears (Rev 21:1-5). All who have died will go blasting from their graves, soaring into the sky to be with Jesus, not only in soul, but in body too. Those saints that died in fires or were cremated and their ashes spread. No problem! Jesus will gather the dust of their DNA and reknit them for all eternity. Their hearts will beat again too.

At that time, when a noteworthy official came to town or a war hero returned from victory, a city would send out a delegation to greet the hero and escort them back into town (Matthew 25:6; Acts 28:15). These could become incredibly lavish events celebrating the hero is a kind of demigod of the day. When Julius Caesar returned from his wars he mounted the steps in the capitol city by the torches held by forty elephants. His procession bore the inscription, "I came, I saw, I conquered." ([see descriptions](#))

Likewise, Jesus will come, he will see the world displayed before him, and he will conquer death and sin once and for all, vanquishing them and parading home to earth with the resurrected saints with him. Any who are still alive, which may be us, will be caught up bodily to meet Christ in the clouds. So Jesus, surrounded by resurrected saints and saints who haven't yet died, will return to earth. And most importantly, "And so we will always be with the Lord." We will be with Jesus forever and ever and it will be glorious. *The dead in Christ will return with him and rise again.*

The morning my dad died I actually dreamed about the resurrection of the dead. I don't know why, maybe it was just a little gift from the Lord. In my dream I saw a group of people, maybe twenty, I do remember black

hair, I don't know why, were taken up into the sky. Then they all huddled in these kinda campfire circles in the sky and looked down below. I didn't see Jesus but I knew what it was. Now obviously, the actual event will be way better. But all this to say is that the resurrection can give us a lot of comfort in our grief.

Notice how Paul finishes his statement, "Therefore encourage one another with these words." This vision of the return of Christ and resurrection of our loved ones who trust Jesus, and we ourselves, fills us with hope. This is why we get to grieve differently than the world.

I started reading our counseling mini-book on grief this week. The author, Paul David Tripp, said, "In times of death, Christians should be sadder than anyone else. [...] Yet we should also be the most hopeful of any who mourn." We get how bad and evil sin and death are, and yet, at the same time we know that Christ will absolute demolish them and undo the sting of death.

**1 Corinthians 15:54b-55 (ESV)**

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

55 "O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?"

Why can Paul write these words, quoting Isaiah 25:8?

## **The resurrection promise helps us grieve with hope.**

Here's what Paul says one more time. And this time as I read it, notice the emotions Paul addresses.

**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.

Paul does call us to grieve. When someone dies, it's okay to mourn. On September 1st, when my dad died, it wrecked me. I was supposed to be flying home to see my wife and kids and instead I went to the hospital to see my dad's body. I cried more in those 3-4 days than I have in all the years combined since I was probably six years old. I'm at a place now where I feel sadness and other strong emotions over the circumstances that led to my father's death, but, at this moment, I feel all cried out. And it's okay. And if you're grieving for your loved one who died, cry, weep, let the tears role. It's okay.

But never let it stop there. Let those tears water our hope. Let hope grow down deep and sprout that assurance that one day you will get to talk and laugh and enjoy Jesus with any family member or friend who trusted in Jesus. We will get to see them again, better than before. Maybe that doesn't make you feel happy, but that's not what Paul says here. He says hope. Hope can turn into happiness, but it will probably take time and sorrow and thanking God for their lives, the good parts and bad.

But what about those of us who don't know if our family members or friends trusted in Jesus. Sadly, we can't experience the same level of hope. We can still trust that God is good and will do what is right and just, but we can't nurture as clear a resurrection hope. In moments like that, grieve, and trust. And let it be a reminder for all of us to get serious about our relationship with God.

Good deeds will not get you into heaven. Believing in heaven will not get you into heaven. Only by placing your complete trust in Christ Jesus can you rest secure. The reward of the resurrection is Christ. We don't believe in Jesus just to get the resurrection. We believe in Jesus to get Jesus. He is our reward, he is our treasure, he is the one we want to spend eternity with.

My dad told me this summer that he felt like the Holy Spirit wanted him to read his Bible this year as fast as he could. When I saw him in June, he was trying to read 10-chapters a day, 10 chapters! I think the Lord was getting him ready for that last lap. At his funeral, I preached out of my dad's Bible, and when I opened it up his page marker was at 1 Corinthians 15, which is a chapter about "The Resurrection of Christ." It says a lot but I want to close with this one key first.

**1 Corinthians 15:20** (ESV)

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Here's what it's saying. It's a fact that Jesus has risen from the dead. And those who have died, who are sleeping, are enjoying him like you might enjoy a fresh bowl of fruit. He is refreshing them. He is nurturing them. They are satisfied. I had just sat down at the Denver gate for Jet Blue, a gate I will never be able to walk by the same again, when I saw I had missed my brother's phone call. I called him back and the first thing my brother said to me was not, "Dad died" or "Dad is sleeping" but, "Dad went to be with Jesus."

Isn't that what it's all about? Dad went to be with Jesus. Grandpa or Grandma or mom went to be with Jesus. Our friends and cousins and any who know Christ have gone to spend all eternity with him, the shepherd of our souls. And guess what, one day all who believe in Jesus will return with Jesus, Lord willing you and me too. We'll get our bodies back, even better than before, but even better than that, we'll get Jesus. Let's pray.

*Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA.  
In loving memory of Paul Ralph Romig ([obituary](#) & [service](#)).*

## Next Steps

1. Pick up and read a copy of [On Death](#) by Timothy Keller.
2. Pick up and read a copy of [A Small Book for the Hurting Heart](#) by Paul Tautges.

## Sources

The Roman Triumph: <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/spectaclesintheromanworldsourcebook/chapter/the-roman-triumph/> Accessed September 15th, 2021.