

Sunday Sermon: November 18, 2018

Sermon Text: 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18

Sermon Theme: I Want You to Know What Will Happen

¹³ 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.

Have you ever had something that you couldn't figure out? I don't mean something that you were curious about, but something that you really wanted to know about, you just couldn't wrap your mind around it? That is the way it is with some of the things that God tells us in his Word. There are some things that are just so far beyond our understanding that when God tries to explain them to us in his Word, we just can't fully understand what God means.

Sometimes we focus on those things. We focus on those mysteries of God. We want them explained and answered. But what we don't often realize is that there may not be a good human answer. God may not may not answer those mysteries for us, or he give us an answer that is not as satisfying as we would like it.

God didn't give us his Word so that we could focus on the all the mysteries and miss the important things. God wants us to see the main point. God reveals exactly how much we need to know about himself to lead us to Jesus, that we might be saved. We don't need all the answers about God to believe in Jesus. We can and should leave some of those mysteries, mysteries.

This morning we are not going to look at a mystery. We are actually going to look at something that God says very clearly and simply in His Word, so that we will know and understand it. We're going to hear God talk about heaven. This truth is for all the saints who have faith in Jesus, to these God says, I want you to know you will be Saints Triumphant in Heaven!

Before we can look at our sermon text for this morning, we have to understand who the Thessalonians were. The Thessalonians were Gentiles who had a background in many other religions, who had converted to Christianity. They had a lot of ideas about the afterlife from these other religions. Because they had all of these other teachings, there were things about the glory of heaven they didn't understand.

Imagine if you heard about heaven for the first time. Does it sound real? Does it sound too good to be true? Does it give you hope and comfort or do you just forget it because it is unbelievable? The Thessalonians did not really know how to put this new message of heaven with the things they already thought about the afterlife.

Paul writes this letter to teach the people the good news, that heaven is very real. God has a plan for them, and us, even after death. God's plan is a wonderful thing because through Jesus, God's saints will be in heaven with him.

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One of the saddest things that I have experienced is how the unbeliever deals with death. Maybe you have been to a funeral or have witnessed someone who does not believe in Jesus and does not have the hope of heaven try to help them as they face death. You can see the sadness and despair is very deep. Paul sums it up perfectly for his listeners. **¹³ 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.**

God wants believers not to be like the unbelievers who fear death. Who cling to this life with all they have because this life is all they know. We do not want you to be lost and without hope. What we want is that you would know that there is hope and comfort in Jesus. There is something more. This hope is not built on

wishful thinking, it is built on Jesus' death and resurrection. 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.**

It was just pointed out to me this week that the Lutherans have such a wonderful picture and lesson in the cross. We see crosses adorn our walls and the front of our church. We see them so often that maybe we don't think about why we use this cross. There are a lot of reasons for the cross, but the one that was pointed out this week is that the cross we choose to use is empty. There is no dying man on this cross. Our cross stands empty because Jesus' work of saving us is done. We read in our second lesson: ¹² **But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.**

Jesus doesn't need to be on that cross to be sacrificed again and again and again. The price he paid, he paid once for all. By his suffering and death on that cross, he took away the sins of the world, just as John the Baptist exclaimed when he saw Jesus.

We also use the empty cross to help us remember that the tomb is empty. When the women raced to the tomb, they did not see a dead Jesus or a slightly alive Jesus in the tomb. He was not there. Jesus was not in the tomb and he was not on the cross. He has risen. And because he has won the victory and we will rise too. **God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep.** In the same way that Jesus rose, we will rise too.

Our loving God and Savior wants us, who believe, to know the victory that awaits us after death. Jesus saw death often and he talked about it often. When he was confronted with death he didn't say, "Let's not talk about that." He provided hope and comfort. When confronted by the grief of the family whose daughter had just died, **"She is not dead, only sleeping."** When he walked into her room he said, **"Little girl I say to you get up,"** and she did.

When Jesus was traveling through the town of Nain, he saw the funeral of a young man who had died. When he saw the grief of the mother, he went to the coffin and said, **"Young man, I say to you arise,"** and he did.

Yet, another time, he was confronted by the grief of Mary and Martha when their brother, Lazarus, had died. He asked them if they believed that Lazarus would rise again in heaven. Then he went to the tomb and said, **"Lazarus, come out."**

God wants us his people to know that we will live again. Not in this miraculous way to life here on earth, but to something even more blessed and wonderful. He wants us to know our resurrection will not be a hard thing. In each of these cases, there was no struggle, no hard work, nothing terrible for the person or for Jesus. Jesus simply commanded it to happen and it did. As simple, as waking from a night's sleep.

Jesus is the Lord over life and death. The cross is empty, the tomb is empty because Jesus has defeated the devil and won the victory. Although death will mark the end of our life here on earth, it will not be the end. We will fall asleep in death, but will awaken to the everlasting joy of heaven.

Even though this was a wonderful teaching, the Thessalonians still had questions. They were worried that they might miss heaven. Paul, you are talking They were worried that if Jesus came back, that they would not receive heaven because they weren't dead yet.

It might seem silly to us, but we have questions and fears about death shouldn't be all that strange for us. Even believers have questions about death, because we don't have all the answers. When and how will I die? We don't know. What about my loved ones, what will happen to them? What about me, if a loved one dies? How will I go on? All of these are very human questions, but they are also fears that God doesn't want us to have. He wants us to trust in him. **Do not be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. Come to me all you who are wearied and burdened and I will give you rest.**

Paul writes these words about heaven so that we will not have a fear of the unknown, rather we will trust in Jesus. Whether we meet Jesus through death or are alive on Judgment Day, there is no fear, only victory in Jesus. **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.**

We can be sure of our victory in Jesus because Jesus himself tells us to be, **"I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."** Heaven is a personal place for each of us. **"In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going**

there to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Jesus seals heaven for us with his great words or promise. There need to be no doubt, no fear only joy and comfort and victory in Jesus. We see that promise fulfilled in the empty cross and empty tomb. We are forgiven, we are saints.

These are words of comfort to us and words that we should use to comfort one another. **Therefore encourage each other with these words.** Encourage one another as we get up in age and our steps on earth seem to be less and less. Encourage one another in faith with the good news of heaven. Encourage one another in faith that we are saints whom God does have a plan for even when we are struggling.

Heaven is not a mystery of the Bible. God wants us to know that heaven is the victory that is waiting for those who believe in Jesus. He wants us to look forward to it with joy and he wants us to be comforted by the fact that we will be Saints Triumphant with him in heaven.