

Sermon for November 16, 2025 – Saints Triumphant

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (EHV)

Theme: Our Most Comforting Hope

- 1) Because Christ died, Christians only sleep.
- 2) He will wake us up to live with Him forever.

¹³We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you do not grieve in the same way as the others, who have no hope. ¹⁴Indeed, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then in the same way we also believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. ¹⁵In fact, we tell you this by the word of the Lord: We who are alive and left until the coming of the Lord will certainly not go on ahead of those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore, encourage one another with these words.

What do you say to a grieving mother who has just lost her Christian son?

Losing a loved one is excruciating. We feel empty and overwhelmed, drowning in a sea of emotions and desperately grasping for some hope to save us.

The empathetic condolences of well-meaning people offer some relief, but they cannot address the root cause of our pain. Only the LORD can. How? By offering us real hope grounded in Christ.

And this hope doesn't disappoint. Even though it won't instantly erase the pain of our loss, it will help us bear our grief as we look joyfully to the future in faith.

With the apostle Paul as our guide, let us meditate on what **our most comforting hope is:** 1) Because Christ died, Christians only sleep, and 2) He will wake us up to live with him forever.

Part One: Because Christ died, Christians only sleep.

Our sermon text is from a letter Paul wrote to Christians in Thessalonica. Having recently converted to Christianity, they were struggling to understand what happens to Christians when they die. Maybe you've wondered the same thing. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to offer us the following encouragement.

¹³We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you do not grieve in the same way as the others, who have no hope.

Is it ok to grieve the death of a Christian? Absolutely. Even Jesus cried at the grave of His friend Lazarus. God doesn't forbid grief, but He doesn't want us to grieve as if we have no hope. Why? Because the LORD promises believers an incredible truth: Christians don't die, they merely sleep.

Let me explain what I mean.

The Bible consistently describes the death of believers as a *sleep*, but never uses that word for unbelievers. They die. Why the distinction?

Because the Bible defines death as "separation." Physical death is the separation of a soul from its body. God, however, is more concerned about a more serious separation: the separation of sinners from God, which we call spiritual death.

Adam and Eve died spiritually the moment they sinned, separating themselves from God. Even worse, they passed on this state of separation from God to all their descendants. The only way we can be reconciled to God is if He forgives our sins, which the LORD willingly does for us in Christ.

Through faith in Jesus, believers are reunited with God and made spiritually alive again. Because they are united with God through faith, they never truly die. Why? Because the LORD takes their souls to Himself in heaven the moment they leave their bodies. Therefore, they are never separated from Him – even as their bodies lie lifeless in the grave, awaiting His call to awaken.

Not so unbelievers. Rejecting God's gift of forgiveness in Christ, they remain spiritually dead. Furthermore, if they don't repent before they die physically, their souls will remain separated from God forever in hell.

Understand, then, that the Christian's hope of never really dying is not a mere wish. It is a confidence based on the historical reality of Jesus.

¹⁴Indeed, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then in the same way we also believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.

Here's an interesting fact: While the Bible often describes a believer's death as a sleep, it never uses that term to describe Jesus' death. Why? Because Jesus truly died! He endured complete separation from His Father, as evidenced by His cry from the cross: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"ⁱ

Just think: Jesus died so that believers never will. God the Father allowed His Son to suffer the hell our sins had earned to prevent believers from ever experiencing such a separation from Him. And to prove He accepted Jesus' payment for our sins, He allowed Jesus to rise from the grave, ascend into heaven, and sit at His right hand – from where He will return to judge the living and the dead.

Yes, because Jesus rose, we are confident that we, too, will rise from the dead. Until that day comes, we trust God's promise that the souls of all our believing loved ones who have fallen asleep

live with Jesus in glory as their bodies rest in the grave. How can we be certain? Because Jesus granted the apostle John a vision of it, recorded in Revelation chapter 7.

“⁹ After these things I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing in front of the throne and of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ They called out with a loud voice and said: Salvation comes from our God, who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb... These are the ones who are coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Because of this they are in front of the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple. He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. ¹⁶ They will never be hungry or thirsty ever again. The sun will never beat upon them, nor will any scorching heat, ¹⁷ for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”ⁱⁱ

Brothers and sisters in Christ: whenever you miss Christian loved ones who passed away, remember this vision and take comfort in the fact that they are not dead, but asleep and safe. God is sparing them from the evils of this earth,ⁱⁱⁱ granting their souls peace as they wait for Jesus to awaken their bodies on the Last Day, as St. Paul writes...

Part Two: He will wake us up to live with him forever.

¹⁵In fact, we tell you this by the word of the Lord: We who are alive and left until the coming of the Lord will certainly not go on ahead of those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Picture it: One moment, it's a day like any other. Next, a trumpet blasts, Christ appears in the sky, surrounded by countless angels and believers in glorified bodies. Once again, they will feel their hearts throbbing with excitement as their lungs fill with air to sing praises to their Saviour.

¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them, to meet the Lord in the air.

Don't imagine all this happening slowly like some creepy sci-fi movie. It will all happen instantaneously, as the apostle Paul explains elsewhere:

⁵¹Look, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.^{iv}

Changed how? Changed to resemble Christ! Our mortal bodies will become immortal like Him^v – free from all sin, sickness, weakness and death. We believers will rise to live with God in the

perfect paradise He will create for us on that day, where there will be no sin, pain, sorrow, or death, but only joy forevermore.^{vi}

And so we will always be with the Lord.

What do you imagine your greatest joy will be in paradise? Will you find it at the grand reunion you will have with all your believing loved ones? How about in the perfect world peace that will exist between believers from every people group on earth? Maybe you are most excited to get the house by the seashore that you have always wanted but could never afford in this life.

As wonderful as these things will be, they pale in comparison to our truly greatest joy: being with the LORD forever. No more fear, loneliness, or emptiness because of sin. Instead, we will run to Jesus with greater love and excitement than a young daughter rushes to her beloved dad, who just returned home from a long trip. Whether we realize it or not, this is what every Christian desires above all else, as St. Augustine once wrote: “Our hearts are restless, O LORD, until they rest in Thee!”

Brothers and sisters in Christ: rejoice in this most wonderful hope: even though your believing loved ones will one day pass through the valley of the shadow of death, because of Jesus, they will never truly die. They will merely sleep as their bodies rest in the grave and their souls praise God in heaven. When the Last Day dawns, Jesus will wake them up – breathing new life into their bodies and transforming you as well. Then, together with them, you will meet the LORD in the air – ready to live with Him in perfect, everlasting joy forever.

¹⁸*Therefore, encourage one another with these words. Amen.*

ⁱ Matthew 27:46 EHV

ⁱⁱ Revelation 7:9-10, 14-17 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ Isaiah 57:1-2 NIV84

^{iv} 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 EHV

^v Cf. Philippians 3:20-21

^{vi} Cf. Isaiah 65:17, 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1-8