

Hope in the Face of Death

1 Thess 4:13-18

The Thessalonian Christians had a deep love for one another. The problem with such love is that when you lose the person you love it hurts deeply. So Paul has to write to help them cope with their grief.

The Grief of Death

In the West most people would say that after death, they have a vague hope of heaven, or that we just cease to exist. That was the view in ancient Greece and Rome: death is final. So the view of modern day atheists is not new. But you cannot find hope in the face of death, if you think there is no hope.

But Paul does not tell these Christians *not* to grieve their loved ones, but not to grieve 'as others who have no hope.' To grieve the loss of those you love is not a sign of a weak faith but of a strong love. And yet Paul sees that they are not seeing death through God's eyes. They understood the hope of the gospel in their heads, but not in their hearts, where it affected how they responded. Sometimes our faith struggles to match our loss, or our emotions.

The Next Chapter

We don't need to grieve as those without hope because something much better is coming. Better chapters have been written for your life than the chapter titled Death. Paul says you can find comfort in the face of death for two reasons:

- ***The Resurrection of Christ:*** The resurrection vindicates everything Jesus said and did for us. But his resurrection was also just the firstfruits of our resurrection. His resurrection guarantees ours. It is because death is only temporary that Paul says those who have died are 'asleep.' Sleep is only temporary!
- ***The Second Coming.*** Like a king coming to a city, Christ will return as King. Just as a welcome party would go out and greet a visiting king, so the dead will be raised and join the living in a great welcome party for Jesus. It will be a wonderful reunion! Death cannot break the bond of brotherly love. Yet, our greatest hope will not be that we will be reunited with each other but that we will be with Jesus.

Encourage One Another

Sometimes we can be tempted to argue about the Last Day or the Second Coming. That is not why Paul writes this. He writes it so that we encourage one another with these truths. It is this that can comfort us in our grief. It is this that tells us we don't need to fear when we face death or suffering. Nothing else can give us this kind of hope.

It's why as Christians we can say with Paul, 'o death, where is your victory?' (1 Cor 15:55).