

1 Thessalonians 4 (13-18) – What God Says About My Mom

Most people don't look forward to funerals. I think that's why many have chosen to call these events a celebration of life. And it is a celebration of someone's life. But it is also an acknowledgment of their death. And it seems that most people are afraid of death. There is so much anxiety, so much uncertainty, so much confusion about it all. And for many, all they know to do to cope with someone's death is to respond with sentimentality.

Now, I can understand that. What else can you say in a time like this? Well, what we need to hear is what God says about it. And Hebrews 2:15 says that Jesus came to *deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery*. I am not a slave to the fear of death, and you don't have to be, either!

It might sound strange to you, but I look forward to funerals. And while I don't want to die right now, I do look forward to that day. And as we look back on the life of my mother, we also look forward to the future, and to eternity. So, I want to tell you on the authority of God's Word what has happened to my mom, and what lies ahead for all of those who trust in and follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. God has spoken clearly, giving us something to look forward to, a glorious hope for those in times of sorrow. And there are three main things we can look forward to...

Vs.13-14 – A Reception – Paul was writing to these believers to instruct them about those who had “fallen asleep”, which refers to those who had died. Paul doesn't want those left behind to sorrow as those who have no hope. We do have sorrow, and we should grieve, it is right to grieve, but it is limited. Believers have something glorious to look forward to!

The reason Christians don't have to sorrow as others without hope is given in verse 14. All of the glorious promises of this passage are based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those who have died in the Lord are with Christ. The souls (immaterial part) of departed Christians are with God and Jesus is going to bring them back with Him when He comes for His Church.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 says...*we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.* When Christians die, they go immediately to be with God.

Philippians 1:21-23 says...*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.* Paul tells us when we depart from this life, we are with Christ, and it is better. Dolores, my mom, is in a better place!

The believer is immediately in glory with God. The Bible shows us Enoch, Moses, Elijah (cf. Luke 9:28-36), and others (Revelation 6:9-10) who have died but who are also consciously in the presence of God. They are conscious but waiting for the consummation of all things, when Jesus Christ returns. The end of the age, the end of pain, sin, sorrow, and death. The start of the eternal state of perfection, with new perfect people with new perfect bodies on a new perfect earth. All the saints who have died before the Second Coming of Christ are eagerly waiting that glorious day. And Dolores Hatfield is now one of those. My mom has had a reception in glory.

But she is waiting for more. Just like Abraham, Moses, and the Apostle Paul.

You see, we need not sorrow as others who have no hope, because the Bible promises the believer an immediate and glorious reception. But also, because the believer will experience...

Vs.15-16 – A Redemption – These verses promise that the bodies of those Christians who have died will be resurrected. And made perfect for eternity. In John 11:25, *Jesus said...I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.* 2 Corinthians 4:14 says...*that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.* Romans 8:23 says...*we wait eagerly for...the redemption of our bodies.* The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of our glorified bodies.

In vs.16, we see that the souls of believers who are now with Christ will be reunited with their glorified bodies when Jesus comes for His Church. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 says...*Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.* In vs.14, we see the souls of dead Christians coming down with Christ, and in vs.16 we see their new glorified bodies coming up to meet Him.

God's redemption includes the whole person. We are not just redeemed souls; we will live body and soul. Right now, although we are saved, and have been changed spiritually, we long for the day when we are changed physically, when the enemy called death will be fully defeated (1 Corinthians 15:26). Death is defeated, not just because we can be spiritually born again, or that we will consciously live again, but that we will be made whole again. The new man will have a new body, fit for eternity, and Christians will live on a New Earth.

Revelation 21:1-4 (cf. Isaiah 65:17-25 / 2 Peter 3:13) says...*I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "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."* Our new glorified body will be free from pain, sorrow, sin, and death. This is the promise of eternity for every believer.

The Christian's soul goes immediately into the presence of God, and when the Lord comes back for His church, then their redeemed, glorious body is reunited with the soul. Philippians 3:20-21 says...*our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly*

body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

We need not sorrow as others who have no hope, for the Christian is promised a glorious reception, a full redemption, and...

Vs.17-18 – A Reunion – When the Lord returns, the believers who are alive will be reunited with our Christian loved ones in God’s presence. Our separation is not permanent! One day the Lord will come back and Christians who are alive will be transformed as they are caught up to join the resurrected bodies of those who have died. I am going to meet my mom again one day, and that glorious day will never end, as time will be no more, and eternity in perfection will be forever. Hallelujah!

1 Corinthians 15:54-55 says...*When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”* Think about this. Paul is mocking death! And no wonder Paul can mock death, for, as he says, *“So we will always be with the Lord”*.

The Christian who dies has the promise of an immediate reception in glory, of a redeemed, glorified body, and a reunion with other believers. This is why we can grieve with hope. This is why I can get righteously excited preaching at my mom’s funeral! This is how mom, and Jesus, want me to be!

No wonder Paul says these verses should be used at times like these; vs.18 says, *“Therefore encourage (comfort) one another with these words”*. The truth is that death is an enemy, but one that has been defeated. When a Christian dies, they shed this body, they enter glory, they await a new glorified body, and all the saints to join them. Death actually helps a Christian live! Let me remind you of Hebrews 2:14-15 again. It says...*Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*

It hurts that we will not see our sister again in this life, but Christians can cope because we have hope! If you are a believer, you will indeed see her again, and it will be glorious, and forever! Those who are left behind can be comforted in knowing the certainties of these verses, if they are part of the “one another”, the people that this passage is talking about, believers.

This world has a whole lot of pain and suffering in it, as well as a whole lot of love and joy in it. There are always a lot of ups and downs and all arounds. But no matter how bad it gets, or how good it seems to be, let me tell you the truth about what’s to come for YOU, depending on who you are. For the believer, this world is the most hell they will ever experience. For the unbeliever, this world is the most heaven they will ever experience.

Not everyone will “rest in peace”. Not if Jesus is true. You see, Jesus plainly spoke of both *the resurrection of life* and *the resurrection of condemnation* (John 5:29). So, everyone will live forever, but some will have eternal joy, and others will suffer eternal condemnation. If someone hasn’t made peace with God through Jesus Christ in this life, then they won’t have peace in eternity, and it will be anything but a better place.

Are you going to heaven? Have you repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus Christ alone? If you have you will get a new beginning, and one day, a new body, and a new home. If you have truly surrendered to Jesus Christ, then you will be able to say, as my mom did, and as the Apostle Paul did, in 2 Timothy 4:6-8...*the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the guarantee of the promises of God, and that is how you can have hope and how you can comfort and encourage one another. A reception. A redemption. A reunion. No matter what you have to go through in this life, and even when this life is over, the Christian has a glorious, forever future. That’s what God says about my mom. Amen.