

Dying Grace That Glows With Living Hope

Text: I Thessalonians 4:13-18

Solomon wrote, “To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: **A time to be born, And a time to die.**” Eccl.3:2

The intent of this message is to encourage believers in two areas that require individual **prayer and purpose.**

1. To rest in the Person, the promises and the provision of God when loved ones die.
2. To pray that God will enable us to face our own death with **grace that glows with living hope as a testimony to others.**

This will not likely happen if the following is not evident in your life **now**—**Romans 15:13** “Now may the **God of hope** fill you with all **joy and peace in believing, THAT** you may **abound in hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

With the death of loved ones, family and friends usually gather together for at least two reasons:

- ▶ We desire to **encourage** family members who are experiencing the raw emotions that accompany grief.
- ▶ We desire to **express gratitude** for the impact that **the departed loved one** had in our lives.

But the Home-going of a **Christian** also brings with it other tremendous opportunities:

- ▶ We can pay no greater **tribute** to a Christian whose soul has departed than for his or her memorial service to draw attention to **the eternal life that we have in Christ.**
- ▶ We can glorify God by acknowledging our **confidence in Him** and our **dependence upon Him.**
- ▶ We can offer great **assurance** to those believers who remain behind by reminding them of **the reunion** that we are promised through Christ.
- ▶ We can offer great **hope** to those who are not Christians by inviting them to place their **exclusive and entire trust in Jesus Christ** for Who He is and for what He accomplished in His death and resurrection.

The death of a loved one is perhaps the most significant test of personal faith that an individual can have; it causes our profession of faith to be tested **publicly and privately.**

Grace Alone [Written after Dad Johnson's Home-Going in 1995]

*I sought to ease the heartache felt O'er loved ones snatched from out of time.
I pitied homes that death had touched, **But then life's foe invaded mine!**
The words of love and themes of hope That seemed so right for **other's** woes
Fell strangely then upon **my** ears As I endured deep sorrow's throes.
Though loved ones eased the weight of grief, And I, in turn, held them more dear,
Twas grace alone that let me see The paradox of Joy 'midst tears.
Assurance over doubts prevailed Though clouds of anguish lingered o'er.
Faith's unseen beacon cast its glow, And shed God's peace on me once more.*

If we are to bring glory to God and honor the memory of our departed loved one, **in the midst of our sorrow**, there must be the testimony of **the living hope that we have in Christ** (1 Peter 1:3). Christians can have the settled joy of knowing that **in our grief, we can rest in our God Who is righteous in all of His ways.**

OUR TEXT:

In **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**, Paul wrote, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning **those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.** 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him **those who sleep in Jesus.** 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord **will by no means precede those who are asleep.** 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And **the dead in Christ will rise first.** 17 Then **we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus WE shall always be with the Lord.** 18 **Therefore comfort one another with these words.**”

What comforts can we embrace and share as Christians when it comes to facing the death of loved ones or our own death for that matter?

I. In our sorrow there is the hope that our loved one is in the presence of the Lord of glory

A. Paul is speaking to Christians. **V13** “But I do not want you to be ignorant, **brethren**, concerning **those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.**”

1. Brethren: those who believe that Jesus died and rose again.
2. Those who have no hope.
3. Hope is a confident anticipation of a yet unrealized promise

B. Paul ties their hope to the Gospel: **V14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.**

Romans 10:8-11 "But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you **confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.** 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

C. Paul calls departed Christians a reassuring name. **14B "...God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus."**

1. This is the most beautiful description of death in the human language. "Sleep in Jesus." It is the **body** that sleeps, not the **soul**. The word "cemetery" means "a sleeping place"; it is the place where the bodies sleep, awaiting the resurrection when Christ returns.
2. **To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord** Who died and rose again in victory over sin and the grave.

Three passages:

I Thessalonians 5:9 "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that **whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.** 11 **Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing."**

Philippians 1:21 -23. Paul wrote, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire **to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.**"

II Corinthians 5:6-8 "So we are always **confident**, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."

Matthew Henry states of those who sleep in Jesus, "Their souls are in his presence, and their dust is under his care and power; so that they are not lost, nor are they losers, but **great gainers by death**, and their removal out of this world is into a better (one)." Jesus Himself confirmed this when he said to the believing thief on the cross, "Then he [the thief] said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.' And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.'" Luke 23:42-43

I. In our sorrow there is the hope that our loved one is in the presence of the Lord of glory

II. In our sorrow we rest in the truth that the birth and death of every individual are ordained by God.

- A. Job asked, "In whose hand is the life of every living thing, And the breath of all mankind?" (12:10)
He later answers his own question. "Since his days are determined, The number of his months is with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass." (14:5)
- B. David wrote, "Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, **The days fashioned for me**, When as yet there were none of them." (Ps.139:16)
- C. Paul reminded the men of Athens that God gives to all life, breath and all things and that in Him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:25, 28)
- D. We can have the blessed assurance that our departure from this life is in the hands of God Who is sovereign. When our Creator/God beckons, nothing can keep us here. Not only does He decide **when** we die; He also determines **where** we will breathe our last as well. Regardless of how we leave this world, we will leave it exactly **when, where** and **how** the Lord has predetermined it will happen.

It was God's will that Moses die alone with Him on a mountain, (Deut. 34:5-8).

It was God's will that Jacob die surrounded by his children, (Gen. 49:33).

It was God's will that Paul and Peter die at the hands of Roman executioners.

It was God's will that His own Son die on a Roman cross in the prime of life.

Not long ago, an individual said to me, “I am not ready to die.” That statement begs two questions:

Does the individual have assurance of salvation? In other words, is he or she entrusting the welfare of his or her eternal soul into the watch care of the Lord Jesus Christ? [Much more than head knowledge of some facts about Who Jesus is and what He did on the cross.]

Does the individual submit to the sovereignty of God?

Take heart dear ones in the comfort that God is sovereign over life and death.

III. In our sorrow, there is the hope of an eternal reunion ahead

Part of the eternal blessing involves reunion with loved ones who placed their faith in Christ. The hardest thing about death is the **temporary separation** from our loved ones; but when Christ comes for His own, Christians will be “together with the Lord” **forever**.

A. The reunion will be led by the bodies of our loved ones who sleep in Jesus!

Vv15-16 “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that **we who are alive and remain** until the coming of the Lord **will by no means precede those who are asleep**. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. **And the dead in Christ will rise first.**”

B. The reunion could be today. [Paul obviously believed that the Lord’s return could happen in his lifetime.]

V17A “...we who are **alive and remain** shall be caught up **together with them** in the clouds **to meet the Lord** in the air....”

We who are alive today can have the same anticipation. **Maranatha! The Lord is coming!**

C. The reunion will happen by being caught up: The words “caught up” mean: **(1)** to catch away speedily, for there will be no warning; **(2)** to seize by force, for Christ is coming as Conqueror **(3)** to claim for one’s self, just as the Bridegroom claims the bride; **(4)** to move to a new place; and **(5)** to rescue from danger, for believers will not see the wrath of God.”

- I. In our sorrow there is the hope that our loved one is in the presence of the Lord of glory
- II. In our sorrow we rest in the truth that the birth and death of every individual are ordained by God.
- III. In our sorrow, there is the hope of an eternal reunion ahead
- IV. In our sorrow, there is the hope that sustains us and can encourage, edify or evangelize others.

17B-18 “...And thus **WE** shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

A. In the meanwhile, spouses and children who remain cannot help but wonder what the future holds. Often grief is accompanied by countless questions and uncertainties.

B. We can find encouragement and comfort from two sources:

1. **We can cling to God** Who ordains the future.

a. **His presence: Hebrews 13:5, 6** “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say:

“The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”
 We are told that a literal reading of this verse could be “There is absolutely no way whatsoever that I will ever, ever leave you.”
 [Repeated and emphasized for our benefit]

b. **His promises:** Our comfort comes from believing the promises of God— In the heartache of loss, Christians embrace the thought that **our loved one** is now living the believer’s hope. Faith has become sight! **He or she** is marveling over the splendors of Home and the wonders of the Father! As sorrow’s dark seasons come and go, we can rest in the calm assurance that *the moment* God chooses to call **His own** to Himself **his or her** spirit is *immediately* in God’s presence!“ Nothing can keep **him or her** here!

All the way my Savior leads me, O the fullness of His love! **Blind Fanny Crosby**
Perfect rest to me is promised In my Father’s house above.
When my spirit, clothed immortal, Wings its flight to realms of day
This my song through endless ages—Jesus led me all the way; This my song
through endless ages—Jesus led me all the way.

- c. **His provision: Matthew 6:27-34** “Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, **will He not much more clothe you**, O you of little faith? **Therefore** do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. **For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.** “But **seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.** Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

We can look to the presence, the promises and the provision of God, AND

2. **We can look to family and fellow Christians.** In both the Old and New Testaments, God associates caring for the fatherless and widows with holiness.
- a. **Isaiah 1:16, 17** “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; **Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.**”
- b. **James 1:27** “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: **to visit orphans and widows in their trouble**, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” (Visit: “the habit of going to see; to inspect; to relieve.”)
- c. **II Corinthians 1:3-4** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **the Father of mercies and God of all comfort**, who comforts us in all our tribulation, **that** we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which **we ourselves are comforted by God.**”

But what about **our** loss and **our** pain that hounds us in spite of our faith in the Person and the promises of God? Healing is intensely personal. It begins for us by daily offering *our desires* as a prayer of loving submission to God, just as Christ did in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Peace In the Midst of Grief

*Weep for a time grief's tears that ease
The pain of anguish and despair.
Yet **sorrow not as those who have No hope, and know not of God's care.**
Death is life's final doorway to Eternity beyond the grave.
God's children rest secure by **GRACE** Through faith in Christ, the Son God gave.
Trust in the sweet assurance that Our sov'reign God does what is best.
Amidst the soul-deep void of loss, He'll grant faith's calming, peaceful rest.
Flee to Him when confusion, doubt And loneliness tighten their grip.
His strength will help you do your part In His predestined, timeless script.*

I want to close with a prayer written to encourage my own mother after the Home-going of my father.

In our **questioning**, Father give us the *perfect peace* that comes to those who trust You when they cannot understand Your providence for their lives. In our **loneliness**, grant us the *comfort* that You will "*never leave us nor forsake us*" even in "the valley of the shadow of death." In our **uncertainty**, give us *grace* to "*be anxious for nothing*" because "*You have promised to meet our needs according to Your riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*" In our **discouragement**, grant us *faith to battle despair through our hope in Thy return*. In our **fear**, draw us to the "throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Cause us to rest in Your promise, "**A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God In His holy habitation.**" (Psalm 68:5) Enable us to glorify You even in our grief. Amen