

Encourage Each Other With These Words*
Մխիթարեցէք Զիրար Այս Խօսքերով

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Do you know what will be the topic of the sermon on your funeral? Today I'll talk about a subject no one wants to hear about. What about death? What will happen to us? What happened to those gone before us?

I read about a man from the Bay Area, Larry Ellison (co-founder of Oracle), who spent millions of dollars so that he would not age. In Ellison's own words: "Death has never made any sense to me. How can a person be there and then just vanish, just not be there? Clearly the reason they're not there is they're off doing something else... Death makes me very angry."¹

"Most people accept early on that they will die," said Ellison biographer Mark Wilson. "But part of Larry Ellison is saying if he's smart enough, he should be able to beat it... Death is just another kind of corporate opponent that he can outfox."²

It is not fun to age. Some of you say to me: "Badveli, aging is not a good thing." Պատուելի, ծերանալը լաւ բան չէ: We all feel it every year. You wake up one morning and a certain part of your body is aching, and the next day another part.

N.T. Wright says: "We may be able to lengthen life, but we won't beat death, not as long as sin is around. Death entered the world when humans sinned."³ Until Jesus' return (which will bring a new order and sin and death will be completely defeated) we will face death.

Meanwhile, we are living in a time zone called “End Times.” Since Jesus’ ascension and until He returns, we have been living in the end times, waiting for His second Coming. So, let us face it, dying is part of our life and we should confront it. Paul knew that the early church needed encouragement. He did. Death is not an end. Death is just a process of entering a new zone. And let me use Paul’s language: death for Christians is like falling asleep, a long sleep.

1. Death is Painful

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13 ESV)

It bothered me one day when a pastor questioned a family who lost their father wondering why they were grieving. He said the deceased person was in heaven so no one should grieve.

Paul is not discouraging grief, not at all; death is an enemy of life. Death was the result of sin. We were created not to die; we were created to live with God. Death is the result of a fallen world. When someone faces death, we mourn and grieve. Paul says our last enemy will be destroyed completely one day: **The last enemy to be destroyed is death** (1 Corinthians 15:26 ESV). Paul continues in the same chapter saying: **“For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”** (1 Corinthians 15:53 ESV). Death will be swallowed up in victory.

So, Paul is not discouraging the early church believers from mourning, but he is teaching them to mourn not like those who do not have hope. Grieve and mourn like those who have hope. As a pastor who performs

funeral services, I have seen a difference between the people who do have hope and the ones who do not. In fact, I am saddened to perform funerals for people who do not know Jesus, or do not believe in Jesus. How sad it is for those who do not have any hope for the next chapter.

2. Assembly of the Fallen Asleep and those who are Alive

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thessalonians 4:14 ESV)

For since... For since what? Or another translation, because we...

“We believe that Jesus died and rose again.”

“Paul’s starting point echoes one of the earliest Christian creeds, the short verbal formula that summed up what the church believed: **‘Jesus died and rose again’**. That little sentence, though, doesn’t just give information about the past; it reveals what will happen to those who belong to Jesus.”⁴

Paul wants his friends in Thessalonica to understand that through Christ we have hope. Death is not the final word for life.

-First, for the ones who died before Jesus returns. Those have **fallen asleep** he says. In this short passage, Paul repeats twice saying those who have fallen asleep. Whoever believes in Jesus, whoever believes that Jesus died and rose again, those have fallen asleep. Death of the body is just temporary. We will have new, resurrected through Jesus Christ. And in the Second Coming of Jesus those who have fallen asleep will come back with Jesus.

-Second, those who are alive:

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thessalonians 4:15 ESV)

What will happen to the ones who are alive? The voice of archangel and the sound of the trumpet, and Jesus coming back, and whoever believes in him will be united with Him and with the ones who left us before:

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:17 ESV)

Somewhere in the air this reunion will happen. This will be the new creation.

3. Where are those who have fallen asleep?

Their bodies are in the ground. You can witness that in any cemetery. Yet, Paul says that he expects to be in some sense, in the presence of the Lord.

I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. (Philippians 1:23 ESV)

We also hear from Jesus about being with him before second coming:

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43 ESV)

This is the in-between state, (to be with Christ; you will with me)
between death and coming of the Lord and having resurrected new

bodies. So it is **temporary state**, time between death and resurrection. The entire creation waits for new beginning with Christ:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:18-21 ESV)

The creation itself will be set free. In Genesis, when humanity sinned, the creation was cursed. So with Christ's second coming, the creation will have a new order, a new beginning.

That is the reason Paul's emphasis is on Christ's resurrection as essential part of our Christian belief. If Christ is raised, then we have assurance that the same will happen to us. Paul affirms that resurrection of Christ is an evidence of what is coming next:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:20 ESV)

4. The Second Coming of Christ Brings New Creation

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. (1 Corinthians 15:51-53 ESV)

The imagery of Jesus' coming (Parousia) echoes how God came down to meet Moses on Mount Sinai. Also Daniel's book has many of those pictures. In Revelation 22 we read about a new creation.

Those are powerful images of how things will be. There will be a drastic change, a major change. We do not have many details, and sometimes those details confuse us. I don't like to go over the details which could confuse us and distract us from the main point. **The point is this.** Christ will come back. Every eye will see that. It is a different kind of entrance. It is victorious, with the archangel's voice and the sound of the trumpet...

It is a new creation where there is no pain and no sorrow. It is a new creation where death is swallowed completely. A new creation where the Devil is defeated completely. A new creation where there is no cancer, no war, no accidents, no earthquakes, no abuse, no...no....

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." (Revelation 21:4 ESV)

I want to be in the new creation. I want to reunite with my mother and father, and with my loved ones who fell sleep before me...

Don't you want to be part of this new creation?

Where this will happen? Heaven? Clouds?

When we were kids when someone said where heaven is, we looked up. I think it is much more than a location up or down.

Paul uses two verbs describing Jesus' Second Coming. Paul uses the image of Jesus coming down. **For the Lord himself will descend from heaven...**(1 Thessalonians 4:16 ESV); also in another passage he uses the phrase "Christ appears." **When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.** (Colossians 3:4 ESV)

This is a new dimension of time and space. Jesus Christ can come down, or can appear. It does not matter how. It is a place where there is no death and aging. (Someone should inform Mr. Larry Ellison.)

The reason I am not stressing place is because some people made a big deal out of these verse of 1 Thessalonians about the rapture. People are flying and are being taken away from their work places and homes. Maybe so. Others say, if you read carefully **Romans 8:18-25, 2 Peter 3:3-13, Revelation 21:1-22:5**. All these passages teach that Jesus will come to be with us on earth—the new earth, which will be part of the new creation.⁵

I don't want to spend more time where all this new creation will be.

One thing is certain. God promised. Jesus Christ was risen. He will come and will bring a new order. Jesus Christ is COMING.

5. The last point of the sermon:

Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:18 ESV)

I think some can lose the main point of this letter. Paul is writing to this church to **encourage them**. They were facing persecution. Every day they were facing trials and difficulties in their faith. Some were confused about what would happen to those who had died.

Every time I do a funeral, I finish my sermon with those words of hope of a new creation. This will be the sermon for my and your funeral. This will be the words that we will read to encourage for the ones who are listening; maybe your grandson, your granddaughter, maybe your friend, brother and sister.

Here is the main point. If you believe in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, then your death is not an end. It is only a new beginning with promises of a bodily resurrection in a new order of life.

If You Believe in Jesus.

So the answer is with your choice.

Do you believe? Do you have faith in risen Lord?

*Adopted ideas from my friend pastor Scott Grant. Good Grief. April 19, 2015

1. <http://www.minyanville.com/investing/articles/ORCL-ellison-yachts-ceos-architecture-immortality/8/28/2008/id/18703>
2. <https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-73872060.html>
3. NT Wright Simply Good News: Why the Gospel is News and What Makes it Good P 102
4. N.T. Wright Paul for everyone Thessalonians p 124
5. Scott Grant, Good Greif.