

Hope in death

Bereavement is a part of life in this flawed, fallen world. Wonderfully, the gospel gives us what we need to meet it not only with strength, but with joy.

Not like the rest

Read 1 Thessalonians 4 v 13-14

- ❓ *What were the Thessalonians “uninformed” about (v 13)?*
- ❓ *Why does Paul want them not to be “uninformed” (end v 13)?*

It seems that this church had such a keen expectation of Christ’s return that they were worried about what happened to Christians who died before that day. Would they miss out on the new creation when it arrived?

- ❓ *What do “we believe” has happened in the past, and to whom (v 14)?*
- ❓ *So what do “we believe” will happen in the future, and to whom (v 14)?*

Falling asleep is such a wonderful way to describe the death of a Christian. What seems a full stop to us, so cold and final, is only a pause, and not the end. A very godly widow I knew described it as being like her husband popping out to get the milk, and taking a while to come back. She missed him terribly... but she was not without hope. She knew she’d see him again.

TIME OUT

It’s unlikely that Paul is teaching here that believers who die don’t know anything until they awake at Christ’s return, rather than enjoying a conscious existence in heaven.

Read Luke 23 v 43 and Revelation 6 v 9-11.

The Lord himself

Read 1 Thessalonians 4 v 15-18

Because this church’s concern is whether those who have died will miss out on glory, Paul assures them that believers who are alive on that day “will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep” (v 15). But he wants to make something else clear, too...

- ❓ *Who will come from heaven (v 16)?*
- ❓ *Who will we meet (v 17)?*
- ❓ *Who will we live with for ever (v 17)?*

When a Christian whom we love dies, it is completely right to grieve, and to look forward to seeing them again; but we must beware thinking that the best thing about eternity will be a reunion with them. That will be amazing, but even better will be that the Lord will come, we will meet the Lord, and we will live with the Lord. The best thing about eternity is... Jesus. Paul is gently saying to the Thessalonians—and perhaps to you—that we are able to look forward to seeing our loved ones, but we are to look forward *most* to seeing our Lord.

- ❓ *How do we respond to these great truths (v 18)?*

Apply

- ❓ *How could you do this today, and who for?*
- ❓ *Do you need to encourage yourself?*