



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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November 14, 2010

3rd Sunday of Endtime: Saints Triumphant

Sermon Text: [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#)

Pastor Henzi of Trinity, Brillion

First Lesson: [Isaiah 65:17-25](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 150](#)

Second Lesson: [Revelation 22:1-5](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 20:27-38](#)

The Promises of Endtime

Right next to the church and down the road are two cemeteries of this congregation. When was the last time you walked through them? Headstones mark the names of saints who have gone before us. There lie family members, friends and acquaintances. Have you ever thought about the fact that one day a headstone will mark your grave as well? Maybe you have thought about that. Then again, maybe you haven't, I don't know. But I do know this...very few people are comfortable talking about the subject of death and dying.

In my experience, the one lone exception to that are the elderly. It seems as if the elderly are talking about the subject of death and dying far more often than anyone else. Maybe it's because they've already buried many family members and friends. Maybe it's because they know for them the grave isn't that far off. Then again, some of the elderly are looking forward to death. The aches and pains of living have made their daily existence a chore. Some even pray that the Lord might take them home.

Next in line are those who don't like talking about the subject of death and dying, however, they are forced to admit that the signs of aging are beginning to show themselves. Maybe they can't do all the things they once were able to do. Maybe the aches and pains come a little bit more frequently now. Maybe they're dealing with an elderly parent. Begrudgingly they are forced to admit it's not much fun growing old.

Bringing up the rear are the young people. Death is usually the furthest thing from their minds. Children seem to radiate a sense of immortality. They don't know about aches and pains. For them, life has just begun.

As a whole, we don't like talking about the subject of death and dying. It's a subject that strikes fear in the hearts of many. There is the fear of the unknown. There is fear of pain. And there is the fear of a broken heart.

Today as we now celebrate coming to the end of another church year, it is certainly an opportunity for us to once again talk about this very same subject. We want to talk about the subject of death and dying, fear and the Last Judgment. These subjects are certainly fitting for this family here at Zion. The reason why I say that is because there are members of this congregation who throughout this past year have had to deal with this very same subject. So on their behalf and for the benefit of everybody else here today, as we search the Scriptures, we pray that the Holy Spirit might open up our

hearts and minds so that we put to rest the fear of death. We believe Jesus died and rose. And we believe that one day, we will too.

I would like to try something this morning. I would like to see a show of hands. Please raise your hands, and I'm serious, please raise your hands if you've ever had to bury somebody. Raise your hands. There is a reason for this. Trust me. Keep your hands up. Raise your hands if you've ever had to bury a spouse, parent, child, grandparent, or family member. Now with your hands raised, I want you to turn and look around. Go ahead. Look around and you will see that virtually every hand is raised. And if you haven't had to bury someone yet, you will. Death affects everyone. Sooner or later, everybody dies. The apostle Paul tells us this is a consequence of sin.

Death brings pain and sorrow. It hurts when someone we know and love is taken away from us. Sometimes it helps if we have an opportunity to prepare ourselves, but as you know, we are not always given that chance.

Have you ever wondered what happens when someone dies? Don't guess. Know the facts. As we search the Scriptures, we find out that at death, soul and body separate. The body remains here on earth while the soul goes to heaven or hell based upon what the person believed while they were alive.

In our text, the Thessalonians were afraid of what would happen now to their loved ones. They were afraid that if their loved ones died before Jesus came again, would that mean that they would miss out on eternal life? Their ignorance was a source of great grief and sorrow. Not only did they have to bury their loved ones, but they were also left wondering where they would be. So Paul now comes to the rescue. He provides the answer.

He began by calling the Thessalonians "brothers." They were family. They were fellow believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. What he wanted them to know and what he wants you and me to know as well is that because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we aren't like everybody else. Sure, when someone we know and love dies, it hurts. But as Paul says, we do not grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. When someone we know and love dies, we aren't left with just a few fond memories. We have more, much more. Remember what we believe. Paul said, "*we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*" (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

Think about it...we don't go to bed at night wondering if we are going to wake up. We always have. In the same way, we don't have to fear death. For Christians, we know that death is just like falling asleep for we know that when we die, we are going to wake up in heaven. How do we know that? Because Jesus' death and resurrection has made that possible.

Listen again to the words of verse 14. "*For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*"

(1 Thessalonians 4:14). So when you think about it, what is there really to be afraid of? We know that when we die, we are going to wake up and see Jesus. Isn't that what we want? Isn't that what we believe? Yes, it is, but still when we lose someone, it really hurts. It really does. Therefore, the only source of comfort for those who mourn is found in God's Word.

Yes, death is a time of sorrow. Someone we know and love is no longer with us. But you have to understand that death is also a time to rejoice. Your husband, your wife, your child, your parent, your grandparent, your family member, your friend is now living with Jesus. They are now in heaven. In heaven there is no pain. There is no sickness. There is no sorrow. Your loved one is now resting comfortably in Jesus' arms. Therefore, death is not something that we need to fear. The challenge is maintaining proper focus.

When we lose someone that we know and love, we need to focus our hearts and minds not so much on what we have lost but on what our loved ones have gained. They are now living with Jesus.

Several years ago, a member of my congregation was very sick and near death. She was very restless and couldn't sleep at night. So late at night, one of her family members called me and asked me to come over. When I got there, I said to her, "What can I do for you?" She said, "I just need to hear the Words of God. I need to hear that the door of heaven is going to be open to me. I need to hear again the promise, that hope of eternal life." So I had the privilege of sharing with her that because of her faith in Jesus, she was assured of a home in heaven. We talked about how at that very moment the Lord was preparing her home. And as so often happens, a calm came over her. She was at peace. She was ready to go and meet her Lord. Later that night, she did fall asleep. And the next morning, she woke up in heaven.

Paul is now encouraging us to put to rest our fear of death. So how are we supposed to do that? It's really very simple. It's by remembering. Do you remember what Jesus did? Sure, he died on the cross. But did he stay dead? No he didn't. We believe that on Easter morning Jesus rose from the grave proving himself to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world. His resurrection proves there is life after death. So do you want to hear the really great part? The great part is that because Jesus rose from the dead, he's promised that one day we will too.

The apostle Paul then goes on and shares with us another reason why we can put to rest our fear of death. He mentions that Jesus is going to come again. He says that Jesus is going to return to earth in the same way that he ascended up into heaven. He is going to come visibly in human form and every eye will see him. But the next time Jesus comes, it's going to be a whole lot different than the first time. The first time Jesus came was very humbling, meek and mild. His first bed was a manger, a feeding trough for cattle. His first clothes were nothing more than rags. His first visitors were lowly shepherds certainly not fitting for the King of kings. But the next time Jesus comes, it's going to be different.

The next time he comes, he's coming in all his power, in all his glory, with all his holy angels with him. And we're told *"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first."* (1 Thessalonians 4:16). So on the Last Day, all the dead will rise from the grave. And Matthew's Gospel account tells us that the angels of the Lord are now going to usher people into one of two lines, one for believers, one for unbelievers. Those who believe will receive perfect glorified bodies similar to Christ's when he rose from the grave. Those who do not believe will be sent to spend their eternity in hell.

But what about those who are still alive when Jesus comes again? We are told those folks *"will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."* (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Amazing! When the Lord comes again, we're not only going to be raised from the dead and receive perfect glorified bodies similar to Christ's, but we are also going to join together with all the saints who are still alive yet here on this earth. And then Jesus is going to take us all home to live with him in heaven. And we are going to live there with him forever.

Okay, so when is this all going to take place? The Bible tells us that the only one who knows when Judgment Day will come is the Lord himself. That's why we must keep watch. We must be ready. However, we do know this...that if our Lord does not come in the next 100 years, everybody who is here will have died. One day it will be you lying in a casket in the front of church. One day your name will mark a headstone in one of the cemeteries. And I know we don't like to think about that. It's hard enough dealing with the loss of someone we love let alone coming to grips with the fact that one day it is going to be our turn, but it is the truth. And it's something we need to talk about and prepare for.

This past week, I had a very emotional confirmation class. The subject had to do with what Jesus did to save us from our sins. We talked about how he died on the cross in payment so that one day we can live with him. However, the subject really began to take on new meaning as we began to put names and faces in the picture. Several of the students know of individuals who are struggling with life-threatening illnesses. Several others have already buried grandparents. One has buried a brother. So death has already affected them. Several of them were fighting back tears. But what a teachable moment. We talked about how their loved ones fell asleep and woke up in heaven.

Death and dying is really a part of life. Sooner or later it will affect everyone. However, it is not something to be feared. It is something to be embraced. And the apostle Paul tells us why. He said, *"we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words."* (1 Thessalonians 4:17, 18).

We are often granted opportunities to encourage one another with the hope that we have. I just pray we seize the moment. When someone dies, do you know how to comfort those who mourn? Whether it's here in church, whether it's at the funeral

home or if it's at someone's death bed, do you know what to say? Do you know what to say to your children when they are dealing with this for the first time? Do you know what to say to your friends when they have to go through this very same thing? I hope you give them more than just, "I'm sorry for your loss." Give them more. Give them hope. Tell them what you know. Tell them that you believe that your fear of death has been put to rest. Tell them you believe that Jesus died and rose. And tell them you believe that because of Jesus, their loved one will one day rise too.

Just right here next to church and down the road are cemeteries that house the remains of saints who have gone before us. One day your lifeless bodies might lie there too. But don't worry. Please don't worry. They are only going to be there for a time. That's just rented space. We believe Jesus died and rose. And we believe that one day, we will too!