



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

November 18, 2012

Endtime 3 - Saints Triumphant

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

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Daniel 12:1-3](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 118](#)

Second Lesson: [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 13:24-27](#)

### **Grieve God's Way**

Focus on His Word

Focus on Forever

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

When I was growing up, dad would often talk about there being a right way and a wrong way to do things, an easy way or a hard way. Over time what I learned was there was any other way, and there was his way. When I was helping him, we were doing things his way so I had to help him do things his way. Have you had that experience in your life? The right way or the wrong way, the easy way or the hard way, my way or your way.

We have a lot of ideas about how certain things should be done in life. I think one of them that we have ideas about at times that show up deal with grieving. When people lose a loved one, there's a hole in your life. There's a loss. There's no denying it. You're going to grieve. There's going to be sadness. There's going to be mourning. God acknowledges this. He tells us you're going to grieve.

But I think when it comes to grieving, some people don't focus on the easy way or the hard way, the right way or the wrong way. Sometimes I think people focus on the "should" way. The "should" way, are you familiar with that way? People come to you and say "You're still struggling with the loss of your loved one? It's been long enough. You should be done grieving now." I'm going to tell you the "should" way is the wrong way. When God talks to us about grieving the loss of a loved one, he doesn't "should" on us at all, does he? Instead, he talks to us about the power of the Gospel. He talks to us about encouraging one another with the Gospel. He doesn't talk about using the Law as we go through grief. He doesn't say that you should go to someone and say "It's been long enough. Knock it off."

We are all going to grieve in different ways. We are all going to grieve at different lengths of time. That's fine. God has made us all different. The key thing is that when we are grieving, grieve God's way. Grieving God's way doesn't have a time limit. It has a focus. That focus is Jesus Christ and what he has done for us. That focus for us, if we're going to grieve God's way, and as members of the body of Christ who are called

to help one another grieve, we want to focus on what God says. He tells us grieving God's way deals with encouraging with God's Word. Grieving God's way involves encouraging with an eye on the future.

That's what the Holy Spirit had Paul write to the Thessalonians about because the Thessalonians were troubled. Not only were they grieving because they had lost loved ones, but they had a misunderstanding about the resurrection and Jesus' return. They thought if someone died before Jesus' return, they weren't sure if that person was going to rise from the grave and enjoy the blessings Christ had won.

You might think, "How in the world could that happen? How could they be goofed up on that?" If you remember from [Acts 17](#), Paul came to the Thessalonians and he went to the synagogue and he taught like he always did. He started talking about Jesus and who Jesus is and what Jesus had done. He is the promised Savior. He has taken away our sins. He has opened heaven to us. All these things that were Paul's message, and some of the leaders in that synagogue didn't like it. They caused lots of problems for the people who believed Paul. They made one of them post bond that said there isn't going to be anymore of these troublemakers like Paul here or else you're going to suffer. They chased Paul out of town. He had to leave town because persecution broke out, and it broke out fierce and fast.

So he went on to Berea down the road a little ways, in Northern Greece. He gets to Berea and starts teaching in their synagogues. When the people back at Thessalonica hear about it, the Jewish leaders hop on their sandals and walk down to Berea and make problems for him there. So this persecution that was there maybe kept Paul from teaching everything he wanted to teach.

When we read the First Lesson and the Gospel today that talked about distress, that's how the persecution was right away and it kind of sounds like it continued that way because if you read in the letter to the Thessalonians, every chapter talks about some of the hardships they were going through. It also talks about the resurrection in every chapter. Evidently these two things were a big struggle for these people. So when Paul hears about it, he writes to them. He wants them to know the truth.

Imagine how he must have felt for them knowing that "I have the answer and you guys don't know it yet." He had to tell them about the resurrection because think of that hole that would have been in those people's hearts. They thought their loved ones missed out on the glories that God had won for them. But Paul penned to scroll pretty quick and gets this message off to them. In the message he writes to tell them, "I don't want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep. I don't want you to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. Here's our hope. Our hope is this... we believe that Jesus died and rose again and we believe God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him."

It sounds like that must have been new news to the Thessalonians. Can you imagine how they thrilled to hear that? These people that they were hurting for that they thought

had missed out on the glories Jesus won, now they're hearing they don't miss out on it and God will bring to him those who have fallen asleep in him.

Did you notice the difference in what I just read to you about how the Holy Spirit has Paul talk about death? For the believers, it's the believers who fell asleep. We don't want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep. God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. Notice it doesn't say we believe that Jesus fell asleep and rose again. It says Jesus died and rose again. That's the difference in Jesus' death and ours.

We who are believers fall asleep because we know we will wake to the glory of heaven, our bodies will when the resurrection comes. Jesus died. Jesus suffered the punishment your sins and my sins deserve. It was agony. It was horrific. It was not peaceful sleep what he went through. So to emphasize that this is a different death with a different purpose than ours, he says Jesus died. But the benefit of Jesus dying is that he rose again and he will bring back from the dead those who died in Jesus, believing that Jesus is their Savior.

He tells them not to just focus on the here and now. Focus on forever. Keep forever in mind. Grieve for those that you lose. Grieve for them, but keep forever in the picture because you know their falling sleep, their death, their body in the grave is not a forever thing. What is the forever thing he is going to talk about in a little bit. But know this truth, this is the love your Savior has for you... he lived in your place. He died in your place. He took away your sins. That's not just a here and now thing. That's a forever thing.

It's easy to forget though when you are going through that hurt. When you are going through that heartache. When you have that hole that's not just a hole, it's a burning lava pit at times, isn't it? Because of that, we forget these truths. Then our grieve, well the lava burns even hotter.

What our God tells us is when we grieve, don't grieve like those who have no hope. Go to your hope. This is your hope... Jesus lived and died for you. Those who die in the Lord are with the Lord. Those who die in the Lord, their souls are with him. The body goes in the ground, but it's not staying in the ground forever. The body will come out on the last day and body and soul will reunite and spend eternity with the Lord. That's what he tells us. He really tells us we have a responsibility. He says, "Therefore, encourage one another with these words."

A lot of you have grieved a loved one right in this aisle. You've had visitation here in the front of church and people come down the aisle. A lot of you have walked down that aisle and shook people's hands. Think of the privilege we have as believers in Christ. We have the privilege to remind these people who are grieving about their Savior. Anyone in the world can walk down that aisle and say "I'm sorry for your loss." That's good. We are sorry of the loss. But we have something more to say than just I'm sorry for your loss. We have this hope of eternity. To have someone come down

the aisle and say “I’m happy your loved one is with their Savior. Remember your loved one is with the Lord. Remember you’re going to see them again at the resurrection.” As we as believers encourage one another with these words in that aisle and in our daily lives, we are being a little Christ to that person. We are sharing the love of Christ with that person.

This is what we get to do. When we are going through grief, we can’t think straight at times. Don’t just assume people know this truth. Share it with them because this is the power. The power is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The power of the Gospel is what you are proclaiming when you say “Jesus took your loved one” not to a better place but “to his side in heaven.” An unbeliever can talk about a better place. You and I know the name of that better place, so let’s use the name.

What a privilege it is that we get to speak this to one another. What a blessing it is when we have fellow believers who, when we are going through difficulty and trouble (whether it’s grief or something else) point us again and again to the love of God in Christ Jesus and don’t just assume we know it and talk about God’s love for you in Christ, and talk about forgiveness, and talk about “if God loved you enough to stretch out his arms on that cross and die for you, do you really think he’s leaving you now? I don’t think so. He loves you and he’s with you.” That’s what we get to speak.

Part of this privilege is that we get to be fired up and wired up about it. This is how we do it. This is what God says. When he says “The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command,” that just isn’t your kids fighting. This is a command with a purpose. This isn’t just kids being loud. That loud command is a word that is a command given with urgency, with emotion. That’s what lies behind this word. It’s like in battle. The commander ordering the command to attack. He doesn’t just say, “Go get them God.” He’s a little more fired up and wired up about it. That’s the picture behind it.

So it really tells us our Lord is really excited to come back and take us to be with him. This is why he lived and died in our place. This is why he did it, so that ultimately we have salvation now, yes our sins are forgiven, but we still live in this sinful world. But when he comes back, he’s taking us out of it. He’s taking people out of their graves, out of a sinful world, to a place where body and soul reunited will spend eternity, will spend forever, where there is no more sorrow, no more suffering, no more tears, where there is nothing but perfection. I can’t wrap my head around that yet. I never will until I get there. Neither will you.

That’s why God says to keep encouraging each other by focusing on forever. In the here and now, things get tough. In the here and now, things are hard. In the here and now in a sinful world, there’s pain and sorrow. But we live as aliens and strangers here because our Lord is taking us to be with him forever. What a wonderful truth that is. I wouldn’t want to live here forever. It’s getting hard enough at age 48. My knees don’t want to work right anymore. I wouldn’t want to live here forever. I’m going to heaven one day where I’m not going to be worrying about my knees anymore. I’m going to

heaven one day where I'm going to be as thrilled to see Packer fans as I will be to see Lions fans.

Think about that truth. It's incredible, isn't it? That's what our Lord has done for us. And now he gives us the privilege to help one another when we're grieving, to point one another to Christ, to say "Yeah, go ahead grieve, but as you grieve, keep the cross right square in the middle of your eyesight. Then you know your Savior loves you." Amen.