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# Taking New Territory in Troubling Times, Pt. 8

## The Christian Hope

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June 21, 2020

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### Today

In the world we live in right now, the people of God are fearful, tired, anxious, discouraged, and worried about the future.

This world is filled with bad news, but God has some good news for us—a message of hope and encouragement that will lift your spirit no matter what is happening around you!

#### 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

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. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 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. 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. 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. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

**THE RAGE AGAINST DEATH  
THE HOPE FOR LIFE  
THE PEOPLE OF THE DAY**

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### The Rage against Death

The Bible is that it doesn't gloss over the harsh realities of life. The Bible acknowledges and faces them. So before we get to the good news, we've got to face the bad news, just as Paul does in this passage, which he addresses to believers in Thessalonica who were grieving and filled with sorrow.

#### 1 Thessalonians 4:13

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.

**Personal:** One of my favorite animated movies growing up was *The Lion King*. There's a song in *The Lion King* called "The Circle of Life," and gist of the song's message is that death is natural. Death is a beautiful part of life, and we need to gently embrace the reality of suffering and death.

- This is not how Christianity approaches suffering and death.

#### Consider:

- **Job:** After Job loses everything, including his family to death; he falls to the ground and cries out.
- **David:** He wrote scores of psalms of mourning and lament. He rent his garments and wore sackcloth and ashes.
- **Jesus:** At the death of Lazarus, He wept and was deeply grieved.

- Many in the church today would look at those responses to suffering and death and say, “*What’s the use of all of that? That’s a little much! Don’t they have any faith?*”
- But Paul tells us that we should grieve. We shouldn’t accept death as some natural, beautiful event. Paul affirms that thing in us that rages against suffering, death, injustice, and sorrow.

The poet Dylan Thomas wrote, “**Do not go gentle into that good night. Old age should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage against the dying of the light.**”<sup>1</sup>

CS Lewis writes, “**Do fish complain of the sea for being wet? Or if they did, would that fact itself not strongly suggest that they had not always been, or would not always be, purely aquatic creatures?**”<sup>2</sup>

- He suggests that we would not be continually shocked and repulsed by death unless there is something in us that’s eternal.
- In other words, the reason we rage against death is because we are made for eternity.

What we see in all of this is that **death is an intruder**. We know it instinctively, and we rage against it. There ought to be anger at suffering and death. There ought to be weeping and mourning over injustice. We ought to grieve our losses. Christians should never be stoic about death, suffering, or injustice.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:13**

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.

- Paul tells us that if all we do is rage against death, we’ll become bitter. If we have nothing more than our grief to hold onto, we’ll be overwhelmed by it, cynical, hardhearted, and hopeless.
- But there is hope.

## **The Hope for Life**

### **1 Thessalonians 4:16–17**

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. 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.

- Our friend Amir a few weeks back said, “I’m no longer looking for the signs, I’m listening for the trumpet!”
- While we don’t know the hour or the day, we do know is that the Lord is coming back!
- This reality gives us an absolutely radical approach to death, suffering, and injustice.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:14**

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

- This passage reminds us of the Gospel, which tells us that Jesus Christ, through His own death, has put death to death.

### **1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 51–52, 54–55**

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His

<sup>1</sup> From *The Poems of Dylan Thomas*, published by New Directions. Copyright © 1952, 1953 Dylan Thomas.

<sup>2</sup> Vanauken, Sheldon, with C.S. Lewis. *A Severe Mercy*. HarperCollins, 1977.

coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. . . . 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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed. . . . So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.  
O Death, where is your sting?  
O Hades, where is your victory?”

**Question:** Do you see how radical this is? Death is put to death. It’s swallowed up in victory. Why? Because Christ is risen from the dead!

Sixteenth-century priest and poet, **George Herbert**, wrote an incredible hymn, *A Dialogue Anthem*, and it’s a conversation between the Christian and Death:

**Christian:** Alas, poor death. Where is thy glory? Where is thy famous force, thy ancient sting?

**Death:** Alas, poor mortal, void of story. Go spell and read how I have killed thy King.

**Christian:** Poor death! And who was hurt thereby? Thy curse being laid on him makes thee accurst.

**Death:** Let losers talk, yet thou shalt die; these arms shall crush thee.

**Christian:** Spare not, do thy worst. I shall be one day better than before; thou so much worse, that thou shalt be no more.<sup>3</sup>

**Rob’s paraphrase:** “C’mon death! Do your worst. The more you try to bring me down, the more you’ll raise me up. The more you try to break me apart, the more you’ll be putting me together. The more you try to destroy my life, the more you’ll make me more than I’ve ever been before, and you’ll be brought to nothing.”

Preacher **Dwight Moody** had this to say about death:

Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal—a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body.<sup>4</sup>

When that trumpet sounds and the Lord descends, not just some things, not even most things, but everything—*everything*—will be as it should. All of our rage against injustice, suffering, oppression, death, hell, and the grave—we’ll have no need of it, because our Father will make everything as it should be.

“At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in.”<sup>5</sup>—**C.S. Lewis**

The return of Christ tells us that all of our turmoil, suffering, and death—every ounce of it—will end.

**He’s coming back with a robe covered in blood,**

<sup>3</sup> Herbert, George. *The Works of George Herbert in Prose and Verse*. New York: John Wurtele Lovell, 1881. 271.

<sup>4</sup> Dwight L. Moody (2017). “Secret Power: The Secret of Success in Christian Life and Work”, p.75, Aneko Press

<sup>5</sup> C. S. Lewis (2003). “A Mind Awake: An Anthology of C. S. Lewis”, p.182, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

**a sword from His mouth,  
and a tattoo on His thigh saying, “King of Kings, Lord of Lords.”  
The earth and all of its injustice, sin, and evil, will answer to Him.**

This is our hope, and we’ve got to continually remind ourselves of it in the face of the evil we’re living amidst.

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## **The People of the Day**

What are the implications of this hope for how we live right now?

### **1 Thessalonians 5:5–6**

You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

- Paul tells us here is that we’re not people of the night. We’re not just to sleep and pass the time as others do, or be drunk and unaware of what’s happening around us. We’re to be sober, awake, alert, and people of the day.

**Question:** What does it mean to be sons and daughters of the day?

**Answer:** Paul tells us that Christians are the ones who have their eyes open. They are not unaware of the schemes of the evil one. They’re alert and attentive to the times in which they are living. They’re not duped by darkness. They are awake to the reality that the battle is not against flesh and blood but against rulers and powers and principalities. Christians—people of the day—work. They are productive in ways that benefit other people. Most importantly, people of the day have the hope of salvation, the hope of the future.

**What you believe about your future  
radically affects how you live today.**

### **Consider:**

- The only reason to take vengeance or retaliation into your own hands today is because you believe there is no ultimate justice that will come one day.
- The only reason to fall into despair about your circumstances, whatever they may be, is if you believe that this life is all there is.
- The only reason to be overcome with grief to the point of hopelessness is if you don’t hold onto the reality that there is a day coming where all human suffering will end and every tear will be wiped from every eye.

### **On the other hand:**

- The reason we help the broken, the oppressed, the unheard, the addicted, the prisoner, and the poor, is because **our salvation isn’t a means to escape from this world, but to be repurposed for it!**

**We are not saved from the world—**

**we are saved *for* it.  
We're called to be good news people  
in a bad news world.**

Christians ought to be people . . .  
    overwhelmed with joy,  
        of exuberant celebration,  
            fighting against the brokenness around us,  
                bringing daylight to darkness,  
                    keeping our eyes on the glorious future that awaits us.

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## **Discussion Questions**

1. How do you typically respond to death and suffering? Do you rage against it? If not, why not?
2. Why is it important that our response to death not end with rage?
3. How does our hope for the future radically change how we live today?
4. Do you find it easy to hold onto this hope these days?
5. What does it mean to people of the day?

# NOTES