Introduction

What happens when we die?

“Death haunts humanity. Poets, philosophers and other writers through the ages have sought to explain, understand and cope with death. Their answers have done very little to alleviate the tremendous fear of death that people feel.” Luis Palau

“Everybody has got to die, but I have always believed an exception would be made in my case. Now what?” William Saroyan

Even Christians can have questions about what happens when we die?

This passage is Paul’s answer.

I. We have a great hope. I Thess. 4:13

What happens when a believer dies?

They go immediately and consciously into the presence of the Lord.

“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Luke 23:43

“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” II Corinthians 5:8

“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” and “to be with Christ is better by far!” Philippians 1:21, 23

For the believer death is still an enemy, but it does not have the final word.

The unbelieving world in Paul’s day had no such hope. “Hope is for the living; the dead are without hope.”

Is it wrong for a believer to grieve? No, not at all.

When Stephen was stoned by an angry mob, “godly me buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.” Acts 8:3

When Jesus came to the tomb of Lazarus, “Jesus wept.” John 11:35

What changes our view of death is that our loved ones are in a place that is better by far with Jesus and we will see them again.

II. Our hope is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I Thess. 4:14-17

Our hope is not wishful thinking. It is based on historical fact. Jesus died and rose again.
Paul assures the Thessalonians, that those who have died in the Lord will not miss out on the glory of Christ’s second coming.

One day our Lord will come down from heaven:

- With a loud command.
- With the voice of the archangel.
- With the trumpet call of God.

“I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”’’ I Corinthians 15:50-54

The word “caught up” means to seize or snatch. In Latin it is the word “rapere” where our word rapture comes from.

How do we know these things will happen?

We have the Lord’s word on it.

“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”

“Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.” Matthew 24:30-31 and 40-41

What we don’t know is the exact time when it will occur which is why Jesus said, “Watch and be ready.” Matthew 24:44

Paul’s focus is not on the details, but on the outcome. We will be with the Lord forever.

III. Hope changes the way we live and the way we die. I Thess. 4:18

Be encouraged! No matter what happens in this life, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ, not even death.

This is a promise for those who have placed their trust in Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

For the believer, death will be the transition from life in this fallen world to everlasting joy in the presence of the Lord.
For the unbeliever, who dies without Christ, there is no hope. There is no second chance after you die.

Hope changes the way we live today.

- “We make it our goal to please him.” II Corinthians 5:9
- “We purify our heart as he is pure.” I John 3:3
- “We fix our eyes on what is eternal.” II Corinthians 4:18
- “We look forward to his coming.” Romans 8:18-23

Hope also changes the way we face death.

- “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:21

Conclusion

We have a great hope that is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Do you have the assurance of your salvation?

Do you know where you will spend eternity when you die?

You can if you will trust in Christ today!