



**PASTOR'S  
PICKS, III**



**SCAN FOR PHJW  
SERMON NOTES**

# **REST IN PEACE**

**SUNDAY,  
OCTOBER |  
8AM & 11AM**

**I THESSALONIANS 4:13-18**

**A SERMON BY  
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**Date:** October 1, 2023  
**Preacher:** Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley  
**Series Title:** Pastor's Picks: Part 3  
**Sermon Title:** *Rest In Peace*  
**Scripture:** I Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NKJV)

*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.*

#### **SERMON SUMMARY:**

Pastor Howard-John Wesley invites us into the third part of his **Pastor's Picks** sermon series in an intensely personal sermonic moment. This week, we hear the text that helped our pastor keep his head above water during the darkest period of his life, the 2006 death of his beloved father, the Rev. Dr. Alvin-John Wesley.

Pastor tells us a bit about his father, and then, using Paul's letter to the people of **Thessalonica** (I Thessalonians 4:13-18), we are reminded we can move through grief if we have a hope grounded in faith, and believe that:

- Jesus died and rose from the dead, and because he rose, we can believe that those who have died in Christ will also rise to new life. This belief gives us faith that death is not the end of the story. This faith energizes our hope.
- Jesus has prepared a place for all who die in him. This prepared place is a promise (see John 14:3) from Jesus to all believers. This promise gives us hope, a confident expectation that we have something good to look forward to. This hope allows us to balance out our grief.

- We who remain will one day be reunited with Jesus and all who have “fallen asleep” before us. Because we believe this and have faith and hope, we understand that death is not the end of the story. There is another chapter after this end.
- The final chapter, the end of all things, as noted in I Thessalonians 4: 16-17, will be when we find ourselves **with Jesus** together in eternity.

*Note: It all begins with our faith in Jesus. When we believe Jesus rose from the dead, that death could not take him out, when we acknowledge that we may not have all the answers to the mysteries of death and heaven. We know there is a prepared place, that Jesus will return to receive us, and we will be with them. Jesus and those who have gone before us, we can not only survive grief, we can move through it with faith and hope. Let the church say, Amen.*

#### **KEY POINTS:**

1. Faith inspires hope, which allows you to see beyond today toward a brighter future. Once we are grounded in this faith and hope, we cannot erase grief but balance it
2. It is OK to grieve. You must give yourself space and permission to grieve.
3. Death is not the failure of God; death is the faithfulness of God.
4. The enemy will try to hem you up with questions, to which there are no sure answers. But, we must not let the mystery of heaven cause us to doubt the reality of heaven. We rely on what we know about Jesus like:
  - a. He defeated death
  - b. Tells us he has prepared a place
  - c. He will come to get us
  - d. We will be with him and them (those who have gone before) forever.
5. Paul attempts to shift our understanding of death from the finality of a dead body to a loving parent who calls a child to sleep and rest. He does this by the choice of words used in today’s text.
6. The word of God will hold you together when the world is trying to tear you apart.

#### **GETTING TO KNOW YOU:**

1. Pastor Wesley describes his father as a dad, mentor, father in ministry, greatest supporter, and best friend. Identify someone who has poured into your life in multiple ways. Please share a memory of this person that you hold dear.

2. We learned today that the Wesley family owns the oldest, continually operating black shoe store in the United States. Is there a black-owned business that has been or is essential in your life? Are there black-owned businesses that you seek out to support? Why or why not?

### **INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS:**

1. Pastor Wesley tells us that when his father died, he also wanted to die. Name biblical characters who experienced the death of loved ones. What were their responses during this walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death?
  
2. Pastor Wesley described a “triune relationship” among grief, hope, and faith, where our grief is balanced with hope, and our faith gives us that blessed assurance that death is not the end for believers. Pastor referenced 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 as the text to support this. Are there other passages of scripture that give you hope and strengthen your faith while experiencing grief?

### **LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

1. Pastor Wesley said it’s important to “give yourself space and permission to grieve” when we experience a loss. He referred to the verse “Jesus wept” (upon the death of Lazarus) as evidence that grief is real. Have you ever felt pressure from others to hide, suppress, or deny your grief? Please describe your experience and share how you responded to the pressure.

2. Many of us find comfort in the hope of reuniting with lost loved ones in heaven. But, Pastor Wesley said the mystery of heaven sometimes causes people to doubt the reality of heaven. The enemy raises questions that cause us to doubt. When has doubt undermined your faith? How can you fight against doubt? How can you strengthen your faith?
  
3. Pastor Wesley teaches that to grieve is not a sin and, in fact, it is a natural part of life. What were you taught about grief in your early years? What did you observe about the way your family grieved? How has that impacted the way you grieve now? What would you like to shift about the way you grieve and why?
  
4. Faith is the ability to hope (Hebrews 11). Hope is an expectation that there will be good in our lives again. We need faith and hope to survive grief. How have you worked on developing your faith and hope muscles?
  
5. We learn Pastor Wesley's distaste for Starbucks black coffee. To drink it, he learned to put a pinch of salt in it to reduce the bitter taste. He applies the metaphor and describes a pinch of hope as the antidote to the bitterness of grief. What else have you found that, if you add a pinch of it to a difficult situation, makes the situation better? How does it make the situation better?

6. Pastor Wesley notes that Paul uses precise language to describe death. Instead of using words that mean the cessation of life (e.g., *Nekios* or *Thanatos*), Paul uses *Koimao*, which means to sleep. Why do you think Paul compares death to sleep? When you think of death as sleep, how does this change your understanding of death?

**“CAN I PUSH IT?” QUESTIONS:**

1. Pastor Wesley shared his barber shop conversation with a Buddhist brother about heaven. What would you say if you were presented with the opportunity to describe your belief about heaven? What scriptures would you use? What is the most essential point you would like to convey?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. According to the Children’s Defense Fund (see additional resources), gun violence is the leading cause of death for black children. How are we to take the message of this sermon and apply it to a national crisis that is often overlooked? As difficult as this may be, how can we help families both grieve and navigate through grief, recognizing that, in Christ, even the death of a child is not the end?

***FOR INDIVIDUAL OR VILLAGE STUDY***

**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:**

1. We are reminded that we must give ourselves permission and space to cry and grieve. Practically speaking, what does this look like? If you can, please share how you have given yourself permission and space to grieve or cry.

2. “Iron” Mike Tyson was the undisputed heavyweight champion for four years, until he wasn’t. Once he was knocked out in 1990 by Buster Douglas, other boxers lost their fear of Mike Tyson. Have you ever been afraid of something until you finally defeated it? What happened once you defeated that thing, experience, or idea that frightened you? What would you tell yourself if you could go back and talk to your old self (before you defeated your foe)?
  
3. The **Parousia** is a technical term for the *second coming of Jesus Christ*. Paul offers us a glimpse of this moment in I Thessalonians 4. ( The additional resources section includes other scriptures which point to Parousia.) What were you taught about the second coming of Christ? Having heard the Pastor say, “...don’t get hemmed up by questions that you cannot answer!”, if someone asked you about the second coming of Christ, how would you respond?
  
4. Pastor tells us how Timothy told Paul that the people of Thessalonica were okay, but "something is lacking in their faith." Like these folks, most of us have experienced a 'lack' in our faith. How might the people's circumstances in this text help us strengthen our faith?
  
5. In the letters of Paul, the word most often used for hope is *Elpis*. Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Concordance defines ***Elpis*** as *an expectation of good, the thing hoped for*. Why is this definition of hope important for the Christian? How does this kind of hope impact

**ACTIVITY:**

1. List three things you have found effective in easing the pain of grief from losing a loved one, a job, your health, money, and status. List three things you tried but have found ineffective in easing the pain.



2. Think back to a time when you were in a season of grief. Please list three things that well-meaning people did that were inappropriate and three things that blessed you. Share them with your Village. What does this teach you about how to respond to someone in a grief season?

### **SPIRIT :**

1. Pastor Wesley reminds us that our ability to move through grief begins with our beliefs. What are ten things that you believe about Jesus? List them below. Take this list of ten and create a prayer that begins with, God I believe (add your ten things), and end the prayer with, because I believe this, then finish the prayer with the words on your heart.
  
2. During the Praise and Worship portion of worship, Royal Priesthood sang a song by the Georgia Mass Choir, *No Greater Love* (<https://youtu.be/ZbnlGGalU0>). In the song the choir sings, “They hung Him high, they stretched Him wide. He hung His head, for me He died. That’s love.” They follow this verse with, “But that’s not how the story ends, three days later He rose again.” If you were going to write the next line to this song, what would it be after “He rose again?”

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

#### **1. THE HISTORY OF WESLEY SHOES**

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwj2so3KrdWBAxWHLVkJFHbSRBYUQFnoECA0QAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwesleyshoes.com%2F&usg=AOvVaw3Z86kBQn0HCFvRWkxN2R6a&opi=89978449>

#### **2. SELECTED SCRIPTURES ON THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST/PAROUSIA**

- a. **Matthew 24:30–31:** Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.
- b. **Matthew 25:13:** Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.
- c. **Acts 1:10–11:** And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand



looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

- d. **Hebrews 9:28:** So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.
- e. **James 5:7:** Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.
- f. **Revelation 1:7-8:** Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'

### 3. BIBLE PROJECT VIDEO ON LIFE AFTER DEATH

[https://youtube.com/clip/UgkxRBmfiwqI-OZNKApSVthez3XqVaD5Pq0m?si=pvrEOC\\_irbxehNB](https://youtube.com/clip/UgkxRBmfiwqI-OZNKApSVthez3XqVaD5Pq0m?si=pvrEOC_irbxehNB)

### 4. GUN VIOLENCE AND CHILDREN

[https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Gun\\_Violence.pdf](https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Gun_Violence.pdf)

### 5. GREEK WORDS USED IN TODAY'S SERMON

- a. Parousia
  - i. Definition: the future visible return from heaven of Jesus, to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up the kingdom of God
  - ii. Pronunciation: par-oo-see'-ah
  - iii. Greek: **παρουσία**
  - iv. More Information: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3952/kjv/tr/0-1/>
- b. Nekros:
  - i. Definition: one that has breathed his last, lifeless
  - ii. Pronunciation: nek-ros'
  - iii. Greek: **νεκρός**
  - iv. More Information: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3498/kjv/tr/0-1/>
- c. Thanatos:
  - i. Definition: the death of the body
  - ii. Pronunciation: than'-at-os
  - iii. Greek: **θάνατος**

- iv. More  
Information: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2288/kjv/tr/0-1/>
  
- d. Koimao
  - i. Definition: to cause to sleep, put to sleep
  - ii. Pronunciation: koy-mah'-o
  - iii. Greek: **κοιμάω**
  - iv. More Information:  
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2837/kjv/tr/0-1/>
  
- e. Elpis
  - i. Definition: expectation of good, hope
  - ii. Pronunciation: el-pece'
  - iii. Greek: **ἐλπίς**
  - iv. More  
Information: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1680/kjv/tr/0-1/>
  
- f. Pistis
  - i. Definition: conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the NT of a conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it
  - ii. Pronunciation: pis'-tis
  - iii. Greek: **πίστις**
  - iv. More  
Information: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4102/kjv/tr/0-1/>