

## **Funeral – 1 Thess 4:13-18 Mavis Cole**

Mavis went into hospital for some tests.  
She'd been having trouble digesting her food.  
They did some tests.  
She had a stage 4 stomach cancer and a week later she had died.  
Death could strike any one of us any time.  
Who knows,  
maybe I'll be next.

So I ask myself the question,  
“What hope do I hold onto in such a situation?”  
“How can those who loved Mavis avoid being overcome by grief?”  
Of course in such a situation  
we must experience deep and painful and long lasting grief.  
We weren't able to say proper goodbyes.  
There was no visiting in the hospital.  
But how can we avoid having our lives consumed by our grief?  
To be consumed by grief is despair.  
There's a difference between grief and despair.  
Grief is an expression of our love and care  
for the person we are missing.  
Despair is something very different to that.  
Despair is an expression of our hopelessness and frustration.

And I turned to words penned by the apostle Paul,  
writing to the church in Thessalonica about 2000 years ago.  
You might not have read these words before.  
You may not come to them with the conviction that they are God  
speaking directly to us,  
like I do.

If that's you,  
why don't you put that aside for a few minutes,  
and see if there is value in these words from the Bible.  
You are here now.  
Why not?

Paul says to them,  
“Brothers and sisters, we don’t want you to be ignorant about those who  
fall asleep,  
or to grieve like other people,  
who have no hope.”  
So Paul’s word to Christian folk,  
to followers of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
is not that he doesn’t want them to grieve  
the loss of their loved ones.  
Occasionally you hear this sort of twaddle –  
“There’s no reason to be sad –  
she’s gone to a better place.”  
No.  
There’s every reason to be sad.  
Relationships have been cut short.  
Perhaps there were opportunities for reconciliation in relationships  
that now can't take place.  
Future plans will need to be rewritten.  
Yes, there is every reason for sadness.  
But Paul says to Christian folk,  
there’s no need to be consumed by your sadness  
like other folk are.  
There is no reason for despair.  
Because you know  
what God is going to do at the end of the world.

So while there is very definitely painful loss in the present.

There is also the promise of God,  
that those who have died in Christ,  
will be raised to life on the last day,  
and will live forever with him.

Just as Jesus himself was raised to life,  
so too we will be raised.

And Mavis was someone who was in Christ.

She was a woman who had placed herself in Christ's loving care,  
from the time that any of us knew her,  
she had followed the Lord Jesus faithfully.

She entrusted herself to Christ's care  
through difficult life situations.

Her first bout of cancer was some 35 years ago.

But she did not waver in her faith in Christ.

What does it mean to die in Christ?

It means to die as a follower of Jesus Christ.

As someone who acknowledges Jesus as king of the universe.

As someone who comes before the Lord Jesus,  
and knows that only through him  
can I stand before God on that last day.

When Jesus died on the cross of Calvary,  
he did so as a substitute for me.

He took upon himself the penalty for my wrong decisions,  
the penalty for my bad attitudes.

And so I acknowledge him as my king.

If I want him to save me

from facing the consequences of my own wrong doing,

I must turn my life over to him.

I can't stand before God on the last day

because of my own goodness.  
My own goodness,  
what there is of it,  
is inadequate.  
I can only stand before God  
because of the goodness of Jesus Christ.  
He lived a perfect life.  
And his perfect life is counted for me.  
When I die,  
I will die in Christ.  
I will be like a little car in the Spirit of Tasmania.  
Completely safe from the raging of the storm,  
because I am caught up in one  
who is strong and powerful to take me with him.  
That was Mavis's faith.  
It sustained her all her days.

When we are confronted by unexpected death,  
it gives us good reason to consider our own fragile mortality.  
And in particular to ask ourselves the question,  
“Am I in Christ?”  
It’s very easy for the things that press in on us –  
the everyday things of life –  
to crowd out the important and eternal questions.  
In the ordinary run of events,  
we might never get around to asking the question,  
“Am I in Christ?”  
I hope that being here today  
will bring things into perspective for you.  
I hope it will cause you to take stock of your life,  
and assess where you stand before God.

Each of us here today  
will have an appointment to meet our maker,  
just as Mavis did.  
We don't know when it will be.  
It might be sooner.  
It might be later.  
Often thinking about the inevitability of death makes us afraid –  
so we push it to the back of our minds.  
But it needn't be like that.  
If we take the promise of God to heart,  
then we can face the future with confidence.  
In the letter that Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica,  
we have the promise of God.

“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.  
After that,  
we who are still alive and are left  
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.”  
Those are not the words of a man who feared death.  
They are the words of a man  
who faced the future with confidence.  
He could do that because his hope for the future  
was not based on wishful thinking,  
but on the promise of God.

Friends let us encourage each other with these words.  
Let us grieve without despair.  
Let us make sure we are in Christ,  
and then hold tightly to the promise of God.