

3rd Sunday in End Times - Saints Triumphant Sunday, Year B,
November 15, 2009
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
1Thessalonians 4:13-18
Pastor Paul Horn

Mythbusters – the Truth about the End

¹³ *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.* ¹⁴ *We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.* ¹⁵ *According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.* ¹⁶ *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.* ¹⁷ *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.* ¹⁸ *Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

Mythbusters is a popular TV show on the Discovery Channel. Hosts Adam Savage and Jamie Hyneman separate truth from urban legend with the aid of modern-day science. One of the myths that Adam and Jamie were asked to confirm or bust was this: there is a story of a soldier by the name of Gunnery Sergeant Carlos Norman Hathcock II. Hathcock was a United States Marine Corps sniper. It was legend that in Vietnam, Sergeant Hathcock shot at an enemy sniper and the bullet ripped through the scope of the enemy's rifle killing him. At first the hosts of the show busted this myth, saying it was impossible. Then a viewer wrote in and asked Adam and Jamie to use the proper weapon and rounds that were used by Hathcock in Vietnam. Only then was this myth confirmed as true.

Did you know that the Apostle Paul was one of the first mythbusters? On his second missionary journey he traveled to a city called Thessalonica, in eastern Greece. Paul had left the city hastily because of severe persecution. So he had to write the Christians there a letter to encourage them. In 3:10 he said, **“Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.”** Their instruction was not complete. There was confusion among the Christians in Thessalonica regarding death, the resurrection and Christ's return. Still today, people have a misunderstanding about these events. So Paul says, **Vs13 “We do Not want you to be ignorant...** especially about something as serious as death and Christ's final return to earth, **“We don't want you to be like**

the rest of men who grieve, who have no hope...”

The first myth that we want to explore this morning is this: Myth #1 – some religions believe and teach that Jesus did not die on the cross but simply became unconscious, he was buried, and when his disciples came to check on him on Sunday morning, the cool morning air roused him from his sleep and he stumbled out of the tomb. What if Jesus had not died? God demands that payment for sins must be made or... you could live a righteous life, with no sinning whatsoever. Then, if Christ had not died, we would always be wondering, “Have I done enough good?” We know that we have not done what God demands. We know that we are sinners. It is evidenced by our fear of death and the grave, evidenced by our fixation on earthly things, our possessions, money, homes, cars, all of our stuff, and not fixing our eyes on true treasure, heaven. The evidence that we are sinners is that we do not faithfully fix our eyes on the things that keep us pointed to heaven; the study of God’s Word and partaking of His Sacraments. We are sinners.

But Paul wants to debunk this myth that claims Jesus never died. He says in vs14, **“We believe that Jesus died.”** The apostle believes it because the eyewitnesses told him so! The eyewitnesses have told you so, through the Holy Scriptures. Jesus has died. It’s a fact. This myth is busted! In fact, the Bible tells us that we never have to wonder if we’ve done enough. Jesus did enough for us. Jesus died for us, in our place, for our benefit. Jesus’ death was enough to pay for all of my sins, and all of your sins, and not just ours, the sins of the whole world! Jesus’ death was enough to change your status from sinner to saint. Now, I’m sure you’ve heard that in order to be a saint, you had to have accomplished many great and wonderful Godly things during your life. By definition, a saint is someone who has been made holy. Jesus’ death was enough to make you a saint. On the cross he took your sins on himself. In exchange, he gave you his righteousness. That is how you now stand before God; holy, righteous, pure, without sin, because Jesus died for you!

This is an important truth to remember when we grieve the death of a loved one. As Paul says, **“I do not want you to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope.”** Your loved one who died in Christ breathed their last breath looking to their baptism, when Christ’s death became their death. They died looking at the body and blood of Christ that they took so many times on this earth, remembering Christ’s promise to them, “This body and blood is evidence that I died for your sins!” Dear friends, we have hope. Our loved ones who died in the Lord are saints triumphant: saints because Christ has made them holy by his death; triumphant because by his death, Christ won the victory over their sins.

We have hope because Christ died. Not only that, but Christ rose. Myth #2 – some religions teach and believe that Jesus did not bodily rise from dead. They claim he only rose in spirit, which means his body is still in the grave and his spirit lives in our hearts, which is supposed to make us feel warm and fuzzy inside. Sounds nice, right? But what if Christ has not been raised? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, **“If Christ had not been raised you are still in your sins, faith is futile, then those who are fallen asleep in Christ are lost.”** Then the dead are dead and that’s that. What hope do we have for our deceased loved ones?

The Chinese hold a traditional Qingming Festival, Grave Sweeping Day. It is the occasion for Chinese people to pay respect to past ancestors by cleaning their graves, presenting offerings of food to their dead ancestors, and burning joss paper (fake money). They burn sticks of incense and red candles ancestors. People actually bow down to the graves, offering blessings to the spirits of the dead. That’s pretty sad. These folks are celebrating the dead. They have no hope.

But we are not like that. We are not like those who grieve. We understand why humans die in the first place. We know that **“as in Adam, all die.”** (1Cor 15) Death comes to all because all have received in themselves the sinful nature from their parents, passed down from Adam and Eve. And so, from the oldest to the youngest among us here today, we all have sin that we carry in our bodies. This sin causes death. And whether we die young or old, we all deserve to die because we are sinful. But we are not like others who die. We have hope. vs14 **“We believe that Christ died for us and he rose again.”** We will die, but we will live for Christ lives! Jesus said, **“I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”** (John 11:25,26) We have hope because Christ rose again.

Paul continues... Vs14 – **“...and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”** We have hope because death is a sleep. Paul is not trying to cover it up the harsh reality of death. He is describing what death is really like for those who die with faith in Jesus. He or she sleeps and then will wake up to reality, the reality of life with Christ! Jesus himself called death a sleep. When he walked into the room where Jairus’ 12-year-old daughter lay dead, he said, “She is sleeping.” When he heard that his dear friend Lazarus had died, he said to his disciples, “Lazarus is sleeping. I must go wake him up. How comforting that is to us!

At death, we still grieve. We weep, as Jesus did at the tomb of his dear friend. But

we have hope, a sure and certain confidence. There is hope at a Christian funeral because our loved one fell asleep in Jesus, with faith in Christ, trusting in his promise of resurrection of the dead. They died knowing that they were falling asleep, trusting that Jesus would come and wake them again on the Last Day. We, too, will not be afraid to lay our heads on the pillow of death and fall asleep, or when we pray at night, “If I should die before I wake, I pray thee Lord my soul to take,” we mean it. We believe it. We wholeheartedly trust it. “If I die tonight, Lord Jesus, you will wake me up again.” We have hope because Christ died, Christ rose, and **Christ will come again.**

Myth #3 – some say that Christ is not coming, that this is all there is to life. You die and that’s it. That reminds me of a song that come out on the radio when I was 8-years-old by Van Halen. The lyrics say, *“You don’t have to die an’ go to heaven, Or hang around to be born again. Just tune in to what this place has got to offer, ‘Cause we may never be here again.”* That’s pretty bleak, isn’t it? There’s no hope in those words. Paul says, **Vs16 “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.”** This myth is busted! Did not the angels say to the disciples who were staring up into the clouds, “This same Jesus will return the same way you saw him go.” Physically, with their own eyes they will behold him. In fact all eyes will see it. All ears will hear it!

If you live on Fort Knox, no matter where you are, you will hear the bugle call in the morning waking you up. If you work on Fort Knox, no matter where you work, that bugle call tells you, “It’s time for lunch! Now it’s time to get back to work!” The trumpet call on the Last Day will be so shrill, so clear, that the dead will pay attention. There will be no pillow to bury your head under. No snooze button to hit. There will be no need to do so... because we look forward with great anticipation for that trumpet call, for Paul says, **Vs17 “We will meet with them (those who have died in Christ) in the clouds, and we will be with the Lord forever.”** Do not mourn too long for those who die with faith in Christ Jesus. On the Last Day, at the great resurrection of the dead, we will be with them and they with us, and we with our Lord in heaven forever. And I know that there are so many questions and myths about heaven. “Will we recognize each other? Will my dog or cat be there? What will the feast be like that Jesus will prepare for us? Will we really live in mansions? Will there be streets of gold and gates of pearl?” Some of those will have to answered by God himself when you get there. But what we do know, is that we will be with the Lord and with each other. We will be saints triumphant: saints, dressed in robes of white, covered with Christ’s righteousness; triumphant, for we will have won the final victory over death

through Jesus' resurrection.

I thank the Holy Spirit that he has preserved these sacred words to us for over 2,000 years. I thank the Holy Spirit that he moved Paul to write these words and be one of the original mythbusters, for informing the Christians in Thessalonica about these important matters. Finally, Paul tells us why we wrote to the Thessalonians, **vs18 “Encourage each other with these words.”** At a Christian funeral, do not say, “I’m sorry for your loss.” What are you sorry for? Instead, encourage the grieving with these words. “My dear friends, I sympathize with you as you grieve. But allow me to share these words with you. Your loved one died with faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Their sins are covered. And death is but a sleep! Jesus has promised it. He will come and wake them up again. He will come for your loved one and for you and me. And together, we will be with the Lord forever!” And so we say, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Amen!”