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Series: Life (and Death)

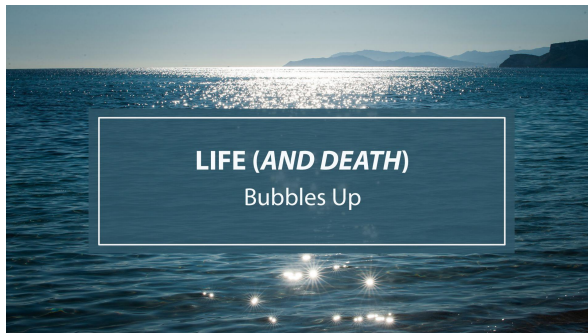
Title: Bubbles Up

Preaching: Danny Gulden, Lead Pastor, Promise Road Campus

Text: [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#)

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[Watch Service](#)



We are continuing a new four-week series today that I believe to be an important series. It's called *Life (and Death)*, and it is about the tension humanity holds between these two stations.

Death is something that we all will have to deal with at some point: a parent, a relative, a child, a close friend, ourselves. The Christian faith has a word about death—about life beyond death and about Life before death. So my prayer is that over the next four weeks, you will hear some good news, a word of hope about life eternal, a word of hope about life here and now.

Long before us, the Christians in Thessalonica had some concerns about death. Their concern was specific in nature. They wanted to know about those who died before Jesus came back.

One thing we need to know, something that helps us understand some parts of the New Testament, is that many of the earliest Christians thought Jesus was returning to be among them immediately. They weren't making long-term plans because they believed that Jesus' return was imminent.

They had this question, which we still have today: Why does death still have such a sting, if Christ has won the victory?

If you have lost a loved one you know that death stings, it hurts. You might be familiar with the five stages of grief that Elizabeth Kubler Ross published in 1969: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. You might have moved through and among these stages at some point in your life or perhaps you are navigating them as we speak.

I've stood before people at countless funerals and read the words from Romans that death has lost its sting. And I wonder each time, how many people who hear those words actually believe those words? We struggle with death. We struggle with grief. The Thessalonians are struggling with death.

At the core of the Christian faith is a word about death and a word about life eternal. It's not enough to say that we simply believe that there is something on the other side; rather the good news about eternal life not only shapes our approach to death but also our approach to life.

It's this idea that we are always in God's care:

Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about people who have died so that you won't mourn like others who don't have any hope. Since we believe that Jesus died and rose, so we also believe that God will bring with him those who have died in Jesus. What we are saying is a message from the Lord: We who are alive and still around at the Lord's coming definitely won't go ahead of those who have died. This is because the Lord himself will come down from heaven with the signal of a shout by the head angel and a blast on God's trumpet. First, those who are dead in Christ will rise. Then, we who are living and still around will be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet with the Lord in the air. That way we will always be with the Lord. So encourage each other with these words. (1 thessalonians 4:13-18)

We don't want you to mourn like others who don't have any hope. This is a pastoral word from Paul. It was a word to Christians long ago. It's a word to Christians today.

There is a paradox here, a tension that we hold. How do we embrace the fragile nature of human life, the reality of human loss balanced with the hope of eternal life? We don't know how to balance this. We don't know how to talk about it. It's why we bring casseroles to funerals or say things like, "They are in a better place" or "God must have needed another angel in heaven." Those things that aren't helpful, not because we aren't trying but because we don't know what it means to grieve in hope.

Jesus told his disciples about his resurrection, about life beyond what we just experienced here, and yet at his death on the cross, his disciples are nowhere to be found. They didn't know what to do with their grief. Even though they heard firsthand about resurrection, about eternal life, they were still grieved. The women who came to anoint Jesus' body for the burial on Easter morning came in grief.

How do we know that death does not have the final word?

I give thanks to God that my path in life crossed paths with Laura Laws. Laura was someone I met while keynoting and directing CYF Conference, the Disciples high school camp in Georgia. Everyone, teens and adults alike, loved Laura. At an age when teens tend to form cliques, Laura was truly a friend to all. She had an infectious smile and laugh and just radiated the love of God. Everyone loved Laura and Laura loved everyone.

She was also a very good soccer player who suffered a series of knee injuries. Painful knee injuries. She was prescribed painkillers to dull the pain from surgery. On Thanksgiving Day 2013, Laura's parents received a call that no parent ever wants to receive. Laura went to a party with friends the evening before, and at the age of 17, had died from a drug overdose. A life cut way way too short.

The next summer would have been her last summer at camp, her senior year, a big deal. Her absence would be felt and the adults responsible for leading the camp knew the grief would be heavy. Laura was so well-loved, admired, and now she was gone in a tragic way. For many of the students, outside of those who had lost a grandparent, it was their first brush with grief. It was the first time they had lost a peer, a friend.

The adults got together ahead of camp with several of the seniors to ask and wonder how we might honor Laura during the week and minister to the sense of loss and grief. Part of what we decided was to set up a table of remembrance for Laura with a candle lit each morning as a sign of Laura's presence with the group.



You may not be able to see the framed word in the background, but it says hope. Laura's middle name is hope. The students also made bracelets, created a hashtag and adopted a motto of sorts: LiveforLaws.

Live with a smile, live with the same spirit, live with a spirit of hope. In other words, the best way to grieve is to live. The best way to honor the memory of those we have lost is to live. We can mourn, yes, but we live because we have a hope like no other.

Musician Jimmy Buffett died in August, and his final album came out last week. One of the songs on the album is entitled "Bubbles Up." The song was inspired by a day Jimmy Buffett spent with the Navy Seals doing simulated training. He jumped from a helicopter with a pack on his back down into the ocean. Buffett was worried about being that far down in the water and becoming disoriented, not being able to find his way to the surface. The Navy admiral overseeing the exercise told Jimmy all he needed to do to find his way to the surface: "When you are down in the water and you don't know where to go, just follow the bubbles to the surface. That's how you know where to go. They will always lead you home."

Lyrics from Bubbles Up:

Bubbles Up
They will point you towards home
No matter how deep or how far you roam
They will show you the surface
The plot and the purpose
So, when the journey gets long
Just know that you are loved
There is light up above
And joy, there is always enough

That sounds like grieving with hope, knowing that we can always find our way home, knowing that with Jesus Christ, the dawn is always around the corner, we always find the stone rolled away.

We grieve. And we live because we are people of hope.

Let us pray.