

The ultimate goal of Satan. Sap the joy out of your life and make you a negative, angry and depressed person. What strategy is he using on you? Strategy number 1. You lost your spouse. Boy is it awful living alone. No one to talk to, share your life with, hug and hold. Plus, it seems there are no Christian guys or gals out there to date where worship and studying God's Word is important. Strategy Number 2. This is the one he uses on Me. "Mark, get ready for Socialism, which will mock religion, and where the government will control every aspect of your life. They will soon control the energy industry, health care, and small businesses will either disappear or be dependent on them for survival. That green new deal will ban fossil fuels that God put in the earth for you to use. Those who are the elite in government, who are involved in public education, high tech, and Hollywood, those will be the wealthy and powerful ones. Goodbye to your enjoyable days as a Pastor. BTW Doesn't the Bible say, its going to get rough before Judgment Day, so just deal with it.

Strategy Number 3. You are getting older. One health issue after another. Soon you will in a wheel chair or get dementia and end up in a nursing home. Your body aches, you sure can't do the things you used to be able to do. Dark clouds continue to surround you. Strategy number 4. You never were married. You are fat. You can't seem to make ends meet. Living paycheck to paycheck. Your grandkids are turning their back on Jesus and so are your kids.

The Devil knows the buttons to push on all of us. You may have money, technology, sports, music and entertainment - but if there is something that is slowly fading away from our American culture, it is HOPE.

First of all, what is hope? There are lots of ways to define it. Let's try this - "HOPE" is an acronym - "Hanging On with Patient Expectation." You're expecting something good to happen in the future. You're patiently waiting for something good. And maybe life is getting hard for you or bad things are happening to you, but you're hanging on. You're not giving up. You're patient. You're expecting something good. That's hope!

Do you have hope? The section of the Bible that we are going to look at this week gives you and me a great deal of hope. It starts out talking about one of the most hopeless situations in the world - when someone you love dies. And God here gives you hope. So Christian: Hang On With Patient Expectation.

Paul wrote about the death of a Christian loved one in a letter to Christians living in the Greek city of Thessalonica. Like the bride-to-be who is devastated that Grandma died just days before the wedding, the Thessalonian Christians were concerned that believers who had already died were going to miss out on the glories of Christ's triumphant return. Not so, explained Paul. "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" (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14).

There is a lot of ignorance out there when you attend the funeral of a friend. People will say things like, "when he died, he became an angel". "He is looking down on us now, telling us not to cry." "She was such a caring and unselfish woman, I am sure God took her to heaven, because of her loving spirit." "Well, he is finally at peace, no longer suffering. He had a good life." Then there is grieving going on at the death of a loved one. So many grieve with no real hope. This is it. We will never see this person

again. All we have to hold onto is the memories of the times we had together.

But the Christian Hangs on With Patient Expectation. This is not the end for their loved one. Just a new beginning. In fact, the loved one is going to be a part of the Fireworks in the sky that will take place soon on Judgment day.

Christians who have died are not going to miss out on Christ's triumphant return. On the contrary, they are going to have a front row seat for it. More than that. They are going to participate in the return for they will be at Jesus' side. It's no wonder Paul says that when a Christian dies we don't need to grieve like those who have no hope. We will see them again. Let's say Judgment day takes place right now. As we look up in the sky, I see the soul of my Mother, Gertrude Schulz, with Jesus as He descends from the clouds. My mom is not missing out on this day, even tho she died when I was 26. She is part of it.

In addition, on Judgment Day Jesus will raise her body from the dead. Further, Jesus will raise the bodies of all believers and unbelievers. The unbelievers will have a body that resembles a zombie body. That body will reunite with its soul in hell. However, back to my mom. On that day, her body will be raised. And in a blink of an eye it will be reunited with her soul up in the heavens. You might think of the change a caterpillar undergoes. It starts out looking like a fat hairy worm but then transforms into a beautiful butterfly. In the same way my mom will have her same body, but new and improved. No wrinkles, hair on her head, skin looking youthful, and her BMI will be right where it should be.

That's great for my mom, but what if I manage to be alive on Judgment day. What will happen to me? Listen again to Paul. "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" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). If you're familiar with Christianity, you've probably heard of the rapture. "Rapture" means to be suddenly taken up into the air. You might think of a mouse suddenly being seized in the talons of an owl and finds itself soaring over trees. Of course the rapture for believers will not be a scary experience like that, for Jesus himself will draw us to him as he descends on the clouds. It's important to note that the rapture will happen on Judgment Day not some time before as some believe. Not only will we float up to meet Jesus in the air and join the resurrected Christians, our bodies too will be changed so that we will be without sin, pain, or any disability. You might say, we get our bodies fixed up enroute to heaven.

How can we believe all this is true? That's simple, says Paul. We believe it because Jesus died and rose again. Faith in Jesus links us to these experiences. In that sense faith is like holding on to a rope tied to a speedboat. Wherever the speedboat goes, you'll go. If it zigs to the right, you'll eventually zig to the right. If the boat goes in a circle, you'll go in a circle. So just as Jesus died, we'll die someday but that won't be the end. We'll be brought back to life - just as Jesus came back to life. And just as Jesus received a glorified body that will not be subject to death anymore, we too will receive such a body.

Those who don't believe in Jesus as their savior from sin will find a much different experience on Judgment Day. Unbelievers will come back to life too but they will be brought back to life to answer for their rejection of Jesus as their savior. Therefore ignorance is NOT bliss when it comes to death. Rejecting Jesus is like pushing away the life preserver someone throws you when you're drowning. While God won't destroy

those who reject Jesus, he will punish them forever in the fires of hell. How can a God of love do something like that? Think of a mother's love for her baby. She loves her baby no matter how sticky and smelly he gets, and because she loves her baby she'll give him a bath! In the same way, if we are going to live with God forever, we need to be cleansed from our sins. God cleansed us from sin when he bathed us in the blood of his own son Jesus; that's how much he loves us. Everyone has been cleansed - even those who don't believe in Jesus. But those who don't care about this act of love or who don't believe it are like the teenager who keeps doing drugs even after Mom and Dad have paid for rehab. Finally, that teenager will have to face the consequences of rejecting his parents' love, and so will all those who reject the love and forgiveness given us by God in Jesus.

But you my friends, believe that Jesus died and rose again. You believe He is your Savior. You will rise from the dead. At the last trumpet you will say, "I think this is the same body I had when I lived on the earth, but it feels so much different, so much better." "That's right," one of the angels will say to you. "God has taken all the sin out of your body. You are now a glorified creature - now you are the human being that God intended you to be before the fall into sin." No wrinkles, no arthritis, no cancer, no artificial parts.

Here is a major reason to have hope. When you are mad at yourself, when you are disappointed in yourself, when you are frustrated with yourself, you can have hope. Someday Jesus will raise you from all this and change you into perfect. When you're not healthy or not smart or not coordinated, when nothing is going right for you and a lot of it is your own fault, you can have hope, because someday Jesus, who died on the cross for your sins and rose again, will someday raise you from all this mess and change you into perfect. So thumbs up, Christian. You have Jesus behind you, backing you, supporting you. Smile! Be upbeat. Don't let Satan, make you Mr. or Ms. Negative!

Jesus,. Keep our eyes on you and on your promises. Keep us always hopeful, even on those days when things aren't going our way. Amen.