FOOTHILLS
CHURCH

HOPE FOR THE WAITING

Brian Long // November 8, 2026
1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11 (NIV)
Big Idea: Christ's Return changes how we grieve, live, and prepare for tomorrow.

Special Foothills Membership Meeting: November 22, 12:30 (After the 11:00 service) You should have received an email with details about this meeting. If you have any questions please email, call, or stop Pastor Dillon.

Introduction:

I've shared with you earlier in this series, I love waiting. ;-) Reluctantly I have had to embrace the reality that waiting is part of life. We wait for important news, we wait for critical results, we wait for answers to difficult questions, for a loved one to recover, and sometimes for circumstances to change. Waiting is the worst when we have no clue as to how long it will last.

The Thessalonian Christians knew something about waiting. They had embraced the gospel, turned from idols to serve the living God, and placed their hope in Jesus. But they were facing pressure and persecution, and they had questions about the future. When is Jesus coming back to deliver us from all this struggle? Some believers had died, and their family and friends in the church were like, wait…what happens to them when Jesus returns.

Paul writes to encourage them. He doesn't give them a timetable. He gives them something better: a reason to hope, a reason to live faithfully, and a reason to encourage one another. That's the heart of our passage today. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

[**Transition**] - Let's look at four truths Paul gives us about living while we wait for Christ's return. Look at 1 Thess. 4:13-14.

"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For 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. Believers can grieve with hope

Paul begins by addressing their concern over the death of believers. He doesn't want them to be stressing about those who have died. Because for believers death is totally different. Believers don't have to grieve "as others do who have no hope." Notice what Paul doesn't say. He doesn't tell Christians not to grieve. He reminds them they can grieve differently than the world.

I share this truth a memorials regularly. Christianity doesn't require us to pretend that death doesn't hurt. When someone we love dies, we totally feel it! Our hearts break. We miss their voice, their presence, their laughter, and the ordinary moments we probably took for granted when they were alive.

[**Illustration**] - I mean, think about it…even Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus…and he knew he was about to raise him from the dead. That says a ton.

What's also important to remember is Jesus wasn't indifferent to the sorrow of those around Him. He didn't put them down for their tears. He didn't judge them for having weak faith.

The difference is not that Christians never grieve. The difference is that Christians don't grieve without hope. For Christians, the promise of

resurrection does not erase the pain of saying goodbye. It changes what that goodbye means.

In verse 14, Paul grounds this hope we believers have in the resurrection of Jesus: "*For 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.*"

Our hope isn't simply that life continues somehow after death. It's not wishful thinking or some vague belief that everything will work out. Our hope rests on a historical reality: Jesus died and rose again. Because Jesus conquered death, death will not have the final word over those who belong to Him.

We still grieve. We still feel the ache of separation. But we grieve knowing that those who die in Christ are not lost forever. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees that death is not the end of the story.

[**Application**] – You might be in a season of grieving today. Maybe your loss is recent, or perhaps years have passed and you still feel it. You do not have to hide your sorrow or apologize for your tears. Bring your grief to the Lord, lean on his people, and hold tightly to the promise of the resurrection.

And let share this…if someone around you is grieving, don't rush to fix their pain with easy answers. Resist the temptation to try and talk them out of their pain. Sometimes the most Christlike thing we can do is sit with them, listen, be quiet with them, weep with them, and remind them through your non-demanding presence that because Jesus lives, and there is hope beyond the grave.

[**Transition**] - Because of Jesus, we believers can grieve honestly. But not only that…we can grieve hopefully. This is because we can live with confidence in Christ's return. Look at verses 15-18. "*According to the*

Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

2. Believers can live with confidence in Christ's return

When we talk about Jesus' return…most want to talk timetable. But Paul's central point here is not to satisfy every question we might have about the details and about timing. His central point is the promise found in verse 17: "And so we will always be with the Lord."

That is the heart of Christian hope. Our ultimate hope is not simply that we will escape difficult circumstances. It is not merely that we will see loved ones again, amazing as that will be. Our greatest hope is that we will be with Jesus forever.

[**Illustration**] - Think about the difference between receiving a text message from someone you love compared to actually being reunited with that person. A message can reassure you that the relationship is solid. But the deepest longing is fulfilled when you are finally together. It's rare, but when Cindy and I travel separately. We're staying in good contact texting, sometimes calling. But when we meet at the airport or at the front door…it's a whole other level.

Paul wants the Thessalonians to know that the future of every believer is eternal life in the very presence of Jesus. It's hard to imagine!

Over the centuries, Christians have understood the details of Christ's return and end-time events differently. We must study those questions

seriously, and handle Scripture carefully. But we must not allow debates about the details to overshadow the clear promise Paul emphasizes: Jesus will return, the dead in Christ will be raised, and his people will be with him forever.

That is why Paul concludes this section in verse 18 by saying, "Therefore encourage one another with these words."

Notice what this end-times teaching is meant to produce. Not fear. Not endless speculation. Not arguments that divide us. It's meant to encourage us.

When life feels wobbly, we can remember that history is not drifting toward an unknown destination. Despite appearances, God is in control. And Christ is coming, and he will bring his people into his presence.

[**Application**] - When you feel discouraged by what is happening in the world, or what's happening in our nation, or the outcome of the election…remember today's headlines don't determine the final chapter of history. When you face uncertainty about your own future, remember that your ultimate future is secure in Christ. We do not know everything about what lies ahead. But we know the One who holds all those details in his capable hands.

Believers can live with confidence in Christ's return. So, let's agree together to seek to focus on his promise: We will be together with the Lord.

[**Transition**] – Having coached them to keep the main thing, the main thing, Paul now shifts from the question of what happens to believers who have died to how Jesus' certain return in the future is to impact our lives today. Look Chapter 5: 1-5

5 "Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

4 But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness."

3. Believers can stay ready without knowing the timing

He tells the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord will come "like a thief in the night." The point is its timing will be unexpected. People who assume they have everything figured out may be caught unprepared. Paul is not encouraging Christians to become experts at predicting dates. He is teaching them to live ready.

There is an important difference between trying to predict when something will happen and being prepared whenever it happens.

[**Transition**] – Think about those who live in our area where wildfires are more of a risk. They can't predict the exact day a fire might threaten their property. But they can prepare. They can keep important documents accessible, have a family communication plan, and know their evacuation routes. Their preparation does not depend on knowing the precise timing of a crisis. It depends on recognizing the reality of the danger and being ready to respond.

In a much greater way, Christians are called to live in readiness for the return of Christ. Paul says that believers are not to live in darkness but are children of light and children of the day. That means we are not to be spiritually asleep, living as though this world is all that matters.

We don't need to know the date of Christ's return to know how to live today. We know we're called to love God and our neighbors. We're called to pursue holiness. We're called to share the gospel, serve faithfully, forgive those who have wronged us, and invest our resources and our lives in what matters eternally. Time, talent, treasure…all for Jesus.

Readiness is not about figuring out the calendar. It is about being faithful in the present. Sometimes Christians become so interested in identifying signs and constructing timelines that they neglect the everyday obedience Jesus has already made clear.

So, the most important question is not, "Can I figure out when Jesus will return?" It's, "Am I living faithfully while I wait?"

[**Application**] – Let me ask you a question: If Jesus returned today, is there anything in your life you might wish you had done differently? Is there a relationship you need to repair? A sin you need to deal with? Someone who needs to hear about the hope you have in Christ? A responsibility you have been postponing?

Those questions are not meant to cause guilt or panic. They are invitations to live with an eternal perspective.

[**Transition**] – Now I want you to notice, Paul concludes this section by describing what a ready life looks like. Look at verses 6-9

6 "So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

4. Believers are to live alert, be grounded and encouraging.

First, he calls believers to stay spiritually alert and self-controlled. In other words, don't drift through life as though the things of God don't matter. Pay attention to what is shaping your heart, your choices, and your priorities.

Second, Paul describes the armor of faith, love, and hope. These are not merely ideas to admire. They are truths to live by.

1. Faith reminds us to trust God's promises when circumstances are confusing.
2. Love reminds us that our lives are meant to serve God and others, not simply ourselves.
3. Hope reminds us that our future rests in God's saving work, not in our ability to control what happens.

Paul then gives us one of the great assurances of this entire passage in verse 9: "*For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Our confidence is not that we will perform well enough to earn God's favor. Our confidence is in Jesus, who died for us so that whether we are dead or alive when he comes, we will live with him.

The Christian life is not sustained by our ability to live every day perfectly. It's sustained by the grace of the one who has saved us and promised to bring us home.

Notice how Paul wraps up this section. Verse 11 says, "*Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*" This is where the passage becomes especially personal.

Our hope in Christ is not meant to be carried alone. God has placed us in a community of believers who can strengthen us when we are

discouraged, remind us of the truth when we are confused, and help us remain faithful when we're getting wobbly.

[**Transition**] - Think about a long-distance runner in the final stretch of a race. The runner is tired. Every step takes effort. But along the course, people are calling out encouragement: "Keep going! You got this! You're almost there!" Their words don't run the race for the athlete. But they strengthen the runner so he or she can find the strength to keep moving.

In the Christian life, we need people who remind us of what is true when we are tired, people who help us keep going when we are discouraged, and people who point us back to Jesus when our attention has wandered.

And we are called to be those people for others.

- Sometimes encouragement means reminding someone of God's promises.
- Sometimes it means praying with a person who is afraid.
- Sometimes it means helping someone bear a burden they cannot carry alone, simply by listening.
- And sometimes it simply means telling another believer, "Don't give up. Keep trusting Jesus. He has not abandoned you."

[**Application**] - Who in your world needs your encouragement this week? Who is struggling, grieving, discouraged, or spiritually weary? Don't assume someone else will reach out. Take the initiative. Make the call. Send the text. Offer to pray. Remind that person that Christ is faithful.

[**Transition**] - The truth is, the return of Jesus is not simply a doctrine to believe. It's a hope that is to shape how we treat one another today. So, as we wrap this up, let me bring these four truths of this text together.

Conclusion: Hope for Today Because of Tomorrow

Because Jesus is coming:

- We can **grieve** with hope because death does not have the final word.
- We can **live** with confidence because Jesus will return and we will be with Him forever.
- We can **stay ready** without knowing the timing because faithfulness honors God and is a demonstration of our gratitude for all he's done.
- We can **encourage** one another because we share a future secured by Christ.

So, now let's go back to the question I raised a moment ago. How would your priorities change if you lived with greater expectation of Christ's return?

- Would you spend your time differently?
- Would you take a step toward reconciliation?
- Would you be more intentional about talking about your faith?
- Would you worry less about things that will not last and invest more deeply in the things that will?

Paul does not give us this passage to help us escape the responsibilities of life. He gives it to help us live into those responsibilities with hope.

- We still work.
- We still serve.
- We still love our families, care for our neighbors, and meet the challenges of each day.

- We still experience sorrow, disappointment, and uncertainty.

But we do not face any of those things as people ***without hope***.

Guys…here's the reality: Our future is secured by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- So, when you attend a memorial or walk through death of a loved one, remember: Jesus is risen.
- When tomorrow feels uncertain, remember: Jesus will return.
- When you are tempted to drift spiritually, remember to live as a child of the light. Stay ready, alert, sober.
- And when someone around you is weary, remember, you can help them keep going.

Let's pray.