

Week 17 | “The Christian’s Hope In Death”

I. INTRODUCTION (1ST THESSALONIANS 4:13-18)

- A. From **1st Thessalonians 2:1-3:13** (33 verses) Paul has made a stout defense of his time, integrity, and humility in Thessalonica among emerging accusation against him. But from **1st Thessalonians 4:1-5:28** (46 verses) Paul shifts gears and gives pastoral advice for *sexual purity, loving one another, living Godly among non-believers, the resurrection of the dead, the timing of Christ’s return* and *how God’s family should conduct themselves in Christian community*.
- B. Last week Pastor Caleb did a fantastic job exhorting us to mind our own business (in the grace of God), stay busy with the task at hand, and to make sure love is operating in our lives through the Holy Spirit.
- C. In the verses that we are looking at tonight, Paul is moving from admonishing the idle, to encouraging the faint hearted. Paul had previously given them great theological teaching on the resurrection of the dead, but now, he’s taking that theology, and applying it to the daily life of Christ followers.
- D. Tonight, Paul is going to answer the questions that the Thessalonians are asking regarding the death of their loved ones, what will the resurrection of the dead look like, and who will rise first? Again, Paul’s taking theology, and using it to speak to real life issues.

II. CHRISTIAN HOPE (1ST THESSALONIANS S 4:13)

- 1. **1st Thessalonians 4:13** “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.”
- B. Through these verses we get greater insight into Paul’s pastoral heart, as well as the questions these new followers of Jesus are wrestling with. It seems clear that these new believers hadn’t given much thought to what would happen to their loved dying before Christ’s return.
- C. Paul’s two-fold concern for these Christians is that *they wouldn’t be ignorant about those who have fallen asleep, and they wouldn’t lose hope, or be sorrowful without hope*;
- D. Be Ignorant, Brethren Concerning Those Who Have Fallen Asleep—Paul’s using strong words not as a rebuke, but as a loving father to help put their fears at ease, as he calls them to remain steady in trouble. Paul’s not speaking to these folks as subjects in his apostolic kingdom, but as brothers and sisters in the faith, in his family, having the same Father.
 - 1. Death in many cultures was used a metaphor for being asleep. This is seen in the fact that dead person lays still, silent and without movement. In the Old Testament it was common for kings to be laid to sleep with their fathers (**1st Kings 2:10; 11:43; 14:20, 31**).
 - 2. Death in the Christian thought is that it’s only temporary. Just as sleep is followed by an awakening, so also is death for the Christian followed by the resurrection;
 - a. **Daniel 12:2** “And many of those how sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.”
 - b. **John 11:11** “...He said to them, Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.”

3. Christian's don't believe in something called "soul sleep" which assumes that while the body has ceased, so also has the soul until the final resurrection (*Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists*). In this state, the soul is neither aware of conscious.
 4. The Bible teaches that upon death, the righteous soul is present with the Lord (**2nd Cor. 5:8**) while the unrighteous soul goes to sheol, the grave, or hell. The righteous soul is awaiting the resurrection of the righteous, while the unrighteous soul awaits the second death (**Rev. 2:11; 20:6**).
 5. Upon death the righteous soul is aware that they are with Christ eternally in bliss, while the unrighteous soul is aware of their separation/pain eternally apart from Christ.
- E. Lest You Sorrow As Others Who Have No Hope—Paul's not discouraging them from mourning over the righteous dead in their lives, he's exhorting them not to mourn like people who have no hope.
1. Paul's not rebuking grief, he's exhorting against *hopeless grief*. It's okay to cry at someone's passing, but it's not okay to continue crying forever. Paul's assuming Christians should have sorrow in death and suffering, he's just saying that it's a different kind of sorrow because in Christ it's not hopeless sorrow, or hopeless grief.
 2. The Greek word for hope here is the word, "elips" which speaks of a joyful, confident expectation of eternal life through Christ. This type of hope transcends whatever might come our way in life.

III. THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD (1ST THESSALONIANS 4:14-17)

1. **1st Thessalonians 4:14-17** *"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means proceed those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with Him in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."*
- B. Paul is now speaking to them by way of a creed, a statement about Christian belief. He's saying that when we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then the like is also true, not only that He died and rose again, but that He will bring with Him all who have fallen asleep in Christ.
- C. God Will Bring With Him Those Who Sleep In Jesus—According to Paul, and Jesus Himself, when Christ returns, He's not coming alone, but with all His saints throughout world history that have loved Him and loved His appearing. Christian hope is centered not only in the hope that He is coming, but that when He comes, He's bringing with Him all those who are asleep.
1. **Revelation 19:7-9,11-14** *"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the Saints. Then he said to me, right blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the lamb! And he said to me these are the true sayings of God...Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a White Horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. he was clothed with a robe dipped in blood and His name is called The Word of God. and the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses."*

- D. We Who Are Alive And Remain Until The Coming Of The Lord Will By No Means Proceed Those Who Are Asleep—It's clear through this passage that Paul thought that Christ could/might return during his lifetime. And though it didn't happen, this type of thinking gives us a precedent for how we ought to live.
1. Although many things need to happen prior to Christ's return, the final season of human history is a short 7 years, which could happen suddenly, or within a lifetime (**Luke 21:34-36**).
 2. The word used here for COMING in the Greek is the word, "Parousia" and it means, *the coming of a high ranking official, like a king or a hidden divinity making himself known through a revelation of his power*.
- E. Paul continues to lay out 4 primary, and very powerful eschatological events through within these 4 verses;
1. The Return (4:16a)—It's the Lord Himself who shall descend, not one of His workers, but He Himself. The return, the Parousia will be a personal coming and appearing of the Christ, a visit in person by the Lord. There is no such thing a secret coming of Christ.
 - a. Jesus' return will be something that darkens the sun, the moon, the stars and is long enough that people will have an emotional reaction to it (**Matthew 24:29-30; Revelation 1:7-8**).
 2. The Resurrection (4:16b)—In verse 14 Paul tells us that this will happen, but he doesn't tell us how, or what we will be like, although speaking of Christ we get the idea that we will be like Him. But here Paul fills in the blanks. The dead in Christ will rise first, not to be preceded by those who are alive. This is done in perfect order, as Christ who comes, is the Christ who died and rose again.
 - a. The simple truth is that nobody who has died in Christ will ever be separated from Him. They died through Him (14), they will sleep in Him (16), they will rise with Him as they will come with Him too (14). Christ and His people belong together inseparably and indissolubly.
 - b. Christ's coming and the resurrection of the dead are one in the same. It's two-sides to one coin.
 3. The Rapture (4:17a)—This word rapture is taking from the Latin word rapere, meaning to seize. It corresponds to the Greek verb (Harpazo) which Paul uses here, and which expresses suddenness and violence, as when the centurion ordered his troops to take Paul by force in order to rescue him from a possible beating/death.
 - a. This violent seizing will be not only to unite the dead and the living, but to unite all with Christ. Paul's concern in sharing here is to give assurance that the dead and living will be reunited together with the Lord.
 4. Reunion (4:17b)—This momentary encounter in the clouds is leading us into everlasting fellowship. The descending Lord and the ascending saints will be the start of God joining together both heaven and earth, as He has always intended. The primary concern that Paul is addressing is that the Thessalonians will never be separated either from Christ nor from each other and then we shall always be with the Lord, eternally.
- F. Thus We Shall Always Be With The Lord—Again, with great pastoral concern and care, Paul makes clear that neither death nor resurrection separates us from Christ, or from one another.

IV. A PRACTICAL CONCLUSION (1ST THESSALONIANS 4:18)

1. **1st Thessalonians 4:18** *“Therefore, comfort one another with these words.”*

- B. Something that we have to remember here is that Paul is wanting to comfort and build up a people who are in bereavement and not answer academic questions about eschatology. It’s okay to use these in an academic way, but the general nature of Paul’s instruction is based on the context of a people struggling with the death of their beloved brothers and sisters and the unknown elements of the judgment seat of Christ.

- C. The comfort that Paul is working to bring these people is based in “THESE WORDS” which are words of eschatology, or the eternal future of the beloved, the last things of God. These are the words that Paul considered necessary for those in a tough spot.

- D. We often fail to realize that the message of the last things is the most hopeful message that you can give to others. The Doctrine of return, resurrection, rapture and reunion is the most hopeful message.

- E. Just as joy shared is joy intensified, so also is suffering shared, is suffering diminished. The Church throughout every generation is called to mourn with those that mourn and rejoice with those that rejoice (**Rom. 12:15**). Paul’s previous words don’t eliminate the suffering of others and alleviate the loss; it does put it in a larger perspective and context.

- F. Often times suffering causes us to only see our world, and what’s in front of us, but the prophetic nature of God’s heart always calls us to more than our own life and causes us to look at the big picture. He doesn’t drive us from loss and mourning, but rather comforts us in the midst of it. The loss remains, but it’s temporary, not eternal.

- G. The Word of God gives hope. The Gospel gives Christian hope. The momentary loss for Christians through death is seen in the context of a future eternal reunion. The loss is still a reality, but it’s a momentary reality.