



LESSON SIX: 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

OASIS Bible Study - October 20-21, 2026

HIT RECORD!!

Last week, we talked about three ways that growing faith becomes visible. In chapter 4, Paul gave some very clear instructions for practical Christian living.

He encouraged the believers to continue growing in three areas:

- Sexual holiness
- Growing love
- Responsible living

Obviously, the return of Christ had been on Paul's mind throughout this letter.

Remember, he has ended every chapter with some kind of reference to the return of Jesus Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul teaches believers what it looks like to live in light of that reality.

To live with courage, to walk in holiness, to remain faithful in the face of persecution, to continue growing in faith, hope, and love until Jesus returns

Remember, one of the major themes of this whole letter is...

Live faithfully today because Jesus could be coming tomorrow.

Now, at the end of chapter 4, Paul addresses a question that seemed to trouble the believers in Thessalonica.

THE QUESTION PAUL ADDRESSES:

**What happens to Christians who _____ (die) before Jesus
_____ (returns)?**

That's where we're going today.

The theological term for this is ESCHATOLOGY.

**ESCHATOLOGY – the part of theology that studies the “_____.”
(last things)**

Comes from the Greek word “ESCHATOS,” which means “last” or “final.”

- *The return of Christ*
- *What happens after we die*
- *The resurrection of the dead*
- *The final judgment*
- *Heaven and Hell*

Remember what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 3.

1 Thessalonians 3:10

Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill the gaps in your faith.

This seems like one of those areas where Paul wanted to “fill in the gaps” in their faith.

Before we dive into the text...

When someone you love dies, what are some common things people say to try to bring comfort? Which statements are genuinely helpful, and which ones can feel empty?

There are times when people mean well, but what they say can feel hurtful.

- *Remember, all things work together for good!*
- *At least they lived a long life.*
- *Everything happens for a reason.*
- *They wouldn't want you to be sad.*

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul doesn't pull out empty, cliché statements to try to make believers feel better. Instead, he offers them truth.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¹³ And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.

¹⁵ We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. ¹⁷ Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ So encourage each other with these words.

Notice in verse 13, Paul says, “We want you to know.” Other translations say, “We don’t want you to be uninformed.”

Apparently, some of the believers weren’t sure what was going to happen to their friends and loved ones who died before Jesus returned.

Remember, Paul planted the church in Thessalonica and then had to leave quickly. It’s entirely possible that some believers had died since he left.

And when you read Paul’s letters, it seems like he believed Jesus would return during his lifetime.

Look again at verse 17...

¹⁷ Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth...

1 Corinthians 15:51

But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed!

I think Paul believed that Jesus would return during his lifetime. And these young believers in Thessalonica didn't seem to doubt the return of Christ, but they were wondering, *"What happens to our friends and family who have already died? Are they at a disadvantage? Are they going to miss out when Jesus comes back?"*

And here's what Paul says first...

1. Christians grieve – but not without _____ (hope).

1 Thessalonians 4:13

...we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died, so you will not grieve like people who have no hope

Let's remember, when we read about the start of the church in Acts 17...

*Some of the Jews who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with **many God-fearing Greek men** and quite a few prominent women.*

So many of these were Gentiles who had been raised in Greek culture.

In Greek thinking, there was no hope of an afterlife. Most people thought that when a person died, their soul went to Hades – *the realm of the dead*. They did not think of it as a place of torment and punishment, as Jesus used it (Luke 16).

Hades was the realm of the dead, the place everyone went when they died.

And there they would exist as a weak "shadow" or "shade" in a dismal Hades. It was a diminished, gloomy state – and nothing to be excited about. As NT Wright puts it,

death in their minds was a “one-way street” because there was no hope of a bodily resurrection.

So, speaking to believers, Paul says, *“You should not grieve that way for other believers, because that won’t be our reality.”*

Now, an important distinction here. Paul doesn’t say it’s wrong to grieve.

Did Jesus grieve?

John 11:35 – Jesus wept

Acts 8:2 – when Stephen was martyred for his faith, “Godly men mourned deeply for him.”

I’ve always loved these words in Psalm 34.

Psalm 34:17-18

The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

Grief doesn’t drive God away. He is close to us!

So grief isn’t wrong, but Paul says it’s wrong for believers to grieve without hope.

Because hopeless grief says, *“This is the end. I will never see this person again that I love.”*

Christian grief says... *"This hurts, and I miss them so much. But because of Jesus, I will see them again."*

Christian grief says, "I'll see you later."

For Christians, death does not have the final word.

Remember what Jesus said to Martha at Lazarus' tomb?

John 11:25-26

²⁵ Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. ²⁶ Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die."

How are we to understand these words in verse 26, since everyone dies?

This is talking about spiritual death, not physical death.

That's why we don't grieve like people who have no hope – because we believe in a better life to come.

Now, in verse 13, Paul talks about "believers who have died." However, there are other translations that say, "believers who have fallen asleep," or "those who sleep in death."

That has led some people to buy into the false thinking of what is called "SOUL SLEEP."

SOUL SLEEP - the idea that when a person dies, their soul "sleeps" in the grave in some kind of suspended state until the Second Coming of Christ.

Think of it as a spiritual unconsciousness – that when you die, you just take a long nap in the dirt until Jesus comes back.

People who believe this base it on this passage – *1 Thessalonians 4:13*.

But why do I call this “false thinking”?

WHY SOUL SLEEP IS NOT BIBLICAL

1. Falling asleep - a common euphemism for _____ (death).

When the Apostle Paul talked about “*falling asleep*” in this context, he was simply using a euphemism for death.

Think of all the different terms we use when someone dies. We say they “passed away” or “went home”. They “crossed over” or “were laid to rest.”

That’s what Paul was doing when he used the term “falling asleep”.

2. What Jesus said to the thief on the _____ (cross) (Luke 23).

Remember what Jesus said to the thief on the cross in Luke 23. When the thief said, “*Remember me when you come into your Kingdom,*” Jesus said to him, “*I assure you, today, you will be with me in paradise.*”

Jesus did NOT say, “*Today you will be asleep in the grave, but don’t worry, I’ll come back for you someday.*”

3. Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 5:8.

2 Corinthians 5:8

Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.

Think about when you go to sleep at night. Most of us fully expect to wake up in the morning. We set alarms. We put our clothes out. We have appointments on our calendars.

That is Paul's picture. Death is real, and it's painful. BUT IT'S NOT PERMANENT. When we die, we can fully expect to awaken to Jesus, and one day, a bodily resurrection.

Does that mean that believers go to Heaven when they die?

So Paul never tells believers not to grieve, but he does instruct us on HOW we should grieve. It's okay to be sad when believers die, but we should not grieve as those who have no hope.

Christian hope is not a _____ (denial) of grief; it is confidence that grief is not the end of the story.

And where does that confidence come from?

1 Thessalonians 4:14

For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.

2. Our hope rests on Jesus' _____ (resurrection).

Notice that Paul is not speaking from a place of speculation or wishful thinking. That's what the Greek philosophers did.

Paul is speaking directly from experience. Not his own experience, but the experience of Jesus Christ.

He said, *"For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again..."*

So whatever Paul talks about in the future is based on what Jesus has already done in the past.

What evidence do we have of the physical, historical resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Eye-witness testimony

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

³ I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. ⁵ He was seen by Peter^[c] and then by the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers^[d] at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him.

Verse 6 almost sounds like an invitation to investigate!

The empty tomb – this message was preached all around Jerusalem that Jesus had risen from the dead. The Jews and the Romans could have easily debunked this by producing Jesus' dead body, but they didn't. Because they couldn't.

Acts 2:32

God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this.

Changed lives – James (Mark 3:21, "He's out of his mind.")

James 1:1 - This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The disciples – hiding out in fear after the crucifixion, boldly preaching the Gospel after the resurrection

The martyrdom of the Apostles – suffering death because of one's faith or testimony. 11/12 apostles were martyred for their belief in Jesus as Lord.

Our hope is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:17-22

¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. ¹⁸ In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! ¹⁹ And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

²⁰ But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

²¹ So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. ²² Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.

Why can we be certain that we will be raised to life? Because Jesus was raised to life!

3. No believer will _____ (miss) Christ's return.

1 Thessalonians 4:15

¹⁵ We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died.

The believers in Thessalonica were worried that believers who died before Christ returned might miss out.

Paul wanted to remove that fear completely.

They aren't going to be late to the party. They aren't going to miss out or be forgotten.

In fact, what does Paul say?

They will rise first!

Those who have died in Christ are not at a _____ (disadvantage).

Now, when it comes to the end times, there is a lot of debate about how things will happen and when. That's not the purpose of Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians.

Paul's primary goal isn't to give believers a chart, but to give believers _____ (comfort).

4. Jesus himself will come for His _____ (people).

1 Thessalonians 4:16

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves.

In other words, Jesus isn't going to farm this job out to his angels. He's going to come personally.

And how will He come? Paul gives some specific details. (UNDERLINE THESE)

- A commanding shout
- The voice of the archangel
- The trumpet call of God

In the Roman world, this is what happened when the king or a governor would visit your city. It would be announced with trumpets. There would be a herald who would announce the coming of the King.

The return of Jesus means the _____ (King) is coming, and it will be impossible to miss!

And when Jesus returns, those who are in the grave will rise first.

First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves.

Their bodies will be raised from the ground. They will not just be revived; they will be transformed and glorified. They will be reunited with their souls so that the WHOLE person will be fit to live with Jesus forever.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44

⁴² It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. ⁴³ Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. ⁴⁴ They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.

**5. We will be _____ (together) and with Jesus
_____ (forever).**

1 Thessalonians 4:17

¹⁷ Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.

And this gets to the heart of the Thessalonians' question. They were concerned their loved ones were going to miss out when Jesus returned.

But Paul says, "They're going to be raised first, but we're all going to be together, and we will be with Jesus forever."

Think REUNION!

How many of you have loved ones who are in heaven that you're looking forward to seeing? Who?

Death does not permanently _____ (separate) God's people.

Think about it!

- *No more separation.*
- *No more funerals.*
- *No more fear of death.*
- *No more sin.*
- *No more suffering.*
- *No more goodbyes.*
- *Forever with Jesus.*

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

Friends, there are a lot of great things about Heaven,

The center of Christian hope, and the greatest joy of Heaven is that we will be with _____ (Jesus) forever!

1 Thessalonians 4:18

¹⁸ So encourage each other with these words.

Notice that Paul doesn't say, "Argue with one another about these words."

These words were meant to encourage the believers in Thessalonica to persevere and remain faithful.

Bringing It Together

1. Death is painful, and believers are allowed to grieve. But we must learn to grieve with hope.
2. Jesus died and rose again, so death will not have the final word.
3. Believers who have died will not miss Christ's return.
4. Jesus Himself will return in power and glory.
5. The dead in Christ will rise first.
6. Living believers and resurrected believers will be gathered together.
7. We will be with the Lord forever.
8. These truths are meant to encourage us.

Take a moment to reflect: How does the promise of Christ's return and the resurrection of believers speak into fear, grief, or uncertainty you are carrying right now?
