



Hope, Until He Comes

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia
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[Video¹] The beauty and the joy of that wedding video are a picture of another wedding day to come. The New Testament refers the church as the bride of Christ and Jesus as the bridegroom.² The book of Revelation gives a preview of the wedding of Christ and His church. The day Jesus returns, an angel of the Lord will shout for all the earth to hear, “Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready ... Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” (Revelation 19:7-9, NIV). If you are a Christian, you are invited! And it will be the most glorious day of your life. And the promise of that day, the day we see Jesus, is the reason we have hope.

We say it all the time. “I hope so” or “I hope things work out.” We hope the problem goes away. We hope tomorrow is a better day. But that’s just wishful thinking. Hope is more than that. Hope is more than optimism, fate, or good luck. True hope, biblical hope, is based on the promises of God. And if God promised, it’s guaranteed.

The hymn we often sing asks the question all humanity is asking, “What is our hope in life and death?”³ The resounding answer? “Christ alone! Christ alone!” *We believe our hope in life and death is Christ alone! That means hope is trusting that He will help us in this life and trusting that He will get us to the next life.* So, no matter what comes our way, we trust Him, and “rejoice in hope” (Romans 12:12, ESV).

Paul was the first to introduce Christianity in Europe. He spent three weeks in Thessalonica explaining that Jesus is the Messiah, and that the resurrection proved that Jesus is the Son of God. Many believed it, but the religious leaders opposed Paul and threatened his life, so he had to flee the city. In the weeks ahead, Paul worried about these young, new believers. Were they safe? Did the Gospel take root? So he wrote a letter, expressing his love for them and “exhorting and encouraging and imploring” them to “walk in a manner worthy of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:12, NAS).

In his letter, Paul urged them, and he urges us, to prepare for the wedding day, for the day when we see Jesus. He talked about return of Christ and the rapture of the saints. He talked about “the day of the Lord” and “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul ended his letter with a series of phrases that teach us how to live until He comes.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything carefully and hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He will bring it to pass” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24).

This passage urges us to prepare for “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,” for the day when we see Jesus. *So, until He comes, be today the person you want to be the day you see Jesus.*

UNTIL HE COMES

And what kind of person is that? One of Paul's favorite phrases was "walk in a manner worthy."⁴ Worthy of what? Worthy of Jesus. Walk in a manner worthy of His sacrifice, worthy of His blood, and worthy of His cross. Walk in a manner worthy of His love, His mercy, and His grace.

So how do we walk in a manner worthy? In his rapid-fire conclusion in his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul gave six ways to "walk in a manner worthy," teaching us how to live until Christ comes.

Until He comes, "rejoice always" (1 Thessalonians 5:16, NAS). Always? Yes, always. ***Until He comes, realize not every episode of life will be filled with happiness, but no episode of life can take away your ultimate joy.*** Joy is not superficial happiness, that's here today and gone tomorrow. Joy is the deep delight of knowing that God loves us and that our lives are in His hands. Jesus said, "(Everything I have taught you is so) my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11, ESV). The Bible urges us and invites us to "rejoice in the Lord always!" (Philippians 4:4, ESV). The word itself is bright and lively and emotional. Therefore, until He comes, hope allows to "rejoice always."

Until He comes, "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17, NAS). ***Until He comes, keep walking and talking with God.*** When Jesus said, "Abide in Me," He was inviting us into a personal, intimate, day-by-day, moment-by-moment relationship with Him. Walking with Him and talking to Him every moment of every day. That's what it means to "pray without ceasing." And here's the wonderful promise if we do. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7, NAS). His peace will calm our thoughts and calm our emotions. When we walk and talk with Him, He replaces our worry and anxiety with peace. Again, it's trusting Him, and knowing that our lives are in His hands.

Until He comes, "in everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18, NAS). Give thanks for everything? Yes, and here's why. ***Until He comes, thank Him for blessing you in the good times, and thank Him for being with you in the bad times.***

The Bible is filled with God's promises to take care of us, especially in the bad times. Listen to three of those promises. Psalm 34, "The righteous cry, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:17-18, NAS). Isaiah 41, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10, NAS). Romans 8:28, "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28, NAS). Because His promises are true, we thank Him for blessing us in the good times, and thank Him for being with us in the bad times.

Kathy started a Thanksgiving tradition in our home when our sons were little. She wanted them to learn how to be thankful. So, she came up with an interactive way to teach them. So, after we eat our Thanksgiving meal, she pulls out paper and markers, and everyone (children and adults) draws pictures of what they are thankful for from the past year. We do it every year, and everyone looks forward to it.

Even if this year has been hard for some of us, we still trust Him, we believe He loves us, and we know our lives are in His hands. So, “in everything give thanks.” Thank Him for blessing you in the good times, and thank Him for being with you in the bad times.

Paul’s list began with three uplifting statements. “Rejoice always ... pray without ceasing ... in everything give thanks.” The next three exhortations are more intense. The next three are serious warnings.

Until He comes, “do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19, NAS). Do not put out the fire of the Holy Spirit in your life. The Bible also says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 4:30, NAS). You cannot grieve an entity. You can only grieve a person, and the Holy Spirit is a person. ***Until He comes, dread the thought of doing anything that would break God’s heart.*** Anytime we sin, we contradict who you are, we offend His holiness, we forfeit His help, and we break His heart. And we should dread it.

I dread a lot of things. I dread being stuck in traffic, standing in line, and having a colonoscopy. We dread a lot of things. But, as recipients of God’s grace, there is something we should dread more than anything else. We should dread the thought of doing anything that would break His heart. But that’s exactly what we do every time we turn away from Him and choose to sin.

Instead, we should long to be “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18, NAS). The Bible says, “If we live by the Spirit” – if the Holy Spirit has given us new life – we should “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25, NAS). The Spirit-filled life is like wind in our sails. As the wind fills the sails, so the Spirit fills us and empowers us to live a joyous, dynamic life in moment-by-moment relationship with God. To be the person you want to be the day you see Jesus, you must dread the thought of doing anything that would break God’s heart.

Until He comes, “Do not despise prophecies, but test everything carefully and hold fast to what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21, ESV). ***Until He comes, filter everything through the word of God, and allow His word to shape what you believe and how you live.***

“Prophecies” refers to the Old Testament prophets who received direct revelation from God and spoke for God. Prophecy in the Old Testament predicted the future and warned of an impending act of God. “Prophecies” in the New Testament refers to the preaching of the word and proclaiming the Gospel.⁵ The New Testament also mentions “prophetic utterances,” referring to spiritual insights we share with each other. The Bible says, “Prophecy one by one, so that all may learn and be encouraged” (1 Corinthians 14:31, ESV). That means being teachable to the biblical insights of others.

The point Paul was making is to “test everything carefully.” Filter everything you hear through the word of God and allow His word to shape what you believe and how you live. The Bible says, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you” (Colossians 3:16, NAS). Absorb His word. Let it fill your mind and fill your heart. Let it shape what you believe and how you live. And “test everything carefully.”

Until He comes, “Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22, NAS). *Until He comes, say no to anything that does not reflect the character of God.*

We live in a culture that tests our character every day. We’re pressured to conform and compromise. We’re tempted to say, “What’s the big deal?” But this world is not our home, and its values are not our values. And godly character says, “I’m not going to do that because it’s not the right thing to do, it’s not the holy thing to do. I’m not going to do that because it does not fit my desire to be like Jesus and to reflect the character of God.”⁶

God is work in our hearts conforming us to the “image of his Son” (Romans 8:29, NAS). Shaping us to look like Jesus, love like Jesus, and live like Jesus in every way. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The Bible says, “Whoever says he abides in Christ” – whoever claims to be a Christian – “ought to walk in the same way in which He walked” (1 John 2:6, ESV).⁷ So until He comes, “Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22, NAS). As Paul said elsewhere, “Hate what is evil and cling to what is good” (Romans 12:9, NIV). Until He comes, say no to anything that does not reflect the character of God.

HOPE IS ...

In this rapid-fire conclusion to his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul described how we should live until Jesus comes. And it is our hope of His coming, our expectation and anticipation of His coming, that shapes how we live.

Hope shaped how David lived, when he said, “My *hope* is in You ... My soul waits in *hope* for the Lord” (Psalm 39:7, 130:6, NAS).⁸

Hope shaped the way Jeremiah lived. In the midst of desperate circumstances, he said, “I have *hope* because the Lord’s lovingkindnesses never cease, for His compassions never fail, they are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:21-23, NAS).

Hope shaped the way Paul lived, when he said, “We look forward with *hope* to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed” (Titus 2:12-13, NLT). We look forward to “the *hope* of eternal life” (Titus 3:7, NAS).

And Paul ended his letter to the Romans saying, “May the God of *hope* fill you with all joy and peace ... and may you abound in *hope*” (Romans 15:13, ESV).

Chuck Swindoll wrote a helpful booklet on hope called *Never Lose Hope*. It includes promises of God for the various times in life when we need hope. As you leave this morning, I have several of these booklets available for you to take home.

So what is hope?⁹

- Hope is *trusting God* – It’s confidence in the promises of God. Hope is not wishful thinking, but confident certainty that God will do what He has promised.
- Hope is *expecting good* – Hope is longing for something better. It expects and anticipates the goodness of God.
- Hope is *enduring struggle* – We hope when we’re desperate, and when we’re struggling. And hope helps us endure.
- Hope is *waiting patiently* – So many times the Bible tells us to “wait on the Lord.”¹⁰ Hope stands in the foreground waiting for what lies beyond the horizon, and with each step, we believe we are getting closer to the fulfillment of His promise.
- Hope is *rejoicing now* – Hope is joy in advance. It’s acting as if “it” has already happened.

Hope is the confidence that God is going to come through for us, that good is on the way.¹¹ Does that mean He will always relieve our pain? Does that mean He will always fix our problems? Here’s the best way to understand it. ***Hope is trusting that He will help us in this life and trusting that He will get us to the next life.*** So, no matter what comes our way, we trust Him, and that’s why we “rejoice in hope” (Romans 12:12).

Hebrews 6 says a lot about hope. It says, until He comes, be “diligent” in faith.¹² It says, “Do not be sluggish.”¹³ Which means pressing on with diligence, perseverance, and endurance. And with faith and endurance, it promises, we will “inherit the promises.”¹⁴ Hebrews 6 says, because “it is impossible for God to lie ... we have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us.”¹⁵ And then it says, “For he who promised is faithful.”

Then Hebrews 6:19 records one of the greatest verses on hope. “***We have this hope as an anchor for the soul,*** firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf” (Hebrews 6:19-20, NIV). An anchor holds a ship steady and secure in a storm, and our hope, our faith, holds us steady and secure in Christ. The “inner sanctuary behind the curtain” is a reference to the temple veil. And when Jesus was crucified, the temple veil was torn from top to bottom, symbolizing our access to God. So the “inner sanctuary behind the curtain” refers to the presence of God, to the throne of God. Hope is an anchor for the soul, and it is tethered to the throne of God. No matter what storms rage in this life, nothing can break the chain from your soul to His throne. That’s our hope.

CONCLUSION

The beauty and joy of the wedding video we saw earlier is a picture of a greater wedding day to come. The New Testament refers to the church as the bride and Jesus as the bridegroom. The day Jesus returns, an angel of the Lord will shout for all the earth to hear, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready ... Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:7-9, NIV).

If you are a Christian, you're invited! And it will be the most glorious day of your life. Therefore, as Paul urged the Thessalonians, he urges us, ***until He comes, be today the person you want to be the day you see Jesus.***

So, let's declare our hope as we recite these truths together.

*What is our hope in life and death?
Christ alone! Christ alone!*

*Because we believe that, we join David in saying,
"You are my hope ... My soul waits in hope of the Lord."*

*We join Jeremiah in saying,
"I have hope because the Lord's lovingkindnesses never cease,
for His compassions never fail, they are new every morning,
great is Your faithfulness."*

*We join Paul in praise.
"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again
to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."*

*We "look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory
of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed."
We look forward to "the hope of eternal life."*

*We pray as Paul prayed,
"May the God of hope fill us with joy and peace
and may we abound in hope."*

*What is our hope in life and death?
Christ alone! Christ alone!*

*Therefore,
"WE REJOICE IN HOPE!"*

NOTES

¹ Wedding video found at <https://youtu.be/-LHwGZP2X5U>, by Tyson J. Henderson.

² See Mark 2:19-20, John 3:29.

³ “Christ Our Hope in Life and Death,” word and music written by Keith Getty, Matt Boswell, Jordan Kauflin, Matt Merker, Matt Papa, Getty Music Publishing, 2020.

⁴ This is one of Paul’s favorite phrases. He used the phrase “walk in a manner worthy” in Ephesians 4:1, Philippians 1:27, and Colossians 1:10.

⁵ Paul explained that the church was “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20, ESV). The truth we hold as the word of God comes from the “prophets” of the Old Testament and the “apostles” of the New Testament. The collection of these works makes up our Bible. And the book of Revelation warns us not to add or subtract from the word of God (Revelation 2:18-19). With the completion of the Bible, the canon, the word “prophetic” refers to preaching the Word of God as we do today.

⁶ See 1 Peter 1:14-16.

⁷ The Bible says “put on” or “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14).

⁸ See also Psalm 71:5.

⁹ Faith, trust, and hope are braided together into a confidence in the goodness of God and the promises of God.

¹⁰ See these verses on waiting on the Lord – Psalm 27:14, 33:20-22, 37:7, 62:5, 130:5, Lamentations 3:25.

¹¹ The Greek word for hope is *ἐλπίς* (*elpis*) and the word group means expectation and anticipation. Linguists define hope as “the happy anticipation of good” [W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1940, 1966), page 232] and “the expectation of good” [Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), page 240.]

¹² See Hebrews 6:11.

¹³ See Hebrews 6:12.

¹⁴ See Hebrews 6:12.

¹⁵ See Hebrews 6:17 and 6:18.