

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
The Legacy of Hope

Introduction

1. We have been making our way through 1st Thessalonians, which is actually Paul's second letter to them
2. It is filled with praise and encouragement for the Thessalonians because of the quality and character of their faith in Jesus
3. These are people we could—and should—emulate when it comes to our Christian lives
4. So far we've been challenged on a number of important Christian principles—like the value of imitating Christ, investing in one another's lives, the importance of encouragement and sexual purity, and in our last passage the charge to excel still more in brotherly love
5. Today, Paul addresses probably one of the most important topics—that of hope, specifically the hope of resurrection and eternal life

A. Paul quiets the Thessalonians fears regarding their fellow Christians who have died (13-18)

1. It is apparent from our text that at least some of the Thessalonians were grieving over the death of loved ones (13): **"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope."**
 - a. The first thing we notice here is that the Thessalonians were ignorant about something: **"but we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren"**
 - 1) Ignorance is often mis-associated with being stupid, but here it simply refers to being unaware of something or not being fully informed
 - 2) Remember, the Thessalonians were baby Christians, and only spent three weeks with Paul when he was in Thessalonica
 - 3) Paul likely spent most of this time teaching them the core principles of their new found faith in Jesus
 - 4) But, three weeks isn't enough time to cover everything so there were obviously many things Paul just didn't have the time to discuss with them
 - b. In this instance, the topic in question had to do with what will happen to Christians who were/are already dead when Jesus returns: **"about those who are asleep"**:
 - 1) In the ancient world, sleep was often used as a euphemism for death
 - 2) Jesus used it this way in John 11:5-15 (READ)
 - 3) Luke also used it to describe Stephen's death in Acts 7:60
 - 4) Paul also used it this way in 1 Corinthians 11:30 and 1 Corinthians 15:51
 - c. This lack of understanding was causing some to grieve: **"so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope"**
 - 1) This is actually a purpose clause rather than a statement—Paul was writing so that they wouldn't grieve
 - 2) However, the fact that Paul tells them to "comfort one another with these words" in v. 18 suggests that some were grieving and that Paul was writing to assuage or ease that grief
 - 3) We're not told here what the actual fear or concern was regarding their dead loved ones:

- a) One popular suggestion over the years has been that they were concerned that those who had died would miss the Rapture
 - b) However, they might have mistakenly believed that the dead would not be raised to eternal life—Paul had to address this false teaching in 1 Corinthians 15:12-26 (READ)
 - c) Both fit the context of this passage, but the emphasis appears to be on what happens to the dead in Christ at the moment Jesus returns for His saints
- 2. However, they had no cause for grief (14-17): **“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.”**
 - a. Paul ties two beliefs together here:
 - 1) The first is that Jesus died and rose again
 - 2) The second is that at Jesus’ return (rapture) God will bring with Christ those who have died in Christ (i.e. dead Christians)
 - 3) Paul’s point is that if the Thessalonians believed the first, they must also believe the second
 - 4) NET: **“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also we believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep as Christians.”**
 - b. Paul assures them that the dead in Christ will not be left behind (15): **“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 not precede those who have fallen asleep.”**
 - 1) What Paul describes next was something new revealed to him by God through prophetic gift: **“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord”**
 - 2) When Christ returns, the dead in Christ will actually join Him first, before those who are still alive: **“that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.”**
 - c. Paul describes the Rapture (16-17):
 - 1) Jesus Christ will descend from heaven (15): **“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God,”**
 - 2) Then, the dead in Christ will rise: **“and the dead in Christ will rise first.”**
 - 3) Then, those that are still living will join them to meet Jesus in the air (17): **“Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,”**
 - 4) Finally, we shall remain with Him forever: **“and so we shall always be with the Lord.”**
 - 5) Paul describes this again in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (READ)

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| <p>B. Conclusion: Four things we learn about our hope</p> |
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- 1. This passage is ultimately about the hope we have as Christians—and that hope is that Jesus Christ will return, gather His saints—those dead and alive—and reunite us with our God and Savior
- 2. There are four things I believe we can take away from this passage today:
 - a. #1: Our hope should set us apart from the rest of the world:
 - 1) Look again at what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in v. 14: **“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.”**

- 2) Who are “the rest” here? It’s the unsaved, those who don’t know Jesus and therefore don’t have the promise of eternal life
- 3) Obviously, the immediate context of this passage is referring to hope in the face of death, but hope is supposed to be a hallmark of the Christian in all of life
- 4) One of the things the world should see in us is our hope:
 - a) The Bible says that we should exult in our hope (Romans 5:1-2): **“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.”**
 - b) The Bible says we should rejoice in our hope (Romans 12:12): **“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope,”**
 - c) It tells us we should be **“looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus”** (Titus 2:13)
 - d) We are told to **“take hold of the hope set before us”** which is **“an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast”** (Hebrews 6:18) and one that allows us to **“draw near to God”** (Hebrews 7:19)
 - e) We are to **“hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful”** (Hebrews 10:23)
 - f) Finally, Peter told his readers to **“prepared your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ”** (1 Peter 1:13)
- 5) Unfortunately, Christians often get caught up in thinking and acting like the world, behaving as if they’ve/we’ve forgotten our hope

How we respond to elections: Clinton in 1992, O’Bama in 2008, Trump in 2016

- b. #2: Our hope isn’t wishful thinking; it’s based on God’s promise and historical fact, the resurrection of Jesus:
 - 1) In this passage, Paul encourages the Thessalonians by reminding them that if they believe that Jesus rose from the dead, then their loved ones will also be raised from the dead
 - 2) This is something God promises to all believers, and the proof that He can do it is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ
 - 3) Those who claim there is no historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus are fools because they are simply ignoring the evidence
 - 4) The events surrounding Jesus’ life, including His death, burial and resurrection, are some of the most well documented events in human history which means that our hope is based on real, historical events
- c. #3: Our hope is God’s ultimate plan for our lives but it’s an eternal one, not a temporal one:
 - 1) To many times we focus on the temporal, rather than the eternal
 - 2) Listen to what Paul wrote in Colossians 3:1-4: **“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Woman preacher on the radio in Holden Beach• Prosperity Gospel (listening to Steve Furtick)• Even the new social gospel with its focus on redeeming this world |
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- 3) But there is no promise of prosperity, the easy life, changing this world for the better—for our hope is eternal, not temporal
- d. Finally, #4: Our hope should be a comfort to one another (18): **“Comfort one another with these words.”**
- 1) Notice that this is an imperative (a command)
 - 2) Again, the immediate context of this passage is death, and therefore Paul is specifically calling on them to encourage those who have lost loved ones by reminding them that if they were in Christ they would be raised up to be with Jesus eternally
 - 3) However, when we lose our focus and get overwhelmed by our present, temporal circumstances, having someone remind us of our eternal hope can serve as a tremendous comfort, can it not?