

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Week 8
 Sunday, October 29th, 2017

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

“¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

As Paul educated the believers at Thessalonica on practical ethics of living a life of holiness he also found it necessary to interject a theology lesson on the resurrection of the dead and the coming of the Lord. Scholars suggest it was likely that the Thessalonians had questions concerning fellow loved ones who had died. John R. W. Stott points out how bereavement can leave us with questions concerning those we've lost. He says this questioning can be, “partly from Christian concern for the dead, and partly because their death reminds us of our own mortality and undermines our security.”¹ We hear the theology concerning death that is preached to us in the church; yet, death can still sometimes seem so *final* and full of uncertainty to many believers. It likely prompts questions in us just as it did in the Thessalonians.

Paul cared that the believers understood the truth concerning those who were *asleep*. Defining the term “asleep” can be confusing at first glance but need not be as we look into the use of the word elsewhere in Scripture. “The figure of sleep for death is common in the New Testament (Mark 5:39; John 11:11). This is not sleep of the soul, however, because Paul wrote elsewhere that a Christian who is absent from his body is present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; cf. Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 5:10). It is rather the “sleep” of the body in the earth until it is resurrected, changed into a glorious body, and reunited with the soul (1 Cor. 15:35–57; 2 Cor. 5:1–9).”²

¹ Stott, John R. W. The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel & the End of Time. Edited by Motyer, J.A. (OT)

² Constable, T. L. (1985). [1 Thessalonians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 703). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Paul's burden of not wanting the Thessalonians to be uninformed was for good reason - for they were a people *born again to a living hope* (1 Peter 1:3). "Expressions like, 'I want you to know' and 'I do not want you to be ignorant' occur a number of times in Paul's letters. He traces many problems of Christian faith and life to ignorance, and regards knowledge, as the key to many blessings."³

Notice that Paul didn't say they were *not* to grieve.

Does anyone else want to say, "*thank God?*" Grief has a unique way of causing us to become uncontrollable or irrational at times. The heavy emotion grief can bring is nearly unexplainable with words, yet colossally felt. Can you even fathom it being suggested as wrong to grieve? Grief will show up at unexpected times. We can think we've finished with the grieving process - only for it to "*whish!*" upon us like the wind in a sudden rainstorm. We will often act subconsciously to avoid experiencing grief or to hurry up its course of action, but that doesn't work.

Where there is life on this earthy abode there will be at some time or another, grief. Many of us feel ashamed of the things we're grieving because we've been led to believe it's not "grieve worthy." Possibly we've been told we need to "*get over it*" or even asked, "*don't you trust God?*" Other people, while being well meaning in their efforts, will offer words that neither comfort nor aid us in our grief. Thus, we grow tired of having to admit we're *still grieving*.

Judah acknowledged the grief Isaac would experience if he didn't return his brother Benjamin safely home (Gen. 44:34). Job grieved over his loss and physical suffering (Job 6:2; 17:7). Jeremiah was grieved over the sin of the people (Jeremiah 8:18). Grief is real. It is a part of loss and it's only natural that we experience it. There is nothing wrong or sinful about grief in and of itself.

In our grief, let us hold fast to the truth unwaveringly until that glorious day,

*"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will no longer exist; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away."*⁴ (Rev. 21:4)

In our grief,
may we make
this our
battle cry to
the one Who
is able to
renew our
strength:

*I am weary
from grief;
strengthen
me from your
word.*
Psalm
119:28

³ Stott, John R. W. The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel & the End of Time. Edited by Motyer, J.A. (OT) and Stott, John R.W. (NT), 1991. Inter-Varsity Press. The Bible Speaks Today Series.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: Holman Christian standard version](#). (2009). (Re 21:4). Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose (1 Thess. 4:14), we are people of hope and shouldn't grieve as others who have no hope. The words of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 beg us to ask the question, "do we believe" while calling attention to the sorrowful fact that there are others who do not believe and are absent of hope. Oh, that the hope we have in Christ would ignite a holy fire in us to share that hope with others.

Paul makes it clear in 4:14, that it is because of Jesus, who died and rose again - defeating death, that *God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep*. Faith demands that we trust what we don't necessarily have the privilege to see with our own eyes. It often defies logic and appears foolish (1 Cor. 1:18). Without faith and genuine belief in the Resurrection of Christ, our faith is pointless. The words of 1 Corinthians 15, concerning how essential the resurrection is to our faith, are at a minimum, informational. This presentation from Paul to the church at Corinth and believers beyond are words that are forcefully hopeful.

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say, "There is no resurrection of the dead"? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is without foundation, and so is your faith. ¹⁵ In addition, we are found to be false witnesses about God, because we have testified about God that He raised up Christ—whom He did not raise up if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Therefore, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished. ¹⁹ If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone. ²⁰ But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.⁵ (1 Corinthians 15:12-22)

Since we believe, we have hope! Christ's resurrection is a guarantee of ours. Paul sought to emphasize to the Thessalonians that the dead would participate in the parousia (the return of Christ) just as much as the living (4:15). Specifically he states that *the dead in Christ will rise first* and then those who are living will be joined with them (4:16-17). Especially if the Thessalonians were confused about the fate of the

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: Holman Christian standard version*](#). (2009). (1 Co 15:12-22). Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers.

believing dead, it would have been comforting to know that one day they would be with one another and with the Lord.⁶

With Paul's use of the first person "we," in 4:17, scholars have debated whether or not he expected to be alive when the Lord returned. However, strong arguments have been made that Paul believed the end could come at any time and never presumed to know the timing.⁷ Discussed throughout our series has been the fact that Paul affirmed the Thessalonians for their faith and hope in the return of Christ. Has an eagerness for His return awakened in us? We are a people of hope – do we live as such?

Believer, one magnificent day *THE LORD HIMSELF WILL DESCEND*. He will come with a *cry of command, with the voice of an archangel* – accompanied by an angelic entourage.⁸ The most heavenly trumpet will sound and the dead in Christ will rise. Those who are alive, together with the risen dead, will be *caught up* in the clouds to meet our Lord. Loneliness will no longer plague our existence for we will *always be with the Lord*. When He appears, we will marvel as we behold all He has promised unfolding before our very eyes. Our faith will finally become sight.

Therefore, brother, sister – encourage one another with these words and so remain steadfast until The Day of our redemption.

⁶ Schreiner, Thomas R. *Magnifying God in Christ: A Summary of New Testament Theology*, Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2010.

⁷ Martin, Michael D. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. *The New American Commentary*.

⁸ *Ibid*.