

○ Last week we noted that Paul was calling the Thessalonians to live differently to the rest of those in their community; as to those within their Roman culture; they were to sanctify themselves and live in a way that was pleasing to God; they were to avoid sexual immorality that was running rampant with their society. And the challenge for us is to keep allowing God to point out where we too need to change and become more like Jesus.

Following on from this, Paul now calls them to another contrast to those in their community. In essence he is saying, "We don't want you to grieve for your lost loved ones, like the rest of those around you who have no hope. Neither do we want you to live in ignorance and therefore uncertain about your future." Evidently there were some, if not all as new believers who were grieving lost loved ones, and uncertain about their own futures.

Through a knowledge of the truth (as opposed to being ignorant or uninformed as v.13 suggests), then they would possess a hope that would take away any uncertainty they might have had, and significantly reduce the level of their grief. They would still grieve, as we all do, but not like those who have no hope.

I have noticed over the years as I have conducted many funerals, that those who have no faith in the Lord are distraught at the death of a loved one; they have no hope of seeing them again, and often they cannot see how they can carry on living without them. In such funerals, people are often overcome with emotion, and cry their way through the service in deep heartfelt tears.

The religions of the world have no certainty of a glorious future; they have no assurance as Christianity does; because their only hope is on the basis of merit, that their good deeds might outweigh their bad. So, let's read our passage... 1 Thess 4:13-18..

○ **"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who fall asleep, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ○ ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words."**

When Timothy returned to Paul and Silas, he brought such a glowing report that was so encouraging, but he must have also brought concerns about the effect that the Roman culture and their upbringing had upon their life and faith, and their lack of understanding about what follows death. "We don't want you to grieve like those around you, and so, be encouraged, and encourage one another with these words of truth." ○ **"We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. And we will all meet Him in the air."**

In 1 Cor 15, Paul says that death will be “the last enemy to be destroyed.” (1 Cor. 15:26) The reason that death is the last and greatest of our enemies to be destroyed is because nothing separates us from one another like death...Nothing here on earth ends a relationship like death. There is no reset button...there is no re-start.

If a relationship is bad when death comes, then there is the pain of never being able to make it right. If a relationship is good, then there is the pain of it being over, and life is not as good as it once was. If death comes early then there is always the wondering of “what could have been,” as if it were stolen.

For those who are left...death is the separation between the time that we saw them, and when we might see them again...or if we will ever see them again. And so death, stings...death seems to have the victory. The death of a loved one can leave us defeated, discouraged, and even depressed. And sometimes the tears that fill our eyes can hinder our vision of what is really true, and what is yet to come. We struggle to see through the tears to see a brighter day.

But for the believer death has lost its sting. In 1 Cor 15 Paul teaches that based upon Jesus resurrection, and His appearance to over 500 of His brothers and sisters in Christ; and Jesus being the first fruits of all who will be raised to eternal life through faith in Him, that death has now lost its sting.

Vance Havner was a preacher and writer through last century. He was 72 when his wife died in 1973. He later told the story of his wife’s funeral and standing by her casket. People filed by and tried to console him with the words “We are so sorry about your loss... Vance we’re so sorry you’ve lost your wife...” After a while he couldn’t take it anymore and responded... “You haven’t lost anything if you know where it is!”

And Paul seeks to encourage the Thessalonians with such teaching. Death had lost its sting. “We don’t want you to grieve like those who are not in Christ. For us, a day will come when we will meet the Lord in the air and we will be reunited with loved ones who have also loved the Lord.” Verse 16, **“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, ...”**

What a precious promise for the believer! The Lord will return! Jesus promised that He would return in John 14:3 **“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”** Jesus is coming again. V16 **“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.”** One day Jesus will return in dramatic fashion; in glorious majesty; and life as we know it on earth will draw to a close.

He has promised to return, and we are promised a reunion. V.17, **“After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”** Those who have died in Christ will rise, and then along with those who still remain here on earth, all will simultaneously meet together with the Lord in the air. We will be reunited with those who are in Christ; our loved ones who have died before, but I think we’ll be less concerned about being reunited as we will about being in the presence of our Lord and Saviour; our eyes will most likely be fixed on Jesus.

And this promise extends beyond a reunion with other Christians, to a completed union with our Lord and Saviour. The close of v.17 says, **“And so we will be with the Lord forever.”** The promise is that we will then reside with Him forever.

We will see Him face to face and we will be with Him. 1 John 3:2, **“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”** As I mentioned before, Jesus also said, **“...I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”** We will spend eternity with our Saviour who has redeemed us! This is not a temporary gathering, but our eternal dwelling place.

Jesus promises us, that he will return, we will be reunited with all believers, we will reside with Him, and we will rest. ○ Jesus has told us that when He returns,

“He will wipe away every tear, there will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away. He who is seated on the throne will declare... I am making everything new!” (Rev. 21:4-5). In Rev 14:13 he also said to John, **“Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. ..for they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.”**

What a beautiful picture of rest and peace, where there is no more death, grieving, mourning, tears or pain. Jesus called it Paradise, and as it is where God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit reside, it will be a place of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and all humans will have complete self-control. We will be like Christ, in Paradise.

○ Communion

As we share in communion, we are reminded of Jesus death on the Cross. As He hung there one thief on one side of Him placed his faith in Jesus and asked Him to remember him once he had come into His Kingdom.

And Jesus said, **“Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”** A thief who had committed a crime that his society deemed bad enough that he receive the death penalty. A thief who recognised the depth of his own sin and receiving just punishment.

And Jesus, whose death paid the price for this man's sin. **“Today you will be with me in Paradise.”** The wonder of this transaction: Jesus death brings us eternal life!

○ And so, as Christians, the future we anticipate, the hope set before us greatly influences the life that we live today. We don't grieve as the world grieves. And neither do we fear death because we understand it to be the transition from life on earth, to life in glory; we see as our graduation. Paul closes his thoughts with the statement, **“Therefore (because of this truth) encourage one another with these words!”** (v.18) It is because of these truths, that we can anticipate death without fear and apprehension, but rather with joy and peace. We don't hang on to our earthly existence as though it's all that we have.

We have been promised, Jesus return; being reunited with other believers; residing in His presence; and being at rest.

Let me close with a true story about a ship that sank in 1914. It was a ship called the Empress of Ireland, and she sank after colliding with another ship, the S.S. Storstad. The Empress was carrying 1477 passengers and crew, and 1012 perished in the cold waters of the Atlantic Ocean.

As the ship began to sink it was discovered that there were not enough life vests to go around. On board the Empress were 167 members of the Salvation Army, and as they could, each of them gave their life vest to others on board who did not have one...all but 8 of them died. One of them was later asked why they would do this...and his answer was "I could die better than them."

Christians can grieve better than those who have no hope;

Christians can live better, because they do so without a fear of death;

Christians can die better than the rest of mankind because of our hope and assurance of eternal life.

Are you ready for death to knock on your door? Could you give away a life vest because you do not fear death?

The only way to trust in these promises of Jesus return; our reunion; residing in glory and in rest; is to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Is He your Lord and Saviour? You can ask Him to be ... today. And as you come into times of grief, encourage one another with these words.

Song: TN276 O praise the name