

September 24, 2023

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

13 But 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. *14* For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. *15* For 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. *16* For 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. *17* Then 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. *18* Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Scriptures for further study:

2 Corinthians 4:14

Ephesians 2:1-22

“Paul responds to the apparent question asked by the Thessalonians: what will happen to the ‘dead in Christ?’ The reply implies that between the foundation of the church and the return of Timothy, some member or members of the church had died, an even that caused much sorrow among them.”

- Gene Green



Grief

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

BIG IDEA: My response to an event is not rooted in the event itself but somewhat shaped and secured by what Jesus says about it.

OUTLINE

““The apostle in no way prohibits grief in the face of death but only advises that grief should not be overwhelming so that they do not grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.”

- Gene Green

1. Our Emotional Hijackings

2. The Colossal Companion of Faith

3. Continued Encouragement for Life

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“Engaging emotions without engaging God is a recipe for disaster.”

-Winston / Smith

“Paul’s expression here could possibly refer to a direct revelation made to him by Christ or a general teaching given by Jesus on earth but not written down in the gospels.”

-Bob Cara

““Why should the church have hope in reaction to death? The reason is that Jesus’ resurrection has launched the final resurrection of all saints.”

-G. K. Beale

“In last week’s sermon, we noted that despite walking well in faith, the Thessalonians needed Paul to help clarify specific topics. One of those topics was how believers interacted with one another within the church, that is, the family of God. Last week, we saw the uncommon call to agape love, which was the epitome of interpersonal relations within the church. Well, another topic that Thessalonians wrote to Paul asking him to address deals with the destiny of those who die. In essence, they asked Paul: How are we to think and believe about followers of Jesus who die? What happens to them? How should we respond?”

-Pastor Bill

Praise to Jesus. In Jesus Christ, you will always be more than your circumstances and emotions.

Repentance through Jesus. Repent for the moments your emotions hijack your life in the weakness of your faith and lead you to unhealthy places.

Consecration for Jesus. Endeavor to engage God as you engage your emotions.

DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These “Sermon discussion questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. *Exploring the big Idea*. Is there a movie in which you have the same emotional response no matter how often you watch?
2. *Exploring “Our emotional hijackings”*. When do your emotions tend to get hijacked? Read 1 Thess. 4:13. What concerned Paul about the way the Thessalonians were grieving?
3. *What is “The colossal companion of faith?”* Read 1 Thess. 4:14-17. What did Paul want the Thessalonians to understand about Christians who die? What do Christians today share with the Thessalonians concerning how to handle emotions? How can your emotions get the best of you?
4. *“Continued encouragement for life.”* Read 1 Thess. 4:18. How did Paul encourage the Thessalonians? What pattern for handling emotions does Paul give?
5. How can you move towards spiritually helpful emotional responses rooted in what Jesus says about the circumstances of life rather than the circumstances themselves?

““In our culture today, virtually all our communication media and educational enterprises are superficial because they don't deal with the most important aspects of their subject, namely, their connections with God and his purposes. Almost all news reports are superficial. Almost all history books are superficial. Virtually all public education in America is superficial. Almost all editorial and news commentary is superficial. All this because of the incredible, unimaginable disregard for God—the main Reality in the universe, the explanation behind everything.”

- John Piper

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. In verse 13, Paul wrote about grief. What is grief? (*This is sadness about losing someone that we care about. For children they most likely experience grief for the first time over the death of a family pet.*)

2. Also in verse 13, Paul wrote about Christian hope. What is hope? (*The most typical use of that word means wishful thinking such as I hope that my favorite team wins, or I hope we get to eat a dessert tonight. Christian hope is different. Our hope has a certainty to it because our hope is based on God's Word and promises.*)

- What does Paul mention in verse 14 that is the basis of our hope? (*Christ's death and resurrection.*)

3. Parents, talk with your children about how we can grieve with hope. You will want to make sure to talk about how it is ok to express and experience grief. Also talk about how for Christians we can focus on the blessings we have in Christ and that is meant to encourage us (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

4. In verses 14-18 Paul wrote about the return of Jesus and how He will assemble His people. How does Christ's return give us hope in our present situations? (*The return of Jesus reminds us that our best days are ahead of us as Christians when we are with Jesus in the new heavens and new earth.*)

Scriptures for further study:

John 16:33

Revelation 21:1-5

FOR STUDENTS

1. In verse 13, Paul says, "...so that you will not grieve like the rest who have no hope." What is this Hope that Paul is talking about?

In these verses, Paul writes about the comfort of Christ coming. Why is this thought a comfort to people?

2. What questions have you heard people ask about our future after we die? How might this passage help you to answer some of those questions?

3. What comfort is there in this passage for those who grieve?

4. Why does looking forward to the second coming of Jesus help us with the anxieties of each day?

5. When grieving the loss of loved ones, what becomes an encouragement to you? How can you actively press into those encouragements, so you do not lose hope?

6. If we believe the promises of Jesus' return, what kinds of things would we be doing while we are waiting for it?

7. How does the thought of being with Jesus always when He returns grow our worship in difficult circumstances?

FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. In common usage today, the word “hope” means something like wishful thinking, as in “I hope my team wins.” But the New Testament Scriptures use the word “hope” to refer to the absolute certainty we can have about our future. For example, Paul uses the word “hope” here in verse 13. Notice that the certainty we have is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus (verse 14).

Question: Do you have certainty that when you die, you will be resurrected and have everlasting life? You can have that certainty if/when you confess with your mouth that “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. (Romans 10:9)

2. Paul contrasts the experience of those who grieve but have no such hope, versus those who do have this living hope. Someone once said if you want a person to see the difference Christianity makes, then have them attend a Christian funeral. It is markedly different from a funeral where the one who died (and well as those who knew the deceased), do not have such hope.

Question: Have you experienced both kinds of funerals? How were they different? What accounts for the difference?

3. Some Christians mistakenly believe that we are always supposed to put on a happy face. That somehow, we are supposed to pretend that we do not experience sorrow, especially at the loss of a loved one. But notice here that Paul is not saying we do not grieve. Remember that Jesus himself cried at the graveside of his good friend Lazarus. (John 11:32-38)

Question: How does it encourage you to know that the Bible gives us permission to grieve?

Question: As a Christian, however, in what ways does our hope in the resurrection inform and impact the way we experience that grief? (Keep reading in John 11:38-45.)

4. Paul specifically states at the end of this passage that he writes these words to “encourage” the Thessalonians (verse 18). God inspired these words of Scripture so that all Christians, including us, might be encouraged.

Question: How does it encourage you when you reflect on the fact that when we die, we are going to be with the Lord forever? (verse 17) How does it encourage you when you reflect on the fact that we as Christians are going to be reunited with loved ones who have already died in the Lord? (verse 17) How does it encourage you to know that you are going to be raised with a new body one day? (verse 16) How does it encourage you to know that God is supreme, his power can never be defeated, and we will be victorious in him?

A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica



Sunflowers, Vincent Van Gough, 1888

About the artist and painting: In 1888, the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh moved to southern France with a dream. He wanted to establish an art community where painters could live, work, and inspire one another. One of his mentors, a man he deeply respected, Paul Gauguin, agreed to come and live in this community. As a symbol of his thankfulness and happiness, Van Gogh painted a series of sunflower paintings and hung them in his room. The sunflower meant to reflect his surprising joy towards achieving a dream.

The apostle Paul was probably not an artist but he did produce a letter expressing his surprising joy, his thankfulness, and happiness. This letter was his “sunflower” to the church Thessalonica. It’s Paul’s verbal painting of Gospel Gratitude. What are things you a most grateful for in your life? Has the Gospel taken root in your heart? If so, what fruits of gratitude are being produced and overflowing in your life as a result of Jesus?

In his opening words from Paul to the Thessalonians, he writes:

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,
3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. The same faith, hope, and love that made a difference in the lives of believers then can make a difference in your life now. **“I’m excited for what God has in store for us First Presbyterian Church, as the Spirit washes us in these words of Gospel gratitude. May Christ be our hope for the world to come, our faith for today, and our love for a lifetime”** Pastor Bill Pardue

The purpose of 1 Thessalonians:

“A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica”

"The purpose of 1 Thessalonians is for Paul to convey to the Thessalonians how encouraged he is by the good report about them and to deal with other aspects of the news brought by Timothy." - Cara, 1 and 2 Thess. 22-23

Paul writes to express his GRATITUDE for the firm faith of the church and their expression and commitment to brotherly love. At the same time, he desires to see the church grow in holiness and provides information and encouragement concerning the hope we have in the certain and imminent return of Jesus Christ.

"The concern Paul had for this congregation was so overwhelming he decided to send Timothy back to the city to 'strengthen and encourage' the believers in their faith and to 'find out about' their faith...1 Thessalonians was written after Timothy arrived in Corinth to report his findings to Paul...He brought good news of the faith, love, and steadfastness of the congregation despite hardships. - Green, PNTC, 52.