

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 “That You May Not Grieve Without Hope”

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Pastoral Intern Michael Onstad

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NKJV)

**13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.**

**14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.**

**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 by no means precede those who are asleep.**

**16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.**

**17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.**

**18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.**

### That You May Not Grieve Without Hope

Death. Suffering. Hopelessness. I think for a good amount of people those words in any combination might describe their 2020. We're in a pandemic that's been way overly politicized, we're constantly hit with the number of new cases and deaths every day, they've been going up recently, the election has been pretty chaotic, and we've endured civil unrest, violence, and riots in various cities across the country. We've been put in lockdowns and are restricted from going to see loved ones. Suicide rates and alcohol and drug abuse are both skyrocketing. In the election, more than a few people on both sides of the aisle think that the end of the world will come if/when their candidate loses. It's felt like nothing but chaos and suffering ever since the year started. This year, more than most, has been a year where, in my still young life, I've had to consciously turn off the news and look at something else. To be honest with you all, I've been quite discouraged this week, more than I usually get. But in the midst of all this darkness, this chaos, our Epistle lesson shines through like a ray of sunshine. Though Paul is mostly concerned with answering the Thessalonians' question about what will happen to the dead in Christ, the hope of this text extends to us who are alive now as well. Paul is reminding us that **our hope isn't in this world, it's in the next one, the new heavens and new earth with Christ forever.**

He tells us that all who are in Christ, both dead and alive, will be reunited with Christ and each other for eternity when Christ returns. This is true based on the historical truth of Christ's resurrection and the truth of God's Word. So, based on those things, Paul says to encourage one another with these words of comfort and truth!

Now, the meat of the text. All who are in Christ, both dead and alive, will be reunited with Christ and each other for all eternity when Christ returns. Paul spells it out for us, clear as day in this text.

Christ will return, and he'll return LOUDLY. I know we have "thief in the night" texts, the next chapter of the book is one of them, and they are 100% true. The end will come in that way as a surprise, so we better be ready for it! That's kind of the point of the parable in our Gospel lesson.

So while Christ's return will come suddenly, we don't know the day or the hour after all, when it comes, we'll KNOW that it's here. We'll know it's Christ when He returns. Verse 16 when it says "with a shout, voice of an archangel, the trumpet of God," that's going to be LOUD.

Christ will come with like a battle cry. It'll be like in those big battles we see in movies like Lord of the Rings, or war movies, or the like. To rally the troops, the leader/general/commander will give a speech and then just begin yelling a battle cry, which the troops echo as they begin the charge against the enemy. Sometimes in those movies, and throughout history as well, as the battle cry is roaring, a war horn may sound out as well. Well, that's our "sound of the trumpet" from the text as well. I think of my favorite football team, the Minnesota Vikings. They embrace their Norse heritage and have a war horn that sounds before their games as they're running onto the field. It's called the "Gjallerhorn," and it's really cool and really big. It's named after the mythological horn of the gods that signals Ragnarok, which is basically the Norse mythology version of Armeggedon. All that to say that we will KNOW when Christ returns. It will be loud and unmissable.

And then the dead will be raised. All those who were believers in Christ who had died will be raised. Wow. That'll be awesome, in both senses of the word. Both really good and really cool, and we're going to be full of awe!

Every single believer who has died up to that point will be raised. All the saints we've put to rest here from this church, and every saint from all the churches, will be raised in an instant upon that sound. Then we who are still alive, probably dumbstruck at hearing such a loud noise and suddenly seeing dead people rise, we'll be taken into the air to be with them and the Lord forever.

And then we get to be in heaven forever. No more death. No more suffering. No more diseases like Covid, or cancer, or Alzheimers, or diabetes. None of that anymore. Just eternity, eternity!, with Jesus our Lord forever. Eternity with the saints who had gone before us and had died before the Lord's return. We get to talk to and meet with loved ones again who had died in the faith. We get to meet and talk to saints of old, even! We'll get to talk with the disciples, and Paul, and Martin Luther, just to name a few prominent names. But most importantly, we'll be

with our risen Lord forever. Our faith will be sight. No longer will we hear Jesus' words just from pages on a book. We'll hear them straight from His lips.

And on the topic of His words, Paul tells that those words are what make this glorious promise true.

This glorious promise is true because it is based on the historical truth of Christ's resurrection and the truth of God's Word. Verses 14 and 15 ground the truth of this glorious reality waiting for us.

In verse 14, Paul grounds this truth in the truth of the resurrection, in history. Because Jesus died and rose again for you in history, this same Jesus will come again and God will use Him to raise the dead. The very same power that raised Christ from the dead will be used to raise you, dear saint, and all the saints, on the last day. And that power is the Holy Spirit, given to you by God as a gift. He is the down payment, the guarantee of your resurrection as well. Because of Christ's own resurrection, and because of the Holy Spirit you've been given, you WILL be raised. No doubt about it.

How does the Spirit come to you? Through God's Word, which is the second grounding that Paul puts the resurrection in. In verse 15, Paul says that this all comes from the Word of the Lord, straight from God's mouth. This news that Christ will return, raise the dead, and bring all believers to himself for eternity comes from the very mouth of God.

We don't know exactly how this specific truth came to Paul from the Lord, but the fact that it came to him from the very author of truth lends it a lot of credibility.

The same God who spoke all of creation into existence by His words, the One who said "let there be light," and there was light, delivers this wonderful news to you through Paul, who himself wrote it down for the Thessalonians and all who would read the Scriptures. And because it's from God, that means it will come to pass. If God can create the world with just His words, then that of course means that His promises WILL come to pass. If God says you are forgiven, you are forgiven. That is the very definition of justification! God has declared you righteous because of Christ, so it's true! If God says that you will be raised from the dead when Christ returns, you will be raised from the dead when Christ returns. If God says that, upon that resurrection, you who believe will be coming to heaven to be with him forever? Then you who believe, upon resurrection, will be going to heaven to be with the Lord forever.

So what do we do with this glorious promise? What do we do with the gift that's been given to us? Paul tells us in the last verse.

Paul says to encourage one another with these words of comfort and truth!

This. Is. Our. Hope. as Christians. That our sins are forgiven, and we will enjoy eternity with our Lord forever in heaven. We do not cling to things in this world as our ultimate hope, because they will ultimately fail us. One does not have to look far in 2020 to see that there's not a ton of hope in this world.

But, can we still hope for good and work for it in this world? Absolutely. We should do our best to promote good for the sake of our neighbor. But we should not turn that work into our source of ultimate hope.

We dare not put our ultimate hope in politics, but we still engage with it and vote for the good of our neighbor. We dare not put our hope in completely turning the culture around and having a predominantly “Christian culture,” but we still engage the culture and make our voices heard for the sake of our neighbor. We dare not put our hope of salvation in our good works, but we do good works to serve our neighbor.

And so when bad things happen, when your political candidate doesn’t win, when the culture pushes back against us, when we’re faced with persecution, suffering, disease, even death, we do not lose hope. We press on, as I talked about a few weeks ago. We press on in hope, clinging to this glorious promise that God has given us!

And we encourage one another with this hope as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death on this earth. This part of building up the body of Christ together, that glorious work of the congregation.

There’s a reason that this passage is constantly used at funerals. It’s an encouragement to know that loved ones in the Lord who have died are with Jesus, and will rise again. We will see them again.

There’s a reason that this passage and others that proclaim our hope as Christians come to mind when people become anxious about politics. Because whoever the governing authorities are and whatever the governing authorities do, they cannot change this. They cannot take this promise away from us.

So whatever suffering comes your way, take comfort in this. Be encouraged that, though we may suffer for a time now, whether those sufferings are smaller or larger, this glorious reality is what awaits us. Eternity with our Lord in the new heavens and new earth, free from death, disease, suffering, and all the fruits of sin.

Cling to this hope friends: All who are in Christ, both dead and alive, will be reunited with Christ and each other for eternity when Christ returns. You know this is true because Christ was raised for you, in history, and God has promised it with His own Word. Therefore, encourage one another with this glorious, comforting truth. And remember, **our hope isn’t in this world, it’s in the next one, the new heavens and new earth with Christ forever.**

The winner of the election will not change eternity. Covid will not change eternity. Riots will not change eternity. Coercion, violence, what have you, will not change eternity. God has promised that His Church will never fall to the gates of Hell. Why? Because Christ defeated the master of Hell, Satan. Christ defeated him on the cross, for you. His death defeated death once and for all, and His resurrection, also for you, guarantees that you who believe, you who trust and believe that Christ has forgiven you of YOUR sins, will be raised again as well when He returns. What comfort, what encouragement as we navigate these chaotic times. And as we cling

to this wonderful, glorious promise, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord until He returns. Amen.