

The Flourishing Church
The Fate of Those Who Die In Christ
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Introduction:

- I remember the first time I lost someone really close to me. It was my grandfather. I believe I was in the first grade when he died. I remember crying and not wanting to go to school the next day because I was so sad. And thankfully, it wasn't until recently I started to have more and more people in my life pass away. Death has become more of a reality in the past year than it has the first 35 years of my life. I was never all that impacted by death until recently. Even as I'm preparing for this I friend told me about his mom having cancer and right now she will receive chemo to prolong her life. Recent deaths were sad. They hurt. It's depressing. But not without hope. And that's what Paul is trying to address here in our passage today.

- Thessalonians were worried about some of their fellow Christians who had recently passed away. They had been taught and knew that Christ was coming back. *See 5:2 – For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the Night.* Paul had taught them that Jesus was coming back but Paul's teaching was cut short when he was forced to leave town, so the Thessalonians did not have a full understanding of what was going to happen to believers who passed. They believed that those who had passed would be missing out on this "day of the Lord."

- So, what was Paul's message to them? To not grieve as those without hope. Paul is telling his readers that they have hope to hold onto. You can grieve but don't grieve without hope. He wants to give his readers encouragement. If you see in this passage – he starts off with the situation he wants to address and then at the end of 4:18, He wants them to be encouraged. So that's where we will go today – What does Paul want them to be encouraged by? What exactly about hope should we internalize?
 - Our hope in death was secured in the past
 - Our hope in death looks forward to a future reunion
 - Our hope in death offers encouragement for today

Our hope in death was secured in the past

- The first thing we see here - Paul tells his readers to not grieve and then says FOR. He gives reasons. His first reason here is that "Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep." Paul connects what will happen in the future (which we will talk about in a little bit) to what has already happened. Paul uses this phrase "Even so" – in the Greek, it's this word can also be translated as "in this way."

- It's the same thing that happens in John 3:16. For God SO loved the world. The word SO is the same word in the Greek. In this way, referring back to John 3:15, God loved the World. You take two examples and compare them with each other. In John – Just as Moses lifted up the snakes in the wilderness for everyone to look at, Jesus must be lifted up for everyone to look at. Here in 1 Thessalonians – Because Jesus died and rose again –

in the same way, those who have died will be raised again and brought along with Christ! What God did through Jesus on the cross and an empty grave is a picture of what will happen in the future. It all starts with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Without this, you have no hope.

- The other day at Costco – when we were exiting, the person checking our receipt actually counted all of our items. This was the first time I ever saw them do that. Every other time, it's more of a glance, okay, mark my receipt and we leave. But you have to have the receipt! No receipt, you aren't leaving. I remember one time I left the receipt at the checkout line. I panicked because I needed to show them – I purchased these. These items are mine. Let me just wave this in your face and you pretend to care and let me go. Well – that's what happened with Jesus in His death and resurrection. He paid for us with His death and His resurrection is his receipt. HE declares – this Christian is mine. I raised her up. She is my possession. All believers will experience the fullness of the benefits of the resurrection. Just as Christ was raised – you will be raised.
- Now in this passage it's clear that the people were worried about those who had already passed but they were also worried about themselves. Some other background information says that there were false teachers who were telling them that they missed the day too! Or they even had the thought– If I die before the Lord comes back then I will miss out on The Lord Coming back too. We sometimes think that we aren't saved, and we let how we feel or failures dominate our beliefs. We doubt. I'm not saying it's not okay to doubt – I think we all go through doubt no matter how long we've been on our journey with Christ...but we doubt because we forget. We let sin do the talking.
- We have a few couple friends who live in Hawaii. Now this might be a little shocking, but these couples tell us that they never really go to the beach. Like...it'll be months before they visit the beach. I mean...it's been years since I've been to Galveston...but that's Galveston. But these are beaches in Hawaii. Like from our friend's place, you can see water. They don't live next to the water, but you can see it. The beauty of the beach is right there but life gets in the way. The beach gets old. You get used to it. They don't go. Sometimes – we lose sight of the Gospel in the same way. The beauty of the Gospel and the truths...we know them but often forget them. We go on with our lives, get bogged down by hard circumstances and we forget that Jesus declares “You are Mine. I was raised from the dead so that you will have life too. You belong to me.” Let's not forget what Jesus has already won for us.

Our hope in death looks forward to a future reunion

- As we look back at what Christ has done, Paul then points our gaze to the future. Which brings us to our second point: Our hope in death looks forward to a future reunion. What Paul describes is not a vague picture of what might happen, but he gives the Thessalonians a pretty good picture of what will happen when Jesus comes back. This was something he was certain of as He says “by a word from the Lord.” He wants his

readers to know that this is for certain. It doesn't matter how smart you are. It doesn't matter how talented you are. When it comes to the future, everyone is in the same boat. No one knows what will happen...except God. So, Paul's argument is not grounded in speculation but in Christ Himself. We pick up in 4:15 to see what will happen.

- *4:15-17 - [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,*

- He encourages his readers by letting them know that the opposite of what they thought was going to happen. Thessalonians thought those who have passed away were at a disadvantage but instead they were going to have the advantage. Those who have passed will come first and THEN those left on earth will join Christ and believers who have fallen asleep. There will be this glorious reunion with everyone. No one who is in Christ will be forgotten and left out.
- As many of you know, Mike Holberg passed away last week. Oh, how fitting and encouraging to know we will get to see him again. BUT I wanted to share something he once said. One of the things I remember that Mike said when we were in East Asia – He was like – Wouldn't it be cool when you got to heaven if there was some sort of radar or maybe people would just light up – like all the people you've come across on this earth and if they were saved – like the 7-11 lady who we visited everyday and got to love on and share the Gospel with. It would be cool if one day we got to see her in heaven.
- What Paul describes here isn't just for loved ones who have passed (even though that's who the Thessalonians were grieving about), but Paul says the dead in Christ. This means all the seeds you planted back in high school or college that you never got to see the fruit from. If Christ has saved them – they will join Christ at this event. Paul wants to encourage the church, whether it be before Jesus comes back or when the day happens – you will get to see them
- But I can't help but to grieve for those who don't know Christ - those who die without Christ will be lost – If I may say something quick at Paul doesn't really talk about here specifically. I think a passage like this should spring us into action for the lost that we know. We are able to grieve with hope but not for everyone who has passed. There will be people who we don't get to see when the Lord comes back. No reunion. There are so many out there who are living with no hope, who won't be at this reunion. We know hope. We have the Gospel. We must go into the darkness with it. So let's do what we can today for those who have no hope. Christ has not come back yet – there's still time to invite others to this reunion. We have work to do today.

Our hope in death offers encouragement for today

- This brings us to our last point. Our hope in death offers encouragement for today. The last line in this passage, Paul says, “encourage one another with these words.” Encourage one another with what you see here. Encourage each other with the past and the future...today.
- The idea is that whatever has been said about our past and our future is to ground our hope and encouragement for today. I’d like to offer 3 ways that we can be encouraged by today.
- We encourage one another - One another – Paul calls them to be there for each other. We remind each other. He says encourage with these words. Tell someone what they need to hear when they’re hurting. Or – we just sit with them for a while. We grieve with each other. We tell each other gospel truths that speak and minister to our souls. We carry each other’s burdens. As Jason said last week – we are family. Paul makes it clear that encouragement is done in community.
- We must be informed – Let’s hold onto right theology and truth. At the very beginning of the passage – 4:13 Paul calls them uninformed. He needed to correct their thinking because they were losing hope. Paul believes that if they knew what he just told them then hope would be restored. They would be encouraged. The Night my dad died – I had to just keep listening to the song “It is not death to die.”

It is not death to die To leave this weary road
 And join the saints who dwell on high
 Who've found their home with God
 It is not death to close the eyes long dimmed by tears
 And wake in joy before Your throne
 Delivered from our fears
 Those who trust in You

The words were ministering to my heart at that moment. I had to hold onto that truth in those moments. I had nothing else to hold onto except Jesus saved my dad. It hurt but I was grieving with hope.

- We hold onto Christ - 4:17b - and so we will always be with the Lord. The very last thing Paul says before telling them to encourage one another, he concludes the future event by saying, “we will always be with the Lord.” In the end – Christ will be all we need and desire. We will spend an eternity singing the song of salvation. Christ will never become dull. Worship will never be boring. Christ will never disappoint. Our cup will always be overflowing. Christ will be all we need and desire – and this is true for even today. Christ is all we need and desire today and for all of eternity. Every morning after Astrid eats – we lay her down on a pillow and we just hang out. I give her a stuffed Hippo. She plays with it and then drops it to the side after a few minutes. Then I give her a stuffed llama. Same thing. Plays with it for a few minutes and she throws it aside. BUT then I stick my face in front of hers and she takes her hands and holds my face. And then she throws me aside. Just kidding. She doesn’t. I’d like to think she loves me! We can play and she won’t throw me aside. I was like she likes me and not her toys! Well...she likes me until mom walks into the room. But when it’s just me...she loves me! She doesn’t just like my

gifts..she likes me. It was one of those – love the gift giver and not the gift. I am the one who she like to spend time with. In the same way Astrid delights to hang out with me, our souls long to be with Christ. We will be spending all of eternity with Christ.

- He is the delight of our souls. Christ is all we need and desire today and for all of eternity. He is the one who fills our hearts in grief. He is the one who brings peace in turmoil. He is the one who brings hope when all seems lost. Christ is the one our hearts long to love – not the toys we just throw aside.

We have all that we need in Christ – and when it comes to death, whether that be the death of loved ones or our own death, the only place we can go for any hope is Christ. In Christ is the hope of the world. In Christ will be the peace in our sorrows. In Christ we can find joy in our grieving.