

Model Hope

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[0 : 00] In 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 it speaks about how Paul remembers the work of the people in Thessalonica, their work of faith and labour of love and steadfast hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just like you know there's a lot of people working a lot of effort around our church. Also there's a meeting that has been meeting fairly regularly for a number of months now and we had a fellow, one of the FIAC chaplains come and join us last Thursday night and help us to think about that some more as well. There's people meeting in the morning to pray before church, there's growth group leaders meeting, a running church, there's kids church going on. There are a lot of good things that people are involved in and serving in a ways behind the scenes and up front as well and so I want to give thanks to God for the work of faith and labour of love and steadfast hope that is evident amongst us. So well done, I'm sure it's pleasing to God, let's keep doing that together.

Now 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, come to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and we're looking at verse 13 through to verse 18. Here what God has to say to us here in this part of his word.

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. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 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. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with the 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. 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. Therefore encourage one another with these words. Now I wonder what the most wonderful occasion that you've ever been to is or was. Something that is a sort of a pinch yourself moment, I can't let that one go. It might have been at the fireworks, at the river fire and seeing the F-111 dump and burn. They no longer do that, it's that big C-130 flies through. It might have been the birth of a child, it might have been your wedding, it might have been, you might have been at the coronation of the king, I don't know. It might have been seeing Queen

Elizabeth on the Brisbane River. It might have been the recent talent and trivia night at St. Lucia Bible Church. Who would forget that? It might have been the recent amazing things that have happened in history around the place. Some people have been part of some amazing things.

[3 : 22] Man has walked on the moon, you know, you can put your finger up there and cover up the moon, but people have walked up there. Only a few people have been out of space.

But what if I was to say that none of these occasions will rate when it comes to what we will all be a part of one day? In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth and none of us were there.

We didn't see it happen. Around 2,000 years ago, Jesus, God's son, was walking around Israel, walking around Jerusalem. And it's possible that people can even walk in places where he walked today. But none of us were there to see his life and death, crucifixion and resurrection.

But come with me to Acts chapter 1 for a second. Come with me to Acts chapter 1. Turn your bowls back to Acts chapter 1 and come to see with me verse 6 and we'll see something amazing. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts chapter 1. Acts chapter 1, pick it up at verse 6.

So when they came together they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

[5 : 08] Now the expectation was that Jesus had risen from the dead and that the kingdom of Israel, God's kingdom, was about to break in, right? However, verse 7, he says to them, it's not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit's come upon you and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. That is, they would bear witness, right? That Jesus has risen from the dead as God's anointed king. And as they did this, people from all around the world would come to faith, right? And so become part of God's kingdom which is much bigger than just Israel. And this message has now gone out to the world and going out to the world.

And there's an urgency about this because one day Jesus is going to return and people need to be ready, right? For that coming. See verse 9, when he said these things, they were looking on, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. There's the promise. Jesus is going to return. He's going to appear. He's going to come the same way you've seen him go. And so ever since that day, the disciples of Jesus have been bearing witness to the resurrection of Jesus, testifying to the fact that he is a risen Lord of heaven and earth. And Christians, you and I, have been waiting for Jesus to see Jesus. He's going to come again. He will return in the clouds.

That's the promise. The disciples knew it and were promised it. And so are waiting for him to appear again. And it's that day that the Thessalonians were waiting for as well. Ever since they had turned from worshipping idols to serve the true and living God, they are waiting for the Son of God to return. The one who had risen from the dead and delivers them from the coming wrath.

That day will be like no other. It's called the parousia, the appearing, the arrival. On that day, God brings about the new creation.

And you and I will see it. We'll be part of it. That's astounding, I think. That's amazing. We will see it with our own eyes.

[8 : 09] On that day, the sky will be rolled back like a scroll. On that day, the dead will rise from the grave. On that day, we will see the risen Lord Jesus, King of kings, Lord of lords, glorious in might and power and authority and purity and righteousness and holiness and justice and majesty.

On that day, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. On that day, mouths will be stopped. On that day, nothing else will matter.

That will be the decisive day in the history of the universe. Nothing will be the same afterwards. Every man, woman and child who has ever lived or will ever live will be part of that day.

That will be the day when you will remember and I will remember for all eternity. How do I know that's the case? Because God tells me here in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

That will be the day that he eclipses the experience of every other day in history. And this is something to be informed about.

[9 : 27] To know about. You'll be part of that day. I will be part of that day. And you will not miss out on that day. God will bring those who believe that Jesus died and rose again into the new creation.

Whether we are alive at the time or whether we are asleep on that day. Whether we've already died. It's impossible to put it adequately into words.

It's beyond comprehension. But it's worth aligning our lives with. Because that is where the universe is heading. So 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

Paul's addressing the concern that was around. Come back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 now with me. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. Paul and God through Paul is addressing a concern that's around.

See verse 13. But we don't want you to be uninformed brothers about those who are asleep. That you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

[10 : 45] A concern at that stage was that Jesus hadn't returned yet. And some people have died. And the concern was around that those who had died and the real grief that goes with it.

Specifically it concerned those who had died that they would miss out maybe on Jesus' return. When he returned. There's the concern.

When Jesus returns and these people have died. They'll miss out on his return. The very thing that they were waiting for.

And they might even think that they might not be around in return. They might miss out on being in the new creation. So just a bit of an aside here now.

When someone dies there is real grief. Death is bad. There's nothing good about death. Death screams out that something is terribly wrong.

[11 : 46] Death shatters relationships and brings an end to our days on earth. It can't stop it. It's inevitable. And it's unwelcome reality to our existence. And there are two ways to grieve.

We're told in this passage here. There's a grief without hope. And there's a grief with hope. The Thessalonians Paul's writing to are those who become Christians.

Become followers of Jesus. Worshippers of the true and living God. People who are saved from their sins by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Right? And what God wants them to know and wants us to know is this.

Whether another believer in Christ dies. When another believer in Christ dies. Sure the relationship is over now. That's sad. Right?

For a while. And it's appropriate to grieve. Because the whole relationship is cut off. But we grieve differently, don't we?

[12 : 50] To the one who doesn't believe in Jesus. For we grieve with the real, substantial and objective hope.

Knowing that death is not the end for those in Christ Jesus. For all those who have died in Christ will wake up to the joy of being with Jesus forever in glory in the new creation with those who will awake alive when he returns.

Which is a certain hope for all who have trusted in Jesus. And that is a great comfort. God. Now, one of the best things you can do for your family is this.

Let them know that when you are asleep in the grave, they can be sure that you're definitely far, far better off.

You are safe in the arms of Jesus. Not because you're good enough for him. Not because you've done enough good things for him.

[14 : 04] But because you've trusted him to rescue you and save you from the coming wrath. So let your friends and family know that that's the case.

If that's the case for you. Now, the rest of the world outside of Jesus agrees without hope. They have no real reason for any hope at all. They might have a wishful desire.

They might have a whimsical wish for some existence in a better place. But in reality, they have no basis for it all. And the reality is they have no hope at all.

Everything they've enjoyed, accumulated, lived for is now over. It's all over. It's tragic. It's all over too soon, too quickly.

And they may well feel that they are just worm fertilizer or worm food at best. The atheist hopes, against hope, that there is nothing beyond the grave.

[15 : 17] But what if there is? What if they wake up from the dead and God does exist? And they are rightly found guilty of living in rebellion against him all their lives.

Now, it may be that you're looking for hope beyond the grave this morning. You've come here longing for meaning in life. Wanting something better. The futility of life, given the certainty of death, weighs you down.

Well, please come to Jesus and find hope beyond the grave and meaning for life. It may be that you're coming this morning thinking that death was the end.

But somehow the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and promised a return has stirred something in your life. Then please don't let that go. Please don't go home without talking about it afterwards.

Believe me, there's nothing more I'd rather do. So the question is, why do we trust in Jesus? It's like, why do we who trust in Jesus have hope?

[16 : 31] And the reason is in verse 14. We believe that Jesus died and rose again. Even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Even so, it follows in this manner through Jesus. That is, by what Jesus accomplished at the cross, right?

Through his sacrificial death, God will bring with Jesus. So Jesus is the first fruits, the resurrection, guaranteeing the harvest to come.

God will bring all who have trusted in him to glory. That's our hope. Jesus has been raised and so will be raised.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, there is no hope at all. If you stay dead, then there's no hope beyond the grave. And the great truth is that God will bring those who believe in Jesus, that they believe he died and rose again, he will bring those people into the new creation, whether they have died or whether they are alive when he returns.

[17 : 51] And now the reason this is built out even further, in the unfolding of things, verse 15 to 17, the very things we're waiting for. So have a look at these things that bring us really great true joy.

Jesus descends, we're told. Look at what Paul declares. He doesn't hope. He doesn't wish. He says without any doubt. It's guaranteed. Verse 15. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until his coming of the Lord, will not perceive those who have fallen asleep.

Now, by a word of the Lord, it could be that it's something that Paul had heard from Jesus and wasn't recorded in the Gospels. John chapter 21 speaks about lots of stuff Jesus said, but it wasn't recorded down.

Or alternatively, by the word of the Lord, could be a way of saying this is a solemn truth, right? Now, both are valid ways of understanding the passage.

Jesus returns and there's not one believer who will miss out on being part of it. Those who are alive at the time will not perceive those who have fallen asleep. Those who have died, fallen asleep, in Christ will not miss out.

[19 : 03] When Jesus comes for his bride, the bride will all be there. She won't have an arm missing. She won't have an eye missing. Every member will be there.

And this is what will happen. The Lord will descend, verse 16, just as promised in Acts chapter 1. He will descend from heaven with a cry of command.

The command of the king will issue the decree, just like he commanded Lazarus to come out of the tomb. He will command the dead in Christ to rise.

And they will. And it will be a triumphant return. The trumpet of God will sound. The victory's been won. It's the sound of the victory and the joy of tumultuous praise.

Jesus has come for his bride, the church. And the dead in Christ will rise. And then verse 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.

[20 : 10] And so we'll always be with the Lord. That day, what a glorious, fantastic day. A powerful thing to be part of. It will be infinitely more impressive than the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.

This is an event that God has been working towards since the beginning of time. The culminating event of creation to the new creation. And we will be part of it.

Those who have died in Christ will be given a resurrection body. And those who are still alive at the time will be given a resurrection body. And then, together we will meet the Lord in the air.

In the clouds. No believer will miss out on this infinitely impressive event. We will meet the Lord in the clouds.

That's it. I'm not quite sure how that will happen. But it will happen. It's not my guess or poor speculation.

[21 : 24] God has revealed this in his word to us through his apostle. And God will bring those who believe that Jesus died and rose again into the new creation.

Whether we've died already or whether we're alive at the time. Now, if you need to be encouraged, and who doesn't?

Or if you want to know how to encourage another believer, and why wouldn't we? This truth is one key way for that encouragement to flow.

This truth will give us courage to face whatever comes our way, however it comes, it's real courage, it's not alcohol-induced courage, it's not false courage, it's not wishful thinking.

Speaking these words to one another is the sure way to encourage one another. See verse 18? Therefore encourage one another with these words.

[22 : 36] In a world of frustration, trying to navigate the complexity of life, here is true north. This is true north. This is the reality of where the world is going.

Nothing in mankind, nothing, no one in mankind, nothing mankind can do, will stop it, will thwart it.

This is the way, we are, this is the place, this is the orientation of our life. we're waiting for the Lord Jesus to return.

And as we align our lives with that reality, then we can see things more clearly, what matters and what doesn't matter. We have a perspective on things which takes us beyond ourselves, for we haven't believed in vain.

And those who have died believing in Jesus, they will be there with him forever, they won't miss out. In the face of suffering for the name of Jesus, we see where we're going.

[23 : 48] We can remind each other of the certainty that because Jesus conquered death, we will too. It doesn't matter what mere man will do to us. God is bigger.

Jesus has got us. And we'll be part of that. How good is that? So let's continually lift our eyes, set our sights on what we're waiting for.

We're waiting for the coming of Jesus, and we will see it, we'll be a part of it. God will bring those who believe that Jesus died and rose again, into the new creation, whether we are alive or dead at the time.

And this is what makes Christian funerals, distinctly different, from non-Christian funerals. I mean, many of us went to Peter Nixon's funeral recently, and experienced it.

It's terribly sad that he's died, isn't it? That he's fallen asleep. Terribly sad. Tears were shed as relationships were lost, as loved ones were no longer with us.

[25 : 01] But at the same time, we could sing. We could rejoice as well, couldn't we? Because we knew, when we know that Peter will one day, rise from the dead.

Because we know that through Jesus, and all his accomplishments of the cross, Peter will be brought safely home. And if the Lord Jesus returns before I die, I will join the myriad of others who have died trusting Jesus, has risen from the dead.

And if the Lord Jesus returns before you die, and if the Lord Jesus returns before you die, you will join the myriad of other believers who have died trusting in Jesus, that Jesus will raise them from the dead.

And if the Lord doesn't return before you and I die, will we'll be raised with the myriad of others who have died in Christ Jesus, to join those who are alive at that time together, and we will join him in the clouds, as the new creation begins.

How good is that? Therefore, let us encourage one another with these words, and be encouraged by them, by this truth, and have courage to face whatever the world sends our way, in God's sovereign decree.

[26 : 31] Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for this great comfort, that no matter whether we're alive or dead, when Jesus returns, you'll bring us safely home to him, and we'll be part of this new creation as it begins.

And we pray that you help us to align our lives with this truth, and this reality, as we live in this world, waiting for the return of our Saviour. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.