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8

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1 Thessalonians 4:13-18



© 2022 Providence Church (Raleigh, NC) Sermon transcripts may be used for preaching and teaching purposes, but may not be published or sold. While generally accurate, parts of this transcript may contain errors. Providence reserves the right to correct and/or remove a transcript at any time. Well, good morning to you, Providence. It's great to see you. I hope you're well. My name's Dave, one of the pastors here, and I have the joy to teach you this morning. As a reminder, Brian is own sabbatical this summer, and so we're praying for he and the family. But if you have your Bibles, 1 Thessalonians. If you're a guest with us today, we say thank you as well. Joining us online, we say hello to you. If you don't have a Bible, there's one under the chair, so you're welcome to take that as a gift. We'll be in 1 Thessalonians, so 1 Thessalonians 4, and we're going to be looking at verses 13 through 18 as we're going to continue our study in this book. Also, I just want to mention to be continuing to pray for many teams that have been sent out. We are hearing great reports from many of them from Moldova to Costa Rica to Serbia to Czech Republic head out this week. And so just pray that God would continue to use those efforts all over the world as well.

As we look at this book, let's just be reminded really quick just what's going on. Who are these Thessalonians? There's a city called Thessalonica, that's in the northern part of Athens. And as Paul, this man who was radically changed by the gospel, would go from city to city to plant churches, he would travel, and as he traveled, he traveled up north to the north part of where Greece is and north of Athens, about 50 miles north of where Mount Olympus was, where many false gods were actually worshiped. And it's a port city that had hundreds of thousands of people, no gospel presence, no King Jesus presence. Paul would come, and he would preach, and he would share the good news of Christ. Some people believed. They believed in who he was.

They planted a church, and they would gather to be encouraged. Paul, of course, normally what followed him preaching the gospel was being persecuted. So he got kicked out of that area, made his way down to Berea, all down to Athens, eventually to the southern part of Greece, which is called Corinth, where he would establish a church and write a letter called Corinthians there. But when he was in Athens, he had such a heart for those that had come to faith in Thessalonica. So he sends Timothy back up to check in on them, in essence, to see how they're going. And when Timothy comes back down to give a report of what is taking place, he is so overwhelmed with how God is working and how they are.

Their faith is functioning. They're laboring in love. They're enduring in hope. And so, Paul then writes a letter to the people in Thessalonica, it's called the Thessalonians. That's the way he addresses it. He wrote two letters. That's why we have a first and a second. As he sends this letter, he sends it in way of really commendation. He's commending them. He's encouraging them. He's not correcting, which he does in some of the other books, maybe something that they're believing that's not true. From Timothy's report, he's writing back to them to just commend incredible faith.

And as we get to chapter four, what we're going to see is I think Timothy has also told Paul that there is some concern. There is a little bit of confusion because 2 Thessalonians too will tell us false prophets were trying to share things that weren't true. And so, what Paul does, and our section deals with really some pretty intense things. You got to love it when these verses fall on your Sunday to preach. Praise. So, the end times, the rapture, nice light things here, death, why people die, where they're going when they die, who's going to be able to be raised from the dead, and so all of these things are going on in our passage today. Again, if you

have questions about the end times, the email is brian@pray.org, okay. Just send it, be glad to answer those questions in August.

Here's what Paul's doing in the book, Paul in the book, he is so pastoral. We're going to see a few words that he changes up that we think it should be this word and Paul uses this word, because he goes into pastoral mode in such an amazing way that this text is not eschatological, which is a big word in seminary, it means the study of the end times. That's not what Paul is trying to do in this text. They're implications, we're going to address a few of them, but what he's trying to do, he's not trying to predict the end times, he's pastoring the church to be ready for the end times. That's what he's doing. He's leaning into these six verses and trying to bring hope and build hope, not at when it will, but that it will happen.

And it's amazing text. So I'm going to need help. You're going to need help. So let's pray. Father in heaven, thank You for today. Thank You for the opportunity to look at this passage, have it look at us, read it, have it read us. God, I pray that You would use this text to build remarkable hope and trust in Your Son King Jesus. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

Pick up in verse 13. Let's read this amazing portion of 1 Thessalonians 4, "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 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. 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."

Therefore encourage one another with these words. I was thinking verse 18 would be like some charts and graphs. No, encourage each other with these words that precede it. And so, the question in this word, how do you hold fast to hope even in the hardest of days? How do you do that? How do you hold fast with hope where hope would build, right, how do you hold fast even in the hardest days?

It was 2020 that was a year for all of us, was it not, that was hard and intense? It was extremely hard for my dad. My dad and mom live up in Youngsville. They're from Virginia, but they have been there for close to 15-plus years. My dad has pastored churches since he was 36. God radically changed his life. Sold the business, went into ministry, and pastored for 40-plus years. They just are celebrating this year their 60th anniversary. But my dad had bladder cancer in the spring of 2020, only to find out as he's getting treatments post-surgery some of the treatments through some chaos in the treatment got all over his body, the treatment did, where it needed to stay located in the bladder. It sent his body into shot. He almost died. Rushed him to the hospital, he was in the hospital for 10 days. On the fifth day in the hospital, he had a heart attack. Hello. And so, that

moved him over to Duke. Again, this is in the middle of COVID so we couldn't be in there with him. So he is in there, we're talking to him on the phone, et cetera. So they discover three arteries blocked, and they need to do open heart surgery.

Dad said, "Man, I've been through a lot with this other. Can I go back home for three weeks and then come back?" They did some things and they felt like it was okay. So I picked dad up and taken him back, and now he says, "Man, I don't know if I'll make it back for the surgery, so could we stop at Bojangles on the way home?" I was like, "Man, praise God." My people right there, these are my people I love in the country, this is the way we do things, we bring our own tomato that we grow in the garden to Bojangles and slice it and put it on the biscuit, right?

And so, me and dad, we're sitting there, he's killing this Bojangles biscuit, egg, and bacon, tomato, salt. I mean, it's big, and he's like, "Well, if I go home tonight, at least I had a great last meal, right." I was like, "Pop, you know that's right." And so, dad, just in those three weeks, I saw so much hope rise. It was hard, don't get me wrong. Matter of fact, it was really intense when we took him back to Duke to do the surgery for another 10 days in the hospital, because of COVID regulation, we couldn't even go in with him. So you imagine having to check yourself in by yourself to get triple bypass. I mean, mom and I are dropping him off at the door, and he's like, "Well, if I don't make it out, I'll see you in heaven." He goes, "Here we go." And he just walks in and checks himself in. It's crazy, right? But by God's grace, he's still alive. We celebrated his 80th birthday Friday night with some barbecue ribs. Hello, let's go.

So, listen, what's going on with pop? Pop, hope was rising in the midst of all the hard time. And this is what Paul says to those in Thessalonica. He wants to build a case for hope. He wants to encourage. Verse 18 is such a key text because he says, "To encourage each other." Followers of Jesus encourage one another in the midst of grief with grace-filled truth. And so, this morning, I'm just going to really quickly show you three truths about kingdom people, right? These people in Thessalonica, they're living, in a sense, as kingdom representatives of another kingdom. They're living in such a way as an advanced sign of the coming kingdom.

They're leveraging and living their life in such a way that they're showing people, although their head is in having, their feet are on earth, there's a kingdom that's coming the way we treat each other, the way we love, the way we persevere. The first truth I want to show you about kingdom people who are living as an advanced sign of His coming kingdom is this: kingdom people have confidence in the gospel as they grieve. Kingdom people, they have confidence in the gospel as they grieve. There's a hope that acts as an anchor. A boat doesn't hold the anchor, the anchor holds the boat, and the gospel does this as you face death. And oftentimes, death is the elephant in the room. It creates so much fear and yet it's the common denominator of all people.

Notice the text in verse 13. What is Paul trying to do around the concept of death? He's trying to bring clarity. He says, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers." So he's trying to bring some clarity around

confusion. Persecution, death had come, some of the believers had died. They weren't sure what happened to them. Did they miss the return of Christ? Are they in the judgment of Christ? What's going on? Notice what he does, he said, "Hey, first of all, I don't want you to be uninformed. I want to encourage you with these words about," now notice the text, "about those who are asleep."

Now think about this, he is so pastoral in choosing this word for sleep. He uses it three different times in just a few verses. And he uses it as a euphemism for death. It's a little bit of a softer word than death. Paul is giving some new categories for death. Seemingly, our worst enemy is now one of our best friends. He calls death sleep. Think about this picture, right? Just taking a nap, sleeping at night, it's refreshing. It's temporary. It's never final. It's peaceful. And Paul uses this word. If you're a recipient of this word, and you're confused about these things and the first thing you, oh, they're only asleep. No, they've died, but what is he. What he's doing trying to do is to show you that death doesn't have the final word because people wake up from naps. That's what he's doing.

Jesus does this for us as well in John 11. John 11:11-13, Jesus, they come to Him, "Hey, our friend Lazarus is dead." "And Jesus says, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. I'm going to go wake him up." And they're like, "Well, if he wakes up, he's going to get better." And Jesus says, "No, no, I'm talking about his death." Jesus uses this category because he knows because of what He is going to accomplish in His resurrection that death does not have the last word. So Paul, what he's not saying in any way is that, "Hey, if you're a Christian, hey don't grieve." No, no, no, he's giving you categories how to grieve. He's lifting our heads so we don't grieve as the world does where there's no hope.

Sleeping people wake up. He's building a case for hope in hard times. And death is one of the hardest, is it not? The number one fear in the world among seven billion people is death. The number one fear in the US is public speaking. Go figure. How you're doing? So think about this, the world death rate per day, 166,279 people per day. That's per hour 6,928 people this hour while we're together will pass into eternity, either with God in heaven or in hell. That's 115 per minute. Death is no friend of age. It's real.

And Roman 6 gives us a category why it's real. There's different means, yes, but Roman 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." The wages of sin, the payment for our sin against the holy God, God as creator who has creator rights has put the death penalty on humanity. He's just, he's righteous. He can do whatever he wants to do, He's God. Romans instructs us that the wages of sin is death, but then he doesn't leave us there. That's the bad news. The good news is that the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. So Paul, you feel it rising. His confidence in the gospel changes his perspective about the grave. Paul's confidence in the gospel changes his perspective about the grave.

1 Corinthians 15, it's 58 verses. I'd encourage you to read them and notice what he says in verse 54, he says, "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting. But thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord." I mean, think about it, "Death has been swallowed up. Where, O death... "Who talks to death, right? He's talking to it, "Where, O death, is your victory. Where is your sting at?" I mean, what is Paul doing in 1 Corinthians 15, right? Because he's just laid out, "Look, if there's no resurrection, then we're the most to be pitted. We're a liar. It's a mess." But if he has, then it changes everything, and he believes it. So what Paul's doing in this text, he's actually trash talking death.

Think about that. I played a lot of basketball back in the day before the knees went out. At the YMCA, I would trash talk people. Not walking with Jesus. It was a mess. It was bad. Arrogant, prideful, bad, right? Confession, good for the soul. I would trash talk, hit a three in somebody's face, drop a few words, right? It's the YMCA pickup at five o'clock at night. It not that impressive. This is impressive, right, when you trash talk death. That's what he's doing. He's like, "Listen, you don't have the last word, death." What is anchored? Where is his anchor of this? Notice in verse 14, look at verse 14, he goes, "For since we believe." Not that since we hope or since we think or since we feel, no, for, since we believe. Believe what? That Jesus died and rose again, the essence of the gospel. Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus, God's going to bring with Him those who have fallen asleep, that there's hope past the grave.

This is why this morning I want to encourage you this morning, I want to encourage you in understanding the gospel, right, that Christ has come to live the life we cannot live and die the death that we deserve, was buried and rose from the dead. And if you place your faith, if you're not a believer here this morning, we are so thankful that you're here, but we would encourage you to consider placing your faith and trust, admitting your need that you are a sinner and that you need Christ and forgiveness of sin and the hope of eternal life. There's no hope apart from Christ. And so, lean in this morning. This is why Christians at funerals will read texts like Psalm 23, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me." Think about this for the believer in Christ, the follower of Christ, take courage this morning, take hope and receive this this morning. For the believer, death, death is now sleep and a shadow. It's like sleep and like a shadow.

Think about passing by a large Greyhound bus, right? You're passing by a bus, and this shadow, you're standing right here. You're not standing right here. You're standing right here. What happens when the shadow hits you? The shadow hits you, it gets a little dark just for a moment, but it doesn't hurt you at all. This is what he's explaining that death is. Death, it's dark, it's a shadow. And what he is saying ultimately, right, is that the shadow may hit you, but it won't hurt you. The bus of God's wrath hit Jesus for those who are in Christ on the cross, and all that's left is the shadow. We pass through that into the presence of God when we die. And apart from Christ, the bus hits you.

Verse 14, listen, how are we going to pass into the presence? It's through Jesus. "God will bring through Jesus with Him those who have fallen asleep." The death of Christ purchased our redemption. The resurrection of Christ proves our redemption. So think about what Jesus says. Think about what Jesus says in John 14:6, "I'm the way, the truth, and the vine. There's no other way, there's no other way to the Father. No one comes

through the Father except through me." Now, some in our culture would say, "Man, that text is narrow, narrow-minded." Listen, what I say about that text, I'm shocked there's one way knowing the wretchedness of my heart. I'm shocked that He gave us even a chance to have one way to know the Savior.

You know what I think about John 14? I think it's mercy and full of grace that He's opened our eyes and opened our ears and moved in our heart to believe on Him. And that we have access to this good news in a world where three billion have no access. So listen, lean in this morning. Admit, believe, and confess. If you're not a follower of Christ, so maybe death has paralyzed your heart or maybe you're not even thinking about it. Let me encourage you to trust Christ this morning. Let us know about it through the Connect Card at the welcome desk. We want to follow up with you and walk with you. It'd be our joy to do that this morning. So kingdom people, they have confidence in the gospel as they grieve. But they also have certainty that Jesus will return as He said. Notice in verses 15 through 17, Paul says in verse 15, listen, he's making a declaration in one sense that this is a word from the Lord, "For we declare to you by the word of the Lord that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. "What's going to prepare, and He's going to come back and get us. And we who are alive will not precede those who have fallen asleep. So in other words, dead believers beat us home to heaven, and they beat us in rising up out of the grave if you're still alive at the return of the king.

But we're right behind them. Praise God. So what happens, what happens to a believer when they die? 2 Corinthians 5 helps us with this, says, "We are confident and satisfied to be out of the body and at home with the Lord." So the spirit is in heaven and the body is in the grave. And yet, one day we'll be reunited. This is what's happening. So think about the context in Thessalonica, what's happening? Loved ones are dying. Persecution is rising. Have they missed the return of Jesus? Has the day of judgment arrive? Paul's trying to bring encouragement for both those who had died, they're going to be resurrected, and those who are still alive when He returns, they're going to be rescued from the coming wrath.

He doesn't lay out charts and graphs in any way. The point of the text is not to identify the time of Christ's return, it's to be ready when He does return. Listen, Providence this morning, 23 and 27 of the New Testament books state He's coming again. For everyone reference to Jesus' First Coming, there are eight to His Second Coming. What is happening here? Listen, I think God wants us to live with a sense of urgency, an urgency in spiritual awareness and mission advancement, an urgency in spiritual awareness and mission advancement. He's trying to encourage them, not necessarily educate them with the end times. End times language always prepares you with hope from the Bible, but it propels you forward with the mission.

Notice a few things that happen. We're going to see four things that happen in these few verses, 16 and 17. We're going to see the return of Christ. We're going to see the dead raised from the dead, resurrected life. We're going to see the rapture, which I'll explain that in just a second. Yeah, I'm going to explain the rapture just a second. And that's what I just said. Not sure why I said it like that. And then the reunion with Christ.

So let's think about this, the return, notice in verse 16, what happens? Does He send angels to come get us? No, no, no. Look at verse 16, "For the Lord Himself will descend."

That's glorious good news. The Lord Himself, He's bodily resurrected in the heavens reigning, He will bodily descend back Himself to come get those who have died in Christ. They'll be raised from the dead. And then for those that are still there, they're going to be called up. But notice he says it in that order, verse 16, "For He'll descend from heaven with a cry of command, with a voice of an aria." These are all biblical connotations even from creation to the angel announcing the birth of Christ the first time to the trumpet in Exodus 19 of where He would blow it to the point to where the people would meet with God, he says, "And the dead in Christ will rise first. And then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up."

So we see the return of Christ. We see the resurrection of the dead, and then those who are alive will be caught up. Now, the word rapture, the word rapture's not in the Bible. We get it from a Latin word that comes from the Greek word rapture. The word literally means to be caught up, to gather, to get, to see. And this is what's going to happen at that moment. What do we know? We know He's coming. He's going to raise the dead first and then we're going to rapture to Him in some way. Some believe we go up, some believe we come back down. I know what the Bible teaches is He's coming. I'm going to hang out there.

Okay, now listen, listen, so many, what happens is they hope in some system. They hope in some type of graph or chart system that tries to explain everything. And our hope is not in that, our hope is in a person, not a position. Our hope is in Christ alone. And what has happened, unfortunately, there's so many misses in the name of Jesus, right? And this creates doubt, disillusionment with Christianity, confusion, and chaos. I mean, think about 1988, 1988 was a long time ago. I actually graduated high school that year. Hello. And so, the book came out 88 Reasons Why Jesus Will Return in '88, and they laid it out. They wrote a book. I mean, who published that, right? And so, they were off, so they said, "I think it's '89. Okay, we missed it by a year." Don't publish things when you miss it by that far.

Then what happened in 2011, May 21st, May 21st, I mean, it was a huge day where people literally, they sold their houses, they quit their jobs, they cashed in their 401s. I mean, they just said, "This is going to be the day." They actually would make signs, and they just walked the streets of New York City. They paid for billboard signs. They wrapped RVs, like multiple RVs. I'd love to be in the room to decide. Who made that decision? I'm thinking, "Send that money to church planters overseas, right? Don't buy the wrap that goes around the RV." And what the wrap said around the RV and on these poster boards, this is what, unfortunately, it said, "Judgment day is coming this day. The Bible guarantees it." And people just laughed. They said, "Oh, we missed it, it's actually October of that year." I'm like, "Please stop. Stop."

Here's what the Bible guarantees, the Bible guarantees that you and I have sinned against the holy God. The wages of sin is death. Christ died for our sins, was buried, and He has been raised from the dead not to taste death ever again, to live forever, and He's coming back to get us. That's what it guarantees. And so, live in

light of that, leverage your life for the sake of that message with urgency of spiritual awareness and mission advancement. Let's study the end times things. Yeah, yeah, yeah, let's study those with some clarity, but let's be on mission with certainty of what He has accomplished.

One professor says it like this, he says, "Regarding the time, nobody knows the time, so don't waste your time trying to guess the time, but be ready at all times because Jesus could come at any time." There it is, summed up, right? Because 2 Corinthians 4 says it like this, "Knowing that He who was raised from the dead, the Lord Jesus, will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence. Because of His resurrection, we have hope for our resurrection." 1 Corinthians 15 says it like this, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." The first fruits, I love the farmer language there because as the seed dies and goes into the ground, it brings produce. In essence, Jesus was the first to come from the dead to never die again, validating, giving us hope that all that are in Him will be raised as well. And then there'll be a reunion, will it not, unlike any other. Kingdom people, listen, they have a confidence in the gospel as they grieve. They have a certainty that Jesus will return as He's sad. But last as kingdom people, they have a comfort, for they will live with Christ forever. Notice in 17 what he says, "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with Him in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so, and so," listen to the text, "we will always be with the Lord."

"And so, we will always be with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these words, we will be with the Lord always." The conquering resurrection of Christ and the coming reunion with Christ is the basis of our hope. It fortifies, it solidifies a hope that rises and it's living. It's active. Hope rises when you anticipate living with God forever and the mission moves forward. This is why Peter would write in 1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According," look what it's according to, "According to his great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

This is why we sing songs like It Is Well. This is why we sing songs like It Is Well by Horatio Spafford, who lived in that Chicago fire of 1871 and survived it and saw 17,000 buildings destroyed in Chicago, \$4.5 billion in today's amount lost. Two years later, he puts his wife and four daughters on a boat headed to London. At sea, that ship hits another one and they sink. Some survive, most died. His wife sends a note and says, "Saved but alone." He quickly makes arrangements to get on a boat to head over there. And as he is sailing across the Atlantic at the very place they believe the boat went down with his daughters, he penned the song you just sung, "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, it is well with my soul."

You know why he can say it is well with his soul? Is because he'll say, "Oh, the bliss of my sin, not in part but the whole, was nailed to the cross forever." He had a hope because his sins had been forgiven and he had offended a holy God. And whatever the lot was from there, anything outside of hell is grace. Anything outside of hell is grace. That's why he would go on and say, "Lord haste the day when the faith shall be sight, the

clouds be rolled back as a scroll. The trump shall sound and the Lord shall descend. Even so, it is well with my soul."

So this morning, if we had a one on one at a coffee shop, no distractions, and I asked you this question, "Is it well with your soul?" how would you respond to that? It can be well. The Christian worldview doesn't remove persecution, heartache, death. It just has a category for it. There's a lot of hope to go through it when you're in Christ. And so, let me encourage you in ways we close to trust Christ, to trust Him this morning. Nonbeliever, this morning, not following Christ, trust Him. We don't know death. Death is no friend of time. We don't know.

Believer, this morning, keep trusting Him. It's hard, we don't know where you are, with everything that's going on, but keep trusting Him. Hold firm to His promises for today. Let's take His Word. Let's take Christ at His Word. Let's just not lean into speculation. Let's take the scripture, eat it, devour it, read it. Let it shape and form all of your worldview. And let's tell someone, let's tell someone, maybe it's four that you're trying to reach and praying for, your city or your world, but let's tell someone about His First Coming so they'll be ready for His Second Coming. Let's tell somebody about His First Coming so they'll be ready for His Second Coming, as I pray, we're going to have the opportunity to encourage one another. One of the best ways to encourage one another is it not just to share in the Lord's Supper?

And so, we're going to do that today. And before I do that, I'm going to pray. But as I pray, the team's going to come, and they're going to sing a song over us with just rich biblical truth that will minister to your heart no matter where you may find yourself this morning. Let that just be a way to minister to you, and then I'll lead us in the supper. But let me pray. Father in heaven, thank You for this morning to be able to come and read Your Word and look into these things. Thank You that You remind us and You encourage us that as a people of Your kingdom that confidence can grow in this gospel, that it not only saves us, but it also strengthens and sustains us. And that there is some things that we don't know that we wish we did, but there's other things that we do know, and I pray that You would help us to lean into those things, God.

The certainty that You will come back and the certainty that not only that You will come back, but that we will be with You forever and ever and ever. So God, as we listen to these words, use them to comfort, God. Use them to comfort us, to strengthen us, and prepare us. We thank You for this meal, God. We thank You for the bread and the cup that we'll take in just a minute, that serves as such a sign of encouragement of everything that You accomplished and that You will return. We pray these things in Christ's name.



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