

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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People Of The Kingdom

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8

TITLE

Hopeful In Tears

SCRIPTURE

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18



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Well, good morning, Providence family. It's a joy to be in the house to worship with you. For those who don't know me, my name is Jarrick Oxendine, and I have the privilege of serving as the Student Pastor here at Providence. I'm not Brian, I'm not Dave O., but I'm excited to be here to open God's Word and to dive into scripture together.

Before we get started, I wanted to share my heart of, I just wanted to thank you, Providence, for being personally so invested into pouring into the next generation. So about a week ago, there's a picture on the screen that I want you to see, is that we took 130 of our students to summer camp, to Ocoee, Tennessee. And you Providence church family, either grabbed prayer bracelets or you wrote letters of encouragement to our students, and you were committed to encourage them and to pray.

And I just want you to know that the gospel was faithfully proclaimed, that the Spirit moved, that many students understood what it meant to be a kingdom citizen, to live in the life that God has given us, but to make much of Jesus in our lives. Friendships formed, and new habits of reading God's Word were cultivated and created, but Providence, you have been such a part of this. And so, I just want to say thank you for everyone who was directly involved with it, but also indirectly in praying for us while we were away.

So if you have your Bibles, I want to invite you to turn to 1 Thessalonians, chapter four, we're going to be reading versus 13 through 18. If you don't have one, a Bible, you can find one in the chair in front of you. And if you don't have a personal Bible at home, we want that to be a gift for you. And if you're a guest in the room or online, we want to welcome you.

And we've been going through our serious people of the kingdom, and in studying the people of the kingdom, today our focus is going to be looking at people of the kingdom have hope and hardships, have hope and suffering, have hope and tears. And I am extremely honored with this task to preach from God's Word, but this passage that you'll see is not an easy text. And so, before we get started, I want to invite you to pray for me, pray for our time, and pray for the Lord to reveal Himself. So let me pray.

Father, we do thank you for this morning. We thank you for the gift of life. We thank you for the very breath that you've given us to come into this room, to sit and to be with each other, but also to spend time in your Word. God, I pray that we would be amazed at your Word, that you've preserved it for us to encourage our hearts, and that's exactly what this passage does. But God, I pray that your Holy Spirit would give us understanding. I pray that your Holy Spirit would stir affections for you. I pray that your Holy Spirit would remind us of the living hope that we have in Christ. And God, I pray that your Holy Spirit, in this moment, in this room and online would encourage the saints and the hearts of many who are suffering right now and going through hard times, that you would encourage the weak and encourage the faint-hearted, and God, that we would worship you all the day more because of it. And so, Father, thank you for this time. And would you bless it? In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

So if you're not familiar with the book of 1 Thessalonians, it was written by Paul to the church of Thessalonica, and you can still visit the modern day city in Greece. And it was there that Paul preached the Good News of Jesus Christ to where some repented and believed in the gospel, but also some rejected the gospel, that Paul was there, preaching the gospel for three to four weeks, and you actually see that he was beaten, attacked, and forced out of the city.

And so, Paul has to leave and head down to the city of Berea. And then he moves to the city of Athens, and it was there at Athens that Paul begins to reflect on his time with the Thessalonians, that he remembers what the Lord had done. And he sends burdened out of love, he sends Timothy to go and survey, to go and check to see how these Thessalonian believers are doing. And Timothy reports back and says that they are expressing this work of faith, this labor of love, and steadfastness of hope, that they are persevering.

And it's with joy and affection that Paul writes this letter, not to condemn the people, but to commend them, to exhort them to keep doing what they're doing, to keep living out the faith, but to do it more and more. And for me, as I read 1 Thessalonians, there is a theme of perseverance that I want you to see throughout this book. We've already talked about it before, that the word persevere means "to continue this course of action, to continue when there's difficulty, hardship, or even opposition." I want you to think of marathon runner, of someone who's trying to finish this race. There's hardship, there's difficulty, but perseverance is the one who endures to the end.

And Paul, throughout this book we've looked at, he wants the Thessalonians to persevere in truth, to persevere in purity, to persevere in persecution, to persevere and loving and serving and praying for each other, to persevere in being diligent to do hard work, living as a witness before the watching world. And today, you're going to see that Paul is encouraging these believers to persevere through hard and confusing times, because we also need to recognize that these are new young believers, and just like any new believer, they have a lot of questions.

And there's two specific questions that Paul is going to address in this text today. What happens to Christians when they die? What happens at the return of Christ? See why this is going to be a hard text? But Paul, in his instructions to these Thessalonians in his passage, it's more pastoral even though we will discuss eschatology. We will discuss end times, but Paul is not trying to predict the end times, he's pastoring this church to be ready for the end times.

So my goal is not to explain different theological positions of the return of Christ, but to simply encourage us that Jesus is coming again. Providence, Jesus is coming again. And Paul is saying, "God's promises for tomorrow gives us great hope for today." And that's what he wants these believers to know.

And so, let's read this passage verse, starting at verse 13. Paul says this, "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 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, for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with a voice of an archangel, with a sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise. 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 truths.”

There’s three truths that I want you to know about the people of the kingdom from this passage. If you’re taking notes, you can write this down. The first one is that kingdom people have confidence in the gospel when we grieve. Kingdom people will have confidence in the gospel when we grieve. So it’s going to be, at some point in our lives, that we’re all going to experience the death of a loved one, that during the time, it’s easy to be flooded with emotions and questions. It’s a time of sorrow, it’s a time of confusion, it’s a time of shock, and it’s even a time of fear. And you can look into the world that the most number one fear that we see in the world is death.

But you have to ask the question why? It’s because death reminds us that we are not in control in our lives, that death erodes the very confidence and foundation that we can build our life upon. The Bible tells us that we are all guaranteed to die. Romans 6:23 says this, is that, “The wages of sin is death.” And all of us, according to Romans 3:23, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So because of our sin, we will die. And yet, in knowing this truth, the conversation of death is like an elephant in the room. Is a morbid and taboo topic that no one wants to think about, much less talk about, but yet every single one of us will experience it. And there was a website that gave statistics to looking at death, and it says per day, 166,279 people died per day. Per hour, 6,928, per minute, 115, 1.2 per second. In the US alone, there are 2.4 million funerals every year. This is the reality and certainty of death that confronts us 24/7. And this text provides evidence for us that these Thessalonian believers, they have just experienced the shock and sorrow of a death of a believer. And so, they are struggling to reconcile this recent death of fellow believers, but also this future return of Christ.

In 2 Thessalonians, we have indications that there’s even false teachers who are adding to their confusion. And so, Paul here is trying to help respond to this shaken and fragile church that they should have this clarification about what happens to a believer when they die. And so, Paul wants to give them a God-centered perspective. So if you look back at verse 13, Paul says this, “We do not want you to be uninformed about those who are asleep. So simply, we need to inform you that true knowledge will inspire true Christian hope.” And so, Paul uses this phrase, that they are asleep or have fallen of sleep. And we see this three times in verses 13 through 15. And Paul, he’s using this word sleep as a euphemism for death. So euphemism is a phrase that is often used to soften the blow of an expression. For example, instead of a boss telling their employee that they’re fired, they’ll say that they’re let go. Paul is personally purposely using sleep to help the Thessalonians realize that death is not the end for believers. He is softening the death blow to the believer.

And Jesus does the same thing in the gospel of John. I want you remember the story of his friend Lazarus, that we know Lazarus was very ill and he would eventually die. And we see that Mary and Martha, when Jesus comes, “If only you had been here, Jesus, my brother would not have died.” That many people came to mourn with them. Jesus, himself, He was moved and wept over the death of His friend. And one keynote that Lazarus died is that when Jesus asked to take away the stone before the tomb, Martha responded, he had been dead for four days, and now there was an odor. And I love how the King James Version says this, “Lord, by now, he stinketh.” Lazarus was dead.

But look at John 11:11-14, see what Jesus says. “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him.’ His disciples replied, ‘Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.’ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but His disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So He told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead.’”

So just like Jesus describing death as sleep here, Paul is trying to allow these Thessalonians to rest in the same truth, that sleep is temporary. Sleep implies that we will be awakened. And based on the fact that believers will be awakened, Paul says we should grieve differently from the world because we have hope.

But you have to ask the question, what is the foundation of our hope? How will we be awakened? Why are we able to grieve differently? And this is where you look back at verse 14. This is the reason, “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.” Paul reminds the believers of what has happened so that they would have confidence in what is happening now and what is to come. He anchors their hope in the historicity and life of death and resurrection of Christ. And I constantly remind our students that for me, the resurrection of Christ is the one crucial piece in the Jenga puzzle that holds together this structure. And if you take that one piece away, the tower crumbles. And Paul clearly reminds in 1 Corinthians 15, you can see this list of reasons. If the resurrection is not true, this is what is true of us. That Christ has not been raised from the dead, that our preaching, you listening to me right now, is in vain. Our faith is in vain. We are liars because we’re misrepresenting God. We are still in sin, and we are to be the most pitied out of all people. And Providence, if we have a dead Christ, we have a dead gospel.

But in the same chapter in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul gives us assurance that according to God’s Word and fulfilling the scriptures, Jesus lived a perfect life you and I could not live. He died the death that you and I deserved. He was buried in the grave, but three days later, He rose victoriously, conquering sin and death, and He appeared to many as the Resurrected Savior. Paul says in verse 5-8, that “He appeared to Peter, and then he appeared to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though even some have fallen asleep.” There’s that phrase again. “Then he appeared to James, then He appeared to the apostles, and last of all, He appeared to me.”

Jesus’ resurrection is a historical event, seen by eyewitnesses, recorded for us to have confidence in the present and the future, that the death of Christ purchases our redemption and the resurrection of Christ proves

our redemption. And so he says, “For since we believe in Jesus. And it is through Jesus that God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.”

This is why Paul makes a clear distinction between believers and unbelievers, that believers have hope. It doesn't mean that we don't grieve, but we grieve differently because you have hope. And so, if you're a believer in this morning, you have great hope. When a believer dies, we know that according to 2 Corinthians 5:8, “To be away from the body is to be in the presence of the Lord.” That your existence does not end in death, but that your physical body goes to sleep in the grave, but your spirit continues to exist. And when Christ comes back, He promised He will bring with them those who have fallen asleep, and your body and your spirit will be reunited to have a glorified, resurrected body. Believer, you have great hope that as frightening as death may seem, it can either hurt you nor destroy you.

I like to think of this example of a bus. That for a believer, death is now like asleep or like a shadow. If you imagine a Greyhound bus that's hurling towards you, and imagine it not hitting you, but going around you. You are only covered by the passing shadow. And when the shadow hits you, it only gets darker, but it doesn't hurt you or destroy you. It's because for the believer, God's wrath is like the Greyhound bus hurling towards us. But instead of us taking the blunt force and impact, God places that wrath on Jesus at the cross. And simply, we are left with the shadow, that we pass through this shadow to enter into the eternal presence of God. This is why we can shout with all the saints, “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your sting? Death, where is your victory? Thanks be to God who gives us victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ.” Believer, you have great hope. But if you are not a believer this morning, Paul is clear to say, “You have no hope apart from Christ.” Is that the wrath of God remains on you and it is inescapable, and the bus is heading towards you. And when you die, you will be separated for eternity, tormented in hell. That's the reality. That's the truth that the Bible reminds us.

But this is also the truth that you need to hear this morning, is that Jesus gives us the invitation to remember that He is the resurrection and the life, that the one who believes in Him will live even though they die. Whoever lives by believing in Him will never die. Do you believe this? If you are not a believer, will you believe this? Will you admit your sin before Him, repent and confess Him as Lord, believe in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection on your behalf, because this is the way only way you will have real hope. And so, for all of us in this room and online, let's trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the only basis of our hope. Paul is reminding Thessalonians here to look back at the cross, to receive confidence, and have hope in the gospel.

But now we change our attention, and Paul in later verses of 14-17, he wants these believers to think about what is to come. So the second truth that I want you to write down is that kingdom people have certainty that Jesus is coming again. Kingdom people have certainty that Jesus is coming again. And I love how fascinating this is to think about it. But Paul was with these believers for three to four weeks, and in that short time, we have evidence, and it implies that Thessalonians, they were able to learn from Paul about the resurrection

of Christ, about this future return, that Christ will return, gather His people to Himself, and every believer should be ready for that moment. So he wanted it to be in the three to four weeks, in the forefront on their minds. Guess what? It should be on the forefront of our minds.

And typically, this is where many people are intrigued and fascinated by the Second Coming of Christ, but we know that there's different interpretations of verses and passages, and that Christians differ over the nature of the signs and the time of the Second Coming. But whatever your theological position is, it shall lead us to a great and stronger belief and certainty that Jesus Christ is returning.

And Paul encourages us to take him at his word. If you look down at verse 15, Paul says, "We declare this to you, by the Word from the Lord, that in the midst of these false teachers," Paul is assuring that Jesus himself has given him this Word that he will return, that whatever he's saying is not his opinion, that Jesus has made promises and He will keep his promises. Think back to John 14, Jesus says, "Let not your hearts be troubled, but believe in God and believe in me, that there are many rooms in my Father's house, and I'm going to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and I will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also."

So He is, from Jesus's mouth, going to return. But Paul also gives them confidence to take Jesus at His word by saying that no Christian dead or alive will be left behind or excluded from the return of Christ. If you look back at verse two 15, he said, "Those that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. So that those who died, they will be resurrected at the return of Christ, and those who are alive, they will be rescued from His coming wrath, that all believers will share in the glorious blessing of His return and find safety and security."

And so, I know there's so much that we can say from this passage, but again, there's four extraordinary events that we see take place in this passage that describes this return of Christ. The first one that I want you to see is this return, that verse 16 says, "The Lord Himself will come down from heaven." That in the past, for most of the history that God has sent various messengers through prophets and apostles, and sometime angelic messengers to accomplish His task. But right here, for this return, Jesus Himself will lead this triumphal entry. Picture that. And this Second Coming will be loud, visible, and victorious, that no one will mistake and it this coming, and everyone will see that it is known to all. So the return.

Second event is the resurrection. Verse 16, "The dead in Christ will rise first." That this time when He returns, it will be a great day of resurrection. And it's important to remember even the order of resurrection, that when you look in the Bible, Paul says that he's the first fruit of the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15 says this, "For as by a man came death, and by man has also come the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ, all shall be made alive, but each and his own order. Christ, the first fruit, and then at His coming, to all those who belong to Christ."

I want you to think about a farmer. So I have uncles who are farmers. Farmers check their first fruit of their crop, and by doing so, it gives them an indication of the nature and quality for the rest of the crop. So for Jesus to say that He is the first fruit of the resurrection, is to give us a foretaste of the resurrection that is to come for all believers.

2 Corinthians 4:14 says this, “Knowing that He who raised the Lord, Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and bring us into His presence.” And that this resurrection day will be an assurance that we have that we will receive a new and resurrected body, and that we need to remember whenever it comes to studying eschatology this end times, you should remember this. I love how Pastor Professor Glenn Kreider says this, “Our hope is not found in the charts or graphs or theological positions. Our hope is found in the person of Jesus Christ.” It’s the person. It’s Him. He’s the only reason that we can be resurrected. So return, resurrection, and now we get to the Rapture.

Look at verse 17. It says, “We who are still alive will be called up together with them.” Now it’s important to know that the word rapture is not in our English concordance, but the Bible clearly gives evidence that describes the word rapture, which means to snatch up, to seize, or to carry off. And this shouldn’t frighten us to use this word as a church, because when we look at other words, for example, the word Trinity, it describes God. But yet, this word is not found in our Bible, but we know that God is the triune God, three in one.

And so, what is the purpose of this word rapture and why we say this, is that all of the redeemed, at one time, will be transformed, brought up, into the personal presence and fellowship with God and all believers. “And that in the twinkling of the eye, the last trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised to an imperishable, and we all will be changed,” Paul says.

And I love how regarding the time and nature of the Rapture, one New Testament scholar and professor, Ed Henson, who just passed away this past week, he says this, is that, “Bible prophecy is written not to scare us. It is written to prepare us. It is not written to frighten us, but it is to invite us to come to Christ while there is hope and time. And regarding the time, nobody knows the time, so don’t waste your time trying to guess the time, but be ready all the time because Jesus could be coming back at any time.” So when you think about the Rapture, this is what needs to be the foundation of it. So return, resurrection, Rapture.

And the last event that you see in this passage is this reunion. Verse 17, it says, “And so we all will be with the Lord forever,” that there is going to be this grand reunion of believers. Think about this if you’re a Christian, that those who’ve lost your spouse, your parents, siblings, friends, and children, this is a great comfort because if they have trusted Christ, someday, you will face and need this comfort that Jesus is returning. There will be a grand reunion of all believers. The dead and alive will be reunited, never to suffer or die again. And I’ll cover more details in a second about that.

But what should we do with all these details and thinking about all these events? This should propel us to move forward in action and responsibility. One pastor says this, is that “The promise of His return could come at any moment was intended to create a sense of expectancy and urgency and obligation for the church



to be busy with things that mattered. The promise of Jesus is coming then is to be a reason to be hopeful and a call to be fruitful.”

So an application, let's daily long for the return of Christ and look for others to tell about His return. That we have certainty that He's coming back. Let our lives be marked with hopefulness and fruitfulness to reach our four, to reach our city, to reach our world.

And the final truth that I want you to write down to learn about the people of the kingdom is that kingdom people have comfort, for they will live with Christ forever. This passage starts with confusion and hopelessness and grief, but it ends with understanding and comfort. The end goal, verse 17 and 18, Paul says, “Remember that we will always be with the Lord.” There's comfort. “But as we wait for that return, encourage one another with these words, to fortify our hearts that we will dwell with the Lord forever.” That we will worship with the redeemed church for all of eternity, that we should have the vision of Christ's return and this reunion on the forefront of our minds to keep us anchored, to keep us comforted.

And I had a sweet moment with my grandmother as she passed away. One of the last times that I spent with her, I actually read Revelation 1:17-18 18. And in Revelation, John has a vision of Christ. And we were expecting my grandmother to pass away soon, and I love how John says, “When I saw him, he fell at his feet as though dead. And then, Jesus placed His right hand on him and said, ‘Do not be afraid, for I am the first and the last. I am the Living One. I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and Hades.’”

And I told my grandma, which was the sweetest thing, because of her faith in Christ, this is the Savior that she was about to see and spend eternity with. This is the joy and peace in knowing what is next. So for the Christian, we do not need to despair death. We grieve with hope. And we can say through the most difficult moments that it is well with our soul. It is well.

And I don't know if you know the details or backstory behind that song, but It Is Well was written by a man named Horatio Spafford. And in his life, a lot of turmoil, a lot of difficulty. The first difficulty that he experienced is that in 1871, Horatio and his family lived in Chicago. And if you didn't know, there was a Great Chicago Fire. It destroyed 1700 buildings that killed 300 plus people, that the cost of it in damage was \$222 million. That was in 1871. Today, it would be \$4.5 billion. And he would lose everything in that fire.

But that wasn't the greatest tragedy in his life. Two years later, it was when his wife and his four daughters were on a ship to England, and through a storm, the ship ran into another ship, and all four of his daughters died of that then. And his wife, saved, sent a word to him that she was safe, but alone. And so, he gets on a ship and heads to be with his grieving wife. And as he passes the part of the ocean where his daughters died, he penned the song, It Is Well. And you can hear it in the lyrics, “When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like see billow roll, whatever my lot, you have taught me to say it is well with my soul.”

But you have to ask the question, “How can he say it is well with his soul?” He goes on to write, “Let this blessed assurance control that Christ has regarded my helplessness estate and He has shed His own blood for my soul.” That’s the only reason someone can say it is well with their soul. That’s the only reason that someone could have joy and peace in life. And this is what we boast in as believers.

And so, in application, let’s respond in gratitude and encourage one another until Jesus returns. 1 Peter 1:3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. That 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.” And so, we respond in gratefulness and gratitude of what God has done for us, but we also encourage one another of the living hope that we have in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

And Providence, one of the ways we get to remind and encourage one another is by taking the Lord’s Supper together. And so, at this time we’re going to have our worship team come out and they’re going to sing over us. And as they sing this song, I want you to seek the Lord in prayer. And I want you to reflect over His grace and mercy towards us, to examine our lives, to confess sin, knowing that God is faithful and just to forgive us, and also to remind us of the living hope we have in Christ. So as they sing, we’re going to spend time just meditating over these truths. They’re going to sing over us and then we’re going to take the Lord Supper, so let me pray.

Father, what wonderful news that we have in Jesus Christ, that He truly is the only hope that we have in this life and in the next, that God, through Jesus, you have not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation. And whether we are awake or sleep, we know that we will live together with you for all of eternity.

And so, God allow these truths to be rooted so deeply in our hearts, to believe in you, to trust in you, that when we do find times of hardship and suffering and even the death of a loved one, God, that we would be anchored in these truths. That you would remind us and recall our attention to Jesus Christ, that He is alive and that He is coming back, and in His presence for all of eternity, there will be no more sin, no more death, no more pain. And so God, we fix our eyes to you. And we say thank you. Thank you for the blood that was applied on our behalf, Jesus, for your body and your blood that was shed on the cross so that we can say, “It is well with our soul because you have regarded our helpless estate.” And so, Father, as we listen to the words of these songs, as we come to you and prayer, God, would your Spirit come for our hearts this time? We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.



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