

We will be with the Lord forever

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Opener: 'Day of the Family' – confusion over Christmas/ confusion over Advent

Context: New sermon series: The Day of the Lord. Advent = 'coming' or 'appearing' Time of preparation. Can't be preparation for Jesus' first coming: 2000 years ago!

It's the time of preparation for his Second Coming.

A lot of that preparation is just about understanding what it is all about. What's going to happen? Will it be good news or bad news? What will happen to us?

And as we look at our first passage today, we see that Jesus second coming gives Christians great hope.

Big Question: How does it give us hope?

Part One: v13-14 – It gives us hope because it is grounded in the resurrection

13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. **14** We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

First, some background to this letter:

Thessalonica was a city in Macedonia, modern northern Greece. It was a largely pagan area but with some Jews.

Paul and his co-missionaries had preached the gospel there and enough people became Christians for them to actually form a thriving church! Most of them were from non-Jewish backgrounds. Paul and friends had to leave, but they stayed in touch by letter and by Paul sending Timothy back to them.

As they've stayed in touch, Paul knows some of the things that are troubling them, and so he addresses some of their concerns about death and dying. They know Jesus is coming back and will take all his friends to heaven, but what about those who die before that happens? Will they miss out? Death is something that we all face, even though we don't like to talk about it.

But Paul shares a truth with them here in ch 4. It's a truth that means they don't have to keep wondering about these questions. And it's a truth that gives us all hope in the face of death.

The truth is here at the start of v14: **We believe that Jesus died and rose again.** It's the truth that is at the very heart of Christianity! If Jesus did not rise from the dead, he was a hoax, a liar, and we are still dead in our sins! But he did rise. Paul met him! The other apostles all talked and ate with the risen Jesus!

And because this is true, the next bit follows: **we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.**

Jesus has not only beaten death for himself, he has beaten death for us. For all who are in him, who trust in him as saviour and Lord. It doesn't matter if they have fallen asleep/ passed away/ kicked the bucket.

And so we do not grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

Jesus' own resurrection gives us the sure and certain hope of our own resurrection

Illustration:

Funerals of Christians vs non-Christians.

Sad but joyful vs sad and despairing

Not surprising that v13-14 are quoted in the Anglican funeral service!

Or pastoral visits with those who are about to die. Fear vs assurance, even longing!

App'n: Have you given much thought to your death lately? (Great conversation starter!)

How sure are YOU of going to heaven? On what is your certainty based?

If anything other than Jesus, the son of God who lived/died/rose for you, there's a hole in your boat! But if it is based on Jesus, it is an unsinkable hope.

But there's more! In order to encourage his Thessalonian friends, Paul talks some more about how they will be raised to heaven, and it's all about Jesus' second coming. We read about it in v15-18...

Part 2: the second coming gives us hope because we will be with the Lord forever!

¹⁵According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words.

There is clearly hope for all those who are on Jesus' side when he returns. But what about those who have already died? Do they miss out? Certainly not! In fact, Paul says that they will have pride of place! The dead in Christ will rise first! V16.

Does it matter if they have completely decomposed? Been cremated? Eaten by sharks?

Not in the least! God can make planets by speaking. He has promised us all wonderful resurrection bodies. Still us, but wonderfully different. (read more in 1 Cor 15)

So how will it all happen? V16-17 [read to break]

It sounds weird, but it sounds pretty amazing! What we have here is a wonderful procession, a victory procession, where the risen, conquering king comes to his people and leads them to the place he has prepared for them.

He has beaten sin. He has beaten death. He has beaten cancer, arthritis, dementia, selfishness, laziness, hatred, and every other evil that is part of our existence down here!

He is taking us to the place the apostle John saw in the Revelation, the last book of the Bible:

³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev 21:3-4)

And so we will be with the Lord forever.

None of us can tell just how good heaven will be. And none of us knows how good it will be to know God face to face. To know him without the things that get in the way. But he has promised that it will satisfy the deepest longing of our soul, and eternity will not seem long enough!

Illustration: Meeting Dr Catherine Hamlin – enriching, I couldn't get enough

Or Heather, my soul mate. Can't imagine life without her.

Application: Being with the Lord forever, wonderfully enriching, satisfying, life-giving – FOREVER!

Read it/ meditate on it/ ¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words.