

Spiritual Hope

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Preacher: Pastor Andrew

[0:00] Believe it or not, we are just two messages away from the end of 1 Thessalonians.

! We have this morning's message and then one more next week.! It's amazing that we're now 10 messages into this and it's been a great time of being reminded of the truths that we find here and encouraged through this process and I hope that you have felt the same.

I wonder though if there may be some things, there are at least two more Sundays between now and Christmas, our Christmas program in the beginning of December 16th and then we have a Thanksgiving service on the 25th of November and I'm going to do something, do some exploring here.

I have messages planned for those weeks but I wonder if maybe there are some things that we touched on over the past 10 weeks and we'll touch on this morning and next week and you would say, you know Pastor Andrew, there's just, I wonder, can you spend a little bit more time on chapter such and such verse such and such and answer this question for me.

We've got two weeks that we can do that and send me a text, send me an email and I'll contemplate whether or not we do that, okay? I'm thinking particularly of the subject that we're going to be talking about this morning and next week as we describe our future hope especially in relationship to the coming of the Lord Jesus and there's a lot of awareness about this issue, a lot of curiosity about this issue and maybe you'd have some questions that we can dig into a little bit more.

[2:11] But before we jump into the message, I do want to just let you know that another individual in our body, Monica Cannon, if you don't know who that is, use your directory app, you can see her face and her family, her dad just died this morning so please keep her in your prayers.

Let me read our passage this morning and I want to open it up with a story. So please turn with me if you would to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. It's on page 987 if you're a guest with us and I'll begin in verse 13 and we'll be moving through verse 18.

Here's what it says. 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 a voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

[3:49] 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. What does a life that is dominated by that truth begin to look like?

If you live with the ever-present reality of the coming of Christ, what would be different today, and what would be different this week, and this month?

Would there be any changes that you would make if you knew that tomorrow Christ would take you to be with him in glory? Would it perhaps change the way you spend the afternoon?

Would it perhaps change some of the conversations that you will have with your family? Would it create a bit of impetus in your heart and life to want to pick up the phone and to make a couple of calls to people that you love who you know do not know Jesus as their Savior?

[5:06] Would there be some broken relationships that you would want to mend, or at least to begin the process of reconciliation? Would now, all of a sudden, those pressures that weigh down on your life that seemed so important yesterday, would they begin to lose the burdening?

I love this story of a girl by the name of Brooke Brunkowski. Francis Chan talks about her in his book, Crazy Love.

He says that Brooke Brunkowski was a 14-year-old girl who was absolutely in love with Jesus. You ever know high schoolers and junior highers who have that kind of passion for the Lord?

That was Brooke. She spent her babysitting money on Bibles. She stockpiled them in her garage so that any opportunity that she had to give a Bible away to an unsaved friend, it was right there at the ready so that she could hand it off.

There were pastors in the area who heard about her zeal for the Lord Jesus and did these little Bible drives, and so boxes of Bibles were carted to her house and stockpiled away so that she could, they could continue to fan the flames of her passion for the Lord Jesus.

[6:36] Brooke wrote an essay when she was 12 years old. Here's what it says. 12 years old. I'll live my life to the fullest.

I'll be happy. I'll brighten up. I'll be more joyful than I've ever been. I will be kind to others. I will loosen up. I will tell others about Christ. I will go on adventures and change the world.

I'll be bold and not change who I really am. I will have no troubles, but instead help others to see their troubles. You see, I'll be one of those people who live to be a history maker at a young age. Oh, I'll have moments, good and bad, but I'll wipe away the bad and only remember the good. In fact, that's all I'll remember, just good moments, nothing in between, just living my life to the fullest. I'll be one of those people who go somewhere with a mission, an awesome plan, a world-changing plan, and nothing will hold me back. I'll set an example for others.

[7:40] I will pray for direction. I have my life before me. I will give others the joy I have, and God will give me more joy. I will do everything God tells me to do.

I will follow the footsteps of God. I will do my best. Twelve-year-old wrote that. Well, during her freshman year of high school, she was traveling with some friends to a movie theater, and you guessed it, an accident took place, and her life was snuffed out in a moment.

People from her public high school flocked to her funeral. There were over 1,500 students and teachers and members from the community who came to her funeral because of the profound commitment of joy and hope in God.

And when the gospel was shared and people were invited to come forward to give their lives to Jesus, more than 200 students and teachers came to the front to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior and also get a gift from Brooke, a Bible that she had been stockpiling away so that she could help to encourage their faith in Christ.

Usher's gave those Bibles to each of those individuals. And in one day, Brooke Brunkowski was used as a resource and an instrument of God to lead more people to Christ than many of us will lead to Christ in a lifetime at the age of 14.

[9:26] You see, her short life, although snuffed out prematurely, as we would say, was lived with such intensity, with such devotion to God that God used her life to absolutely transform her immediate surroundings.

And somewhat prophetically, God used her example at a young age to impact the world. Not only in California, in Simi Valley, but now as her story is captured in this book, Crazy Love, to perpetuate that example, that life that we get to speak about a bit this morning and use as an example of what it looks like to be a person of hope.

A person who is dominated by the reality of the truth that we're going to look at this morning. What might life look like?

What might God do for you, in you, and through you? If every moment of life was captured, captured and saturated by hope.

Hope in Christ. Hope in His coming. The problem is that there are so many things that get in the way. There are so many things that distract our supreme hope, the hope that we should have in God, and distract us from that hope, and either dilute the hope in us, or begin to carry our hopes over into things that really don't matter.

[11:12] Those superficial hopes, those secondary hopes, however great they might be. And they keep us from really making a difference in the world, because we set our hopes on the things that don't matter, the things that are fleshly, the things that are here, the things that are temporal, instead of setting our hope, and setting our eyes on the things of God, the things of Christ.

So how do we reclaim hope? How do we begin to nurture a passion for hope? How do we fuel up ourselves with this hope that God desires for each of us to have, that can carry us through the moments, the difficulties of life, that can help to catapult our spirituality.

For those of you who have felt stagnant in your spirituality, maybe have felt unfruitful in your life, what kind of difference am I really making?

Perhaps the key for you this morning is to recognize not only the significance of hope, but how to fuel hope in your lives.

So this morning I want to encourage us as we look at the significance of hope and begin to recognize how hope is reclaimed.

[12:39] We begin this morning in verses 13 to 15, and we see here that the fuel of hope is the knowledge of God. The fuel of hope is the knowledge of God.

Notice he says in verse 13, but we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others who have no hope.

The starting point for hope, and really the starting point of the Christian life, is true knowledge of God. We're going to look at this a bit more in just a few moments here, but I want you to understand that the kind of knowledge that Paul is talking about is not just the information dump that we're so familiar with.

It's not just an awareness of the facts. It's not just an accumulation or an articulation of doctrine and theology. It doesn't matter whether or not you're a scholar.

It doesn't matter if you can prove every point. What really matters is that you embrace the things you know, and you have pulled them into your life, and you have activated them as a means of behavior, as a means of true faith.

[14:04] Last week, we saw that Paul made a case for the significance of knowledge. He has done that throughout his letter, but particularly last week, in chapter 4, verses 4 and 5, he says that each one of you know how to control your body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lusts like the Gentiles who do not know God.

That is the fundamental distinction, the difference between truly knowing and just having some intellectual assent to knowledge.

Because the root cause of deficiency in the Christian life is a lack of knowledge, not the lack of information, not the lack of reading and having memorized the Bible, not knowing the stories and just having some sort of facts and figures, but the kind of knowledge that moves us to action, the kind of knowledge that helps to guide our experience with him.

Notice that Paul says, I don't want you to be uninformed about something in particular. I don't want you to be uninformed about those who are asleep. And what Paul is referring to here, of course, is not just people who are taking a nap or people who are down for the night.

He's talking about individuals who in the vernacular of the day have died. And he wants them not to be sad. He wants them not to be discouraged.

[15:43] There was a prevailing view, a prevailing fear in that culture that those who had died had actually missed the resurrection. That those who had died had their life snuffed out and now there wasn't an opportunity for them to participate in the coming of Christ.

Speaking of the pagan world, William Barclay points to a couple of individuals who kind of share the running theme of the day.

One historian says, once a man dies, there is no resurrection. Another figure says, there is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope.

And that was the prevailing opinion of the day. And Paul wants to correct that. He wants the church to live in the reality of understanding. And that understanding is anchored in the knowledge of

Jesus' resurrection.

It's anchored in the knowledge of Jesus' resurrection. Let me read this for us again. He says in verse 14, For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

[17:08] Come on, Thessalonica. Don't you know the gospel? Come on, Thessalonica. Don't you recognize that the Jesus that you have placed your trust in is the God who died but also rose again?

Don't you appreciate the fact that those who are in Christ will also now experience the benefits of that resurrection too? That if you have rested your confidence in the truth of the gospel, that you're resting your confidence in a resurrected Savior, not a dead one.

And because he is alive, then it has definite implications for us as believers. Because he is a resurrected Lord, then we know that not only is there a resurrection of Jesus, but there's also a resurrection of us.

Know that the knowledge of our resurrection as well. That you have participated in Christ and as those who have participated in him, you will also experience the joy of resurrection.

And that was just built in to the gospel. It was one of those things that they should have understood. He says here in these verses, in verse 14, which rings a little hint of interest, he says in verse 14, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

[18:47] But then if we drop down to verse 15, we see that those who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

Then in verse 16, for the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry, with a command, with the voice of an archangel, with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Now time out here, Paul. Hang on. What is going on here? Does Christ bring with him those who are dead? Or does somehow they get resurrected? I don't understand what's taking place here. Are they there? Are they here? And how do they meet? What is taking place? What is the truth? Well, I want to point to a couple of verses. The first is found in 2 Corinthians 5, 8, and 9.

It'll help us to understand what Paul is referring to. He says, We are confident, yes, well pleased, rather, to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

[19:55] Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to him. Paul is alluding to the fact that those who have died in Christ, those who have believed in Christ and have trusted him as their Savior, will also then be resurrected immediately.

Their spirit will then go to be with God in heaven. But here in Romans 6, verse 5, we also understand this reality. For if we have been united with him in death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

What does that mean? That means, if Christ's body was resurrected and not just his spirit, that there will be a bodily resurrection of the saints as well.

So although they are in heaven, their spirit is there with God at the moment of their death, now there is going to be a reunion that takes place. A full resurrection, as it were.

Body and spirit joined together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and then be reunited with the other believers throughout history in that respect.

[21:14] Understand the knowledge of Jesus' resurrection. It is essential to the gospel. And when you know what Jesus has accomplished for you, you will begin to appreciate and understand that you will participate with him in a resurrection just like Jesus'.

His bodily resurrection will be a resurrection we will also experience. So how does faith in resurrection in your life give you hope?

I was thinking about this. What is the difference between a knowledge of a truth and the actual participation in that truth?

Any of you who have been to the Grand Canyon might understand or know this next picture.

There's a, it's kind of hard to see, but there's this bridge, this glass bridge, okay?

And it's 4,000 feet above the ground. And the only thing that's holding you up is this pane of glass, okay?

[22:28] Now, here are the statistics. It's hanging 70 feet out from the end of the cliff, 4,000 feet to the ground.

Apparently, apparently, now I just have a hard time with it, apparently it can hold 70, count them, 70 747 airliner jets.

70? 70? It should be able to hold me up, right? But I don't know about you.

I don't think I'm going on that bridge, okay? I'm sorry. I'm just going to let every one of you experience that, okay? Now, maybe you have seen this YouTube video, okay?

This is a glass bridge over, I think it's 3,000 feet over something. And here's this guy walking on this glass bridge, and you may not be able to tell, but it's actually cracking underneath him, okay?

[23:24] So these panes of glass are cracking underneath him, and he is jumping up to the rail so that he can save himself from this fall. Now, I don't know enough about this particular picture, but apparently they've actually built into this glass a fake fracture.

And that's why the camera is at just the right angle, so it can get the response of the individuals who are seeing this glass begin to crack underneath them.

It's like this perfect shot, and this is not by accident. It's something that I think has been fabricated.

Thanks a lot. I'm not...

Give me back my admission fee. I'm sorry. I'm going to have to pay for hospital bills now. But this is what Peter says for us to do.

He says in 1 Peter 1, verse 13, Therefore, prepare your minds for action, and being sober-minded, this part is what I really want to draw your attention to, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[24:47] Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. You begin to do this moment by moment, decision by decision, step by step, priority by priority, conversation by conversation begins to be guided by the full weight and resting on the hope of His return.

It will change everything about your life. Absolutely everything about how you live. Tomorrow will be a different day if we begin to recognize the significance not only of the truth, but we begin to put this truth to work in our lives.

Resting fully on that hope, the hope of Christ, not the hope of our savings account, not the hope of our position or title, not the hope of our relationships, not the hope of our good appearances, but the hope on Christ alone.

That will change everything about how we live. So the fuel of hope is the knowledge of God, but we find here in the next few verses, the fuel of hope is the promise of God.

It is the promise of God. Look with me in verses 16 and 17. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

[26:30] 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.

Promise number one is the promise of the future return of Christ. promise of the future return of Christ. Remember that time Jesus had resurrected, and Jesus was now spending time with His disciples.

They're having some fellowship with one another, and they have made their way to Galilee, and He saw them there around the Sea of Galilee, but now they've made their way back to Jerusalem, and Jesus is talking about this future day.

when He's going to be coming again. And He tells them in Acts chapter 1, verses 9 and 11, He says, And when He said these things, they were looking on, and Jesus was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight.

While they were gazing into heaven, as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and they said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?

[27:44] This Jesus, who was taking up from you into heaven, will come in the same way in which you saw Him go into heaven? Any mystery, then, why Jesus would come in the clouds?

Any mystery why that would be the rallying point, the place of reunion with His people? No, not when you begin to understand that God will fulfill His promises in just the way He planned them. But notice a couple of things here. First, I want you to notice that it is the Lord Himself who will come. He will not send a representative.

He will not allow someone else to enjoy the culmination of the victory march that He intends to have. And His coming will not be subtle.

It will not be silent. But it will be visible, obvious, and unavoidable. Paul says, Don't worry, Thessalonica. Don't worry.

[28:55] You can't miss it. It will be so obvious, you will not be able to miss. So why descend from heaven? Why not just snap your finger and poof everybody up into heaven around the throne?

Well, because God has intended for this to be visible. And why come with a shout? Well, because He wants it not only to be visible, He wants it to be audible.

And why a trumpet? So the purpose of the event is clear. It's definitive declaration to signal God's crowning achievement of redemption, of purchasing for Himself and reclaiming for Himself those who are saved.

Now, thousands of years later, through the patient endurance of God, He finally comes to claim His prize. will only the Christians hear?

I don't believe so. I think the world will hear and see this event unfold. I think all we have to do is look at the baptism and we understand that those who were there at the baptism heard the Father from heaven say, This is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased.

[30:18] and the disciples at the transfiguration when the resounding voice of the Father spoke, This is my beloved Son whom I'm well pleased to hear Him, they heard the voice, they fell on their faces, and they were blown away.

And at the very end of Jesus' public ministry, we find in John chapter 12, Jesus is speaking about His desire to glorify the Father in John 12, 28 and 29.

He says, Father, glorify Your name. Then a voice came from heaven, I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.

And the crowd that stood there and heard it said that it thundered. Others said, An angel has spoken to Him. It is my conviction that the world will see, the world will hear, it will be unmistakable, this day of triumph for God, that everyone will be able to observe in some.

Those who are in faith will be able to participate. And then the dead in Christ will rise first. Nothing can be said definitively in terms of the timing of this and how long will it take for them to go, and then we're going to be caught up together with them.

[31:43] But it doesn't really matter because the text is establishing the priority. What is the priority? The priority for God is the resurrection of those who are dead first.

And I believe it's because they demonstrate the full, the full effects of what He has come to do in terms of resurrecting the Spirit and the body together.

His victory over all of the effects of sin on a life. The emphasis is placed on the power of the resurrection.

They are the ones who represent the full effects of the gospel taking place through their life. Why a bodily resurrection?

Why is this so important? Because the full redemption of the entire person is taking place. God is a champion over the full effects of sin.

[32:51] Not just the spiritual parts of life, but also the physical parts of life. He's victorious over every consequence. He erases it once and for all.

No more death, no more decay, no more groaning, no more struggle, no more imperfection. In Christ, it has all been reconciled.

It's all been changed. Yes, there is a promise of His return, but there is also a promise of reunion. Reunion with Christ, and that's what we see next.

Notice the destination. Notice what it says. Verse 17. We who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds.

What is the purpose? To meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord.

[33:49] The destination is not just the clouds. The destination isn't just reunion with other saints. The destination is reunion with Him.

As spectacular as this event may seem, however dramatic, however mysterious, and however the implications run wild in our imagination of what it would be like here on earth when bodies and people are transported immediately out of whatever situation they're in.

book series have been written about this. Planes crashing, cars going off the edge, and clothes just lying there unoccupied. All of these spectacular things, but the wonder of this event is not what happens here.

The wonder of the event is what happens there. Reunion with Him, the One who has done it all.

The reunion will be like no other reunion. The homecoming will be like no other homecoming. And don't imagine that this reunion is one-sided.

[35:03] But on God's end, this is the culmination of centuries of sovereign fulfillment which have finally come to fruition.

God will finally receive His children home. And for a God who celebrates over one person who has come and repented of their sin, imagine now millions upon millions now captured back to reunion with Him.

This will be a glorious day for us, but it will also be a glorious day for Him. Don't overlook the joy of our Savior. Imagine the celebration that will come.

There's no wonder why this is done in such spectacular display. This is His crowning achievement. The purpose of redemption that has been planned since the beginning of time and now culminates in Christ capturing us up and us being able to enjoy salvation, the final effects of salvation with Him. finally, the fuel of hope is delight in God. The fuel of hope is delight in God.

[36:19] We get that from verse 18. Notice with me here, here's what it says, therefore, encourage one another with these words.

Encourage one another with these words. Now, let that sink in just a little bit. Remember what the situation was in Thessalonica.

Remember what this church is going through. Remember that it is dominated by persecution.

Remember that this church is experiencing the effects of suffering and certainly experiencing the devastation of all that that affords.

Children and families that are being threatened, perhaps imprisoned, fathers who are being carted off, the income and the ability for a dad to minister to his family and now his kids are left on the street destitute, trying to beg for their existence.

So what is the hope that Paul gives to them? Comfort each other with these words? It is not that God is going to fix their immediate situation.

[37:37] It is not that God is going to take away their suffering. It is not that God is going to make everything better and it's not that God is going to give them this abundance existence of things and safety from their environment.

No. They will still move through the suffering. They will still experience the anxiety and the difficulty.

But there is a future hope that Christ is coming and will capture them out of this world.

Would that be hope for you? That can't be hope today if you're putting your hope in anything but Christ right now.

If Christ is not your delight if he is not your source of joy then that would not be hope. That would just be agony. You mean I have to wait till Christ comes before all of this is fixed?

the only way for that to be hope is if Christ is your joy. Paul puts it well this way in Philippians chapter 2 when he says for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

[39:08] Is living for you captured by Christ this abiding relationship that we've been talking about all year? Is there this settling of your heart and a full weight of assurance and resting on the hope of his future coming?

Kind of like Brooke Bronkowski who oriented the trajectory of her life it was dominated by that kind of hope and it saturated every decision at least that we know of the decisions that she made and God used her hope to change her world.

May that be true of us. Let's pray. Thank you.