

The Gospel And: Grief

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 October 2024

Preacher: Rev Donald M Macleod

[0 : 0 0] page 9 to 8. Just one verse for us. 1 Thessalonians 4, page 928. 1 Thessalonians 4 and verse 13.

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.

We're sticking there for now. Looking at verses 13 down to verse 18. And then later on, turning back to John 11. Remember last week we said we're coming to a brief pause in our series looking at the Gospel ABCs.

We stopped last week. Now, for a few weeks, there's a new series. And the new series is looking at how the Gospel deals with life.

If we say the Gospel is sufficient, the good news of Jesus is sufficient to deal with all aspects of life, in just a few weeks, it's good for us to see what that actually means.

[1 : 1 1] So today, our title would be The Gospel and Grief. The Gospel and Grief. Now, very aware that this is a topic that affects every single one of us.

Every one of us, in some capacity, knows what it is to grieve. And right from the start, it has to be said that not every one of us has felt the same grief in the same way.

The obvious example is myself. I have never, as of yet, haven't yet lost a parent. So I can sympathize.

I can sympathize. I feel sorry. I feel pain. I feel sadness. I will cry with you, those who have lost a parent. But I can't come alongside you in the same way.

I haven't felt that level of grief yet. Simple as that. And that's why we come to God's Word. For every one of us, our experience of loss and grief is different.

[2 : 1 4] For God's Word speaks to us clearly. Whatever, as it were, level of grief we may be in. And grief is not all about death. We'll touch on this later on, perhaps in our series.

But grief is also a reality where we can lose someone. And they may not be dead. But we've lost them because they have walked away. They've lost them because the relationship has broken down.

And that grief is just as painful at times. Just very briefly for us today then. What does the Gospel say about grief? We can focus first of all on our verses here in 1 Thessalonians.

And then use the account of Lazarus as a case study. To see how the best comforter. How the ultimate counsellor. How the best friend.

How Jesus deals with those who are grieving. And see what we can learn from that. First of all then, 1 Thessalonians. Verse 13 downwards.

[3 : 1 5] Verse 13 down to verse 18. Just a few points from this for us. Again, there's nothing here that's particularly new for us. And we're very careful that this is not just an academic exercise.

Academically, we can analyse grief. We can go through the mental processes of grief. The stages of grief. I'm not a psychologist. I'm not a trained counsellor.

My job today is to take us together to God's word. And see what the word says to us about grief. And there'll be things I won't say today that I should say.

If you forgive me for things I say in a wrong way. That hurts and affects the way you're grieving. Take it all to God's word. First of all then, to note in verse 13.

As we read this section. But grief is not bad. When Paul writes, he's writing to this church. Who are concerned, it seems, about what's happening to the brothers and sisters who have gone before them.

[4 : 20] Those who have died. And there's all this teaching and they're all confused. And it's quite clear that they've asked Paul. They've asked for help. With what happens. How do we deal with the emotion of losing brothers and sisters?

And one thing to say just now is that much of this sermon today, it is directed towards those of us who love the Lord. And who have lost those who die in the Lord.

And Paul, in response to this church's question, he says to them, we do not want you to be uninformed. That's brothers and sisters.

We said this before in our series, this before. Looking at Paul's letters. Brothers. It's brothers and sisters. It's folks, really. It's a colloquial word that was used for just the whole gathering.

Folks. Paul was saying, brothers, guys, we might say badly today to take in everyone. We do not want you to be uninformed about those who are asleep.

[5 : 23] That you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. There is nothing wrong then with grieving. Paul does not say you must not grieve.

You must not be sad to those who you know have gone to be with their Lord and their Saviour and their friend. He doesn't say Christians, as you mourn for a passed away loved one who loved the Lord.

You must not grieve. You must not be sad. Grief, it's not bad. Grief is right. Sadly, many of us have heard and we've seen the tendency to equate grief and equate how we should respond as Christians to grief with what you might call stoicism.

That kind of stiff upper lip. Then just get on with it. Move on. It's happened. Let's crack on now. Let's get over it. They're dead. They're gone.

They're with the Lord. We have to keep on going. I hope you've never heard that from anyone else. But if you have, I am sorry. And if you have, it is wrong.

[6 : 33] The gospel's response to grief, it is not stoicism. It is not this, just get on with it. That is from the world. That's from the world. What we see here is something much more beautiful.

Much more gentle. The Lord has given us a full range of emotion. And there's nothing wrong with our emotions. There's nothing wrong with the way God has designed us to have feelings and thoughts and emotions.

Even emotions we think are always bad. Scripture says they're not. Anger, for example. There is a place for anger. When there's wrong being committed. When someone has wronged us or wronged someone else.

When we see death and destruction in the world, we rightfully should feel anger. But the Bible says, be angry, but what? But do not sin. Feeling emotion is fine.

It's letting that emotion then lead us. That's the problem. Grief is one of the God-given emotions. As we see, as we live in a fallen world. As we see the reality of loss and pain and sadness and darkness.

[7 : 44] It hurts. And feeling that hurt. And being affected by that hurt. It is no sin. It is how God has made us.

He's given us a full range of emotions to live through. I'll say in a second, our saviour felt the same emotion. If he is able to grieve and weep.

Then so should and so must we. In fact, all the way through scripture. We see the prophets. We see the Psalms. If you think, you know, I'm being too much here.

Turn to any of the Psalms. David and the other psalm writers have no problem writing of how much their emotions. And how high they're feeling them.

And how strong they're feeling them. We sing the Psalms. We read them. We pray for them perhaps. And they are full of big expressions of joy also. Yes.

[8 : 42] Of betrayal. Of heartbreak. Of loss. It's right. It is good for us to feel the full range of emotion.

It's how the Lord built us. So grief we see here. It is not bad. It is not wrong. But also for the Christian mourning the loss of a brother or sister in the Lord.

Grief is also not a fear of the unknown. It's not a fear of the unknown. But we do not want you to be uninformed. About those who have fallen asleep.

When death takes place in our experience of a loved one. There is darkness.

There is loneliness. There is horror. There is that gnawing. Just unfillable void of loss isn't it? And it's there.

[9 : 43] And it sits in your stomach. And it's just there. And you try and get on your life. But it's still there. That is there.

Because it's we've lost someone we love. But Paul is saying with all that emotion, yes. But don't be uninformed. Don't be uninformed.

We don't fear the unknown. Brothers and sisters. Yes. As we mourn the loss of one who loved the Lord. Perhaps, yes. We mourn. We miss them dearly.

We miss them desperately. But we're not crying into an abyss saying, Where are they now? What has happened to them now? Are they lost?

Are they gone? Paul says, No. Those who have gone before us. Who are asleep as it were. Those who have died knowing the Lord. And loving the Lord.

[10 : 38] They are with the Lord. Paul says, Don't be uninformed. Well, what does he inform us?

What reassurance are we given? Verse 14. We see this clear logic of Paul. There's steps here in verse 14. Which gives us reassurance.

First of all then, the first step is. We know and we believe that Jesus died. Verse 14. For since we believe that Jesus died. He died.

We know the whole account. The whole narrative. He died. Taking our place on the wrath of God. Taking on himself the full wrath. His righteousness covers us.

He became sin for us. We know what took place on the cross. Jesus died. The next logic then is. Jesus rose again. We believe Jesus died.

[11 : 34] And he rose again. And then because these two things are true. We know that those who die in the Lord. Will also then rise again.

That death is not the end. That there is hope. There is life. There is eternal beauty. Ahead of them. Because he died. And because he rose again.

Those who know him. Who love him. Who die. Will also then through the same power. That raised him up. With themselves one day soon. Also be raised up. Again.

To life unending. To life eternal. Yes we grieve. As Paul says. Our grief is not hopeless. Brothers and sisters.

We have a hope. Our grief is not uninformed. Our grief is not hopeless. Our grief. We must feel it.

[12 : 31] We must go through it. It is good for us to do it. But behind it all. We have the sure and certain knowledge. That we are grieving.

As for our brother or sister in the Lord. We are grieving for one. Who is now with their saviour. We don't grieve. As those who have no hope.

Death of course is abnormal. And at times grief will. Grief will obscure our understanding of these theological truths.

It's one thing preaching it. It's another thing understanding it. And thinking it. And feeling it. As you're going through it. It's why we need the church. Why as brothers and sisters. We have to come alongside.

And come around those who are grieving. And bring them into the promises of the gospel. Death is abnormal. It's not how it was meant to be. It's not how it should be.

[13 : 29] It's why it feels so wrong. It feels so strange for us. Don't think for a second. Myself or any other minister. Doing funerals. Don't think for a second.

It's just a job. A part of a job. In Graver. Such a small gathering of us. You attended. You were there for every single funeral.

And all of it. Quite literally. By the end. Of my time in Graver. Hundreds of funerals and wakes you'd seen. It never changes the horror.

And it just feels wrong. Because death. Death was never how it was supposed to be. We feel that. And we know that. So if as Christians.

Who are mourning the loss of a Christian. We say we're not without hope. Then what does it look like. To be comforted. What does it look like. To comfort those. Who grieve. Well then we have our case study.

[14 : 32] Back now in. John chapter 11. Where we see as we said. The ultimate comforter. Doing the comforting work. The ultimate friend. Doing the work.

Of a friend. John chapter 11. Just turn back with me please. Again. We won't go through the whole narrative. The whole account. We've covered this before. We've preached this before.

We're just to remind ourselves. Just throw out certain points. That show us. Some tips for us. Some lessons for us. How we can come alongside those who grieve.

That shows us what Jesus says. How Jesus is with those who are grieving. One thing to note. In verse 4 of chapter 11.

This is in many ways. An extraordinary situation. As verse 4. As Jesus says. When Jesus heard of the death of Lazarus. He said. This illness does not lead to death.

[15 : 28] It's the glory of God. So the Son of God may be glorified through it. We have to remember that. When we see the account of Lazarus. The question then is. Well why does Jesus not still.

Raise people from the dead. In our experience today. If he could do it then. Why can't he do it today? In one sense. This is a very special occasion. Lazarus is raised from the dead.

To prove. To show. The power. Of our saviour. Over death. We come. To this account of Lazarus.

And we see it. With the privileged eyes. Of our saviour. We see it from the perspective. Of Jesus. But we know ourselves. That every other single day. Of our lives. Every other single death.

And mode of grief. We encounter. We come at it. From the perspective. Of the sisters. Don't we? Of Martha and Mary. This one time. We see it.

[16 : 26] Through the eyes of Jesus. As Jesus tells us. That he will raise Lazarus. From the dead. As we see it take place. But every other death. We see. In our own experience. We are Martha. We are Mary.

We just see. We see the death. And feel the pain. And sadness. But still. In some ways. Extraordinary.

But in some ways also. This is a man. Who's died. Who's left behind. A mourning. Grieving. Family. And although Jesus is here. Doing something incredible.

For Martha and Mary. And the rest of the family. And the friends. And the crowds around him. Lazarus is dead. And they are in great pain. And we see the glorious.

Beautiful words. Of verse 5. Now Jesus loved Martha. And her sister. And Lazarus. Brothers and sisters.

[17 : 25] Jesus. Loves. You. You know this. You believe this. You accept this. When times of trial come.

When times of pain come. When times of grief. And darkness. And death come. We believe it. But man.

Is it hard to feel it. In my experience anyway. Maybe your shells are different. But in my experience anyway. I believe it. I hold on to it. But as for feeling it.

The other emotions. Soon take over. The other emotions. Of worry. And confusion. Anger. And loss. And whatever else. You might be going through. It's why it's important for us.

To take to heart. What it is we learn. Week by week. We remember. What we learn. And we learn. That Jesus loves. His. Precious.

[18 : 24] People. So Jesus. Loves Martha. He loves Mary. He loves Lazarus. But yet. Lazarus is going to die. There's no way around that. We can skip then down.

To verse 17. Because that middle section. Is for a different teaching day. Which Jesus reminds. The disciples. That he is. As we have a resurrection. That he is the way. That he is.

A teaching moment. There for the disciples. We are focusing on how he. He treats Martha. And Mary. And the crowds. As we come down. Then. Jesus arrives. And we find out.

In verse 17. That Lazarus. He has been dead. For four days. In the tomb. For four days. This man is well. And truly. Gone. He isn't just. Ill. He isn't just. Faking it. He is dead.

No hope. He is gone. He is dead. And the family are there. The Jews. The community. Is around. Martha and Mary.

[19 : 21] And they are all consoling them. And Martha hears. That Jesus is on his way. And she runs out.

And she meets him. And she. Gives him this. Deeply honest. Statement. The same statement. That her sister will make.

In a short while. She runs up to him. And she says to Jesus. Jesus. Lord. If you had been here. My brother would not have died. What is he saying there?

What's the real statement there? Why have you let this happen? We've seen your power. We've seen your goodness. We know you love us. And if you love us so much. Then why has my brother died? Why are we broken hearted?

[20 : 16] Why have you left us. For this to happen to us? Why have you left us? And in some way. I'm sure that.

Is a question. In some form. That many of us. If not most of us. Have uttered. Have thought. Have prayed at some point. There's no sin in this question.

There's no sin in saying. To the Lord. I don't understand this. Why is this happening? There's no sin in saying. What's going on here?

And we see that. Because. How does Jesus respond to her? Does he. Does he rebuke her? Does he say to her. How dare you?

How dare you speak to me like that? I. The Lord of power and glory. How dare. No. Of course he doesn't. He lets her speak. He lets her speak.

[21 : 15] He engages her gently. In conversation. He lets her. Have her space. To speak. And to think.

But he also then. Gently. Leads her. Past the current reality. Of pain. And loss. And grief. And heartbreak. And he raises.

As I were. He raises her mind. Heavenward. He takes her mind. Back. To. Himself. Doesn't he? Jesus said to her.

Verse 23. Your brother will rise again. Martha says. I know. I know he'll rise again. Resurrection. On the last day. Jesus said to her. I am the resurrection.

And. The life. Whoever believes in me. Though he die. Yet. Shall he live. Here we find. The hope of all believers. In this.

[22 : 15] Glorious verse. Every one of us. Those of us. Who know. Who love the Lord. Every one of us. Will taste death. Death is that.

We know that. Great leveler. Not just of. Of. Of status. And of. Of wealth. Every human. Every one of us here. That the Lord comes again.

We will taste of death. We know that. But also we know. As we are reminded. In Thessalonians. First Thessalonians. That we don't die. We don't lose.

Brothers and sisters. And we ourselves. Don't face. Our own death. Our own end. Without hope. A sure. Uncertain hope. Not based on feelings.

Not based on the situation. But based on. The unchanging truth. Of who Jesus is. And what Jesus says to us. What Jesus says to us. I am. The resurrection.

[23 : 09] And the life. But Jesus says to us. Whoever. Believes in me. Yes he will die. Yet. He. Shall.

Live. Those of us who die. As it were. Belonging to him. Die. Trusting in him. He will not lose.

A single one. Of his own people. He will raise us up. With himself. Behind.

Me. Here. Down the hill. There. There are many. Brothers and sisters. Who died. Who have. As it were. Fallen asleep in the Lord.

To use it. The language of that day. Who died. In pain. Who died. Perhaps. In physical. Of not mental anguish.

[24 : 05] Who died. Having. Wanted to achieve. Much in life. Perhaps. Having not the chance to do it. But who died. Knowing. The Lord. Who died. Loving. The Lord.

And every one of them. Were in the grave air. In the sea. Beyond it. In the dust of the ground. Across our world. Every single one of them. Will one day.

Be raised up again. Perfect. Glorious. Beautiful. To be with our Lord. Forever. Now. Some hear that.

And think. As Christians. Just having some. Pep talk. To get us through. In many ways. It doesn't really change.

The pain of loss. It doesn't change. The pain of going through. A loved one. Passing away. You're still going to feel it. And still experience it. What it does change. Is your perspective.

[25 : 02] A wee bit. Doesn't it? You think. Yes. Yes. It ends for me now. And yes. I will mourn now. And grieve now. But I believe. And I know. The day is coming. When we will see each other.

Once more. Now. For Martha and Mary. They would see their brother. Once more. Pretty quickly. But Lazarus. Is that a pattern for us.

For what will be true. Of every one. Of the Lord's people. One day. One day. We'll all be raised again. And join together. With him. For all time. Time.

Without end. That is the hope. That is the. The beauty. Of knowing. The Lord. Of loving. The Lord. Jesus is going to raise Lazarus.

We know that. And Jesus knows that. But yet. We see this most extraordinary situation. Don't we take place. Verse 32 onwards.

[26 : 01] Where now Mary comes. And says the same thing. Lord. If you had been here. My brother would not have died. Jesus. Hears this from Mary. He sees Mary. And Martha.

Weeping. He sees. The family and friends. The fellow Jews around them. They're all weeping. And mourning. Lazarus. Obviously. A beloved brother. A beloved part of the community.

And there's loss. And there's grief. And there's pain. And we see our saviour. God. He is God. In human form. In human.

Enrobed in human flesh. Fully man. Fully God. He knows. He's about to raise Lazarus from the dead. In a short while. He knows Lazarus will live again. But yet.

What do we see our saviour doing? And we know the answer. But let's. Let's soften our hearts once more. And see what our saviour does. He sees the mourning. Sisters. He sees the mourning.

[26 : 58] Family. He understands. That behind that rock. Behind that wall. Behind that tomb. His friend is dead. And our saviour.

He is deeply moved. He is deeply grieved. And that grief.

That pain. He asks him. Where have you laid him? Where is he? Where is the body? So we take Jesus. To see the tomb. An arrival to the tomb.

We see the simple. But eternally. Resounding. And deep words. Of verse 35. On seeing the tomb of his friend. On seeing the mourning sisters.

On seeing the pain. And misery of death. death. Jesus. Jesus. Wept. That's not a few tears.

[27 : 57] Rode in his cheek. The wording there. The sense there. It's crying. Jesus is heartbroken.

At what is taking place. He is heartbroken. Why? Because he cares. He cares.

Yes he knows. He's about to raise Lazarus from the dead. He knows what's going to happen. He's God. But he cares. The sisters don't know that. The community does not know that.

And he cries. Alongside. Those. Who are. Crying. He mourns. With those. Who mourn. He is the saviour.

Who took on human flesh. Who became like us. In every single way. Apart from sin. The full emotional range of humanity. He took on himself. And Jesus.

[29 : 01] Who created and sustains. The stars. And galaxy. And universe. Jesus. Who maintains. Every single atom. In this world. The sovereign.

Holy. Lifted up. Eternal son of God. He is here. Standing beside. Some crying men. Some crying women. And he is one of them.

In English. We know. Perhaps. Famously. This is the shortest. English sentence. In the Bible. However.

It's not the shortest sentence. In the original. In the original. In Greek. This is. Three. Terms. Well. Two terms. It's complicated. But it's.

It's not the shortest. The shortest phrase. Actually. In Greek. Is. First. Thessalonians. Five. And verse. Sixteen. First.

[30 : 00] Thessalonians. Five. Verse. Sixteen. Which is. Rejoice. Always. Rejoice. Always. That letter.

We read. Where Paul. Is giving encouragement. To the believers. Not to. Not to fear. But to remember. That those who have gone to the Lord. That they are. Kept by him.

That they will be raised by him. In the same letter. Paul says to them. To rejoice. Always. And in one sense. These two. Shortest phrases. In the scripture.

They do connect. The second. Shortest phrase. In the Greek. Jesus. Wept. Reminds us. We have. A weeping. Saviour.

Who grieves. With those who grieve. Who is not distant. Who is not far away. We know ourselves. Don't we. That when. When a loved one. Goes.

[30 : 53] When. A loved one. Passes away. Perhaps. You've. Had the same experience. One of the most painful things. Is seeing the world.

Keep on turning. When your world. Is stopped. You know. You want. As it were. That famous poem. Isn't it. To stop all the clocks. And cover the mirror.

Because you want to say. Well. My world. Is stopped. Why hasn't. Everyone else's world. Stopped too. No. My world. In a way. Has now ended. Because I've lost.

This person. Why does the rest of the world. Not care. They care for a while. But our capacity. Is only such. We can only care. For so long. And our own lives. Carry on. And we're back to everything again.

The world. Carries on. We don't move on. We still grieve. We still mourn. But those around us. Carry on eventually. As we have for others.

[31 : 47] Who have lost. Loved ones. Jesus doesn't just. Carry on. He is. The friend. He is. The saviour.

Who is with his people. Who grieves alongside us. Not just for a week. Or a month. Or a year. But every time. We feel that pain. We go back to him. We say to him. Lord.

I need you. Lord. Help me. He is there. With you. Grieving alongside you. Once more. Crying as you cry. As it were. Because he is a saviour. Who cares for you.

As a friend. As a brother. As God and King. In this other. Shortest phrase. In the Greek.

To rejoice always. Because we have. A grieving saviour. Who comes alongside us. In our grief. Because in him. We know. There is hope.

[32 : 40] For all who die. In him. And even in the depths. Of our grief. And the depths. Of our loss. We can be reassured. And say.

That we can rejoice. Always. Through the tears. Through the misery. Through the pain. We pray always. And we rejoice always. Because he has not left us.

He has not forsaken us. As we said. What happens with Lazarus. Is a snapshot. In a short time frame. Of the Lord. Of the Lord will do. With his people.

For all time. We know what happens. Don't we? Verse 38 onwards. We see that. Jesus. Comes up to the tomb. They roll away.

The stone. Jesus prays. And with simple words. He cries out. Lazarus. Come out. Lazarus.

[33 : 36] Arise. Lazarus. Come here. And the man. Who had died. Came out. That is a snapshot.

To the future. Of our hope. And our sure hope. That one day. One day soon. It's all soon. In the end. Jesus.

As it were. Will say again. To us. Lazarus. Come out. And his people. Will arise. Perfect. Spotless. No more death. No more sorrow.

No more grief. Until that day comes. Help us to. Learn. We pray. From the example. Of our. Saviour. Who is close to all. Cry out to him.

Who is not distant. Who is not far away. And. Just to close. With the. The clear point. And. If you want to know.

[34 : 36] What it is. To grieve. Whilst having the hope. Of a saviour. You have to come to know. A saviour. As obvious a point. As that is.

If you want to know. What it is to have. The comfort. Of a saviour. Who is beside you. In your darkest moments. Is. Come and know him. Come and get to know him. Come and call out to him.

He will not ignore you. He will listen to you. And he will make. You. One of his own. That's about right. It's not a word of prayer. Lord. Thank you. For the gift of your word.

As we. Deal with sensitive. And difficult topics. Painful topics. We understand. That you enable. Through the work of your word. To. Speak to the hearts. Of those who are grieving.

Pray again. For. Those today. Who are grieving. Recent loss. But also grieving. Loss of decades ago. Years ago. As anniversaries come and go. And as.

[35 : 31] Small reminders. Remind us of our loved ones. As that pain wells up again. Lord be with us. Look after us. And take us. As it were. Again and again. To the grieving saviour.

To the mourning saviour. To the one who says. That he is beside us. Who will never leave us. Nor forsake us. Who is crying. Alongside us. But yet. Who is all powerful.

And he leads us. Into his life. And into his victory. In his name. And for his sake. Amen. We can close.

Again from the sing psalms. That's psalm of comfort. Psalm 23. Sing psalms. Psalm 23. Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd.

No want shall I know. He makes me lie down. When the green pastures grow. He leads me to rest. With the calm. Psalm 23. Psalm 23.