

Hope that Lasts

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[0 : 00] Welcome to another sermon on the web from St. John's Shaughnessy Anglican Church in Vancouver, Canada.

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The following message is from the February 25, 2001 service at St. John's Shaughnessy. The Reverend Felix Orji delivered his message from the book of 1 Thessalonians, the 4th chapter, verses 13 to 18.

The title of the message is Hope That Lasts. A few years ago, a couple came into my office very deeply distressed.

The reason for their distress was not because they were having family problems that all couples have. They were distressed because they were not sure of the eternal future of one of their parents who had passed away a few days earlier.

[1 : 33] They wanted to know whether she had gone to heaven. They wanted to know whether she was at peace with God.

And they wanted me to tell them exactly where she was. And what we did was to look through the New Testament to see what the Bible says about those who die in Christ and outside of Christ. But that's not what they were looking for. They wanted me to say exactly where she was. And hopefully that she was in heaven.

And I couldn't. How could I? And I left my office still very distressed and in great anguish.

I've not forgotten that. It is impossible to forget. As I thought about that experience, that encounter, I remembered that about 200 years ago, Immanuel Kant had posed three questions that he thought every human individual must address in this life.

[2 : 58] The questions were, What can I know? What should I do? And what can I hope for?

What can I know about my mother who had passed away? What should I do? And what can I hope for? For my own life.

As you and I face the reality of our own mortality. And as we experience the mortality, the death of our loved ones.

We are faced with these questions. What can I know? What should I do? And what can I hope for? And I think the Bible is fairly clear on the answers to these questions.

According to scripture, The first thing that you and I can know for certain is that there is no hope for those who die in unbelief.

[4 : 10] It is not very comforting to hear that. In fact, it is distressing. And terribly, politically incorrect.

Because everywhere you turn around, You hear false hopes being given to people. I have been to many funerals and memorial services.

It's part of my job here. And you have been to a number yourself. And you have heard those sermons and those eulogies That give people the assurance of everlasting life In the presence of God, In spite of their defiance of God.

I once attended a funeral of a relative. And the pastor went on and on, Explaining how she was going to enjoy the kingdom of heaven.

And everybody who knew her Was wondering How that would happen. And this is why intelligent people Who come to church Sometimes live With huge disrespect For the church Because they seem to know the truth More than those who speak On behalf of God.

[5 : 38] I once saw a bumper sticker that read Live your life in such a way That the minister Will not have to tell a lie At your funeral.

I do not want intelligent people That are sitting here this morning To lose confidence And respect For the church And for God In accordance with scripture The consistent testimony of scripture Is that those who die in unbelief Who refuse to acknowledge The salvation The free salvation The free grace That God has given to us Will die Without any hope.

And many people realize this In spite of the false hopes That are given all over the place. And this is why The very timid ones Have decided to repress The thought of death All together.

They have joined The court of silence Don't talk about it Don't think about it And one modern writer Has called it The great universal repression Of our day Do not talk Or think about death Because there is no hope.

On the other hand Those who are a bit more bolder Have decided To take the fear of death And the fear Of life after death Out Of death itself They have decided to make death A little bit more user friendly They have given it a number of names And if you have the opportunity To have a tour Of a funeral home As I did You see how user friendly Everything has become And they tell you Just accept it It's about time That you joined the food chain And just carry on with your life But every attempt To domesticate death And make it more user friendly Has failed And will continue to fail Because the Bible says That death is the king

[8 : 08] Of terrors He is the great intruder And when he comes He breaks apart relationships Disrupts families Causes us intense grief And plunges the non-believer Into a hopeless eternity That is the first thing That we can know about death The second thing That we know Is that according to scripture There is hope For those who die In Jesus Christ For those who recognize Their need for Christ Who recognize the fact That there is no hope In this world And in the world to come Without Jesus Christ And embracing The Bible holds out The promise Of everlasting hope If you and I believe in Christ

We can honestly Face death And the death Of our fellow believers With tremendous hope And that's why Paul writes In verse 13 That he does not want us to grieve As those without hope Paul is not saying That we should not grieve When believers die Or when friends die In fact the Bible encourages Us to grieve Jesus himself The Bible says Wept At the tomb Of his friend Lazarus It is important That we grieve It is important That we mourn But Paul says As we mourn And as we grieve The death Of our beloved brothers And sisters And as we anticipate Our own death And begin to grieve About it Paul says We should not grieve

As if we do not have Any hope Because we indeed Have hope This hope Is not the hope Of purgatory Where you spend A few years Being purged Of your sins It is not the hope Of soul sleep Or some sort of Vague second chance This is a robust hope Of sharing In the glory Of God It is the hope Of spending eternity With God And with one another It is the hope Of being filled With the very presence And with the very love Of God himself In a sense This hope Is being partially realized In this world But the Bible says That its full realization Will happen

When Jesus comes back The second time See the ultimate hope Of the Christian Is not personal resurrection The ultimate hope That God has set For you and for me Is to participate In the second coming Of our Lord Jesus Christ That is the most important thing In the hope That God has set Before us And this is why Out of 260 chapters In the New Testament The second coming of Christ Is mentioned 318 times I have not counted it I'm trusting those Who have counted So if you count And get more I ask for forgiveness In advance But the coming of Christ Is so central In God's plan for you And for me In the full realization Of the glory That he has for us

That it is mentioned That many times And it is The Bible's expectation That you and I Have a strong expectation Of the coming of Christ I know in the Anglican Church We don't talk much about that But we believe it And we confess it Every Sunday Speaking with my ethics professor Last night And he said to me That Anglicans Will prefer to talk About the second coming Over a cup of sherry Rather than talk About a rapture I don't know what that means I need some help He wouldn't tell me Exactly better The problem In Thessalonica Was that the believers Did not fully understand This truth

[13 : 14] They did not fully understand That God's purpose For each and every one of us Whether dead or alive Was to share In the full realization Of that glory At the second coming of Christ And because of lack Of understanding When fellow believers Died Before the second coming Of Christ The relatives And fellow Christians Grieved As if there was No more hope For them They had lived

In expectation Of the second coming Knowing that At the second coming The fullness of God's glory Will be revealed And given To all the people of God Now Christ Had not come And they had died And the believers Were in deep grief And Paul writes to them And reassures them That that was not

The case No single believer Dead or alive Will miss The full realization Of God's purpose For us Beyond death And what Paul does In this passage Is to give them Four major events That will characterize The second coming Of Christ First of all He says to them When Jesus comes God will bring with him Those who have died See they believe That because the believers Died before Jesus comes These believers These believers Have been separated Completely From participating In the glory That will come When Jesus comes And Paul says That's not the case That's not true When Jesus comes God himself Will bring with him Those who have died That's 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 The believers Who have fallen asleep Are not lost When Jesus comes God himself Will make sure That he brings them With him And this is powerful here You see Paul is saying That if indeed You believe And since you believe That God raised Jesus From the dead It is important That you also believe That the same power With which God Raised Jesus From the dead He will use that power To make sure That those who have died In Christ Are not only raised But they are brought With him When he descends From heaven See the God Who raised Jesus

From the dead Will not abandon Those who put their trust In him And that's why We are called The body of Christ Since Christ Has been risen Since Christ Has ascended into heaven And since Christ Is coming down From heaven His body Will come With him God is committed To us And there is no possibility Of separation From him At all And to further Emphasize this fact Paul says That By the word Of the Lord I say to you In verse 15 For this we declare To you By the word Of the Lord That we who are alive Who are left Unto the coming Of the Lord Shall not precede Those who have fallen asleep Same point Paul is saying This is not my idea This is not my opinion This is not pious hope

This is by the word Of the Lord In accordance With the revelation Of God himself I declare to you That we shall not precede Those who have died Those who have died In fact They will be raised From the dead See the hope Of the Christian Is not based On wishful thinking It is not based On what we wish Or hope Or speculation It is based On the authoritative Word of God Paul says I declare to you It is not my opinion It is the word Of God And so we can trust it Because God himself Is trustworthy How is this going to happen?

[18:07] Verse 16 Paul says That For the Lord himself Will descend from heaven With a cry of command With the archangel's call And with the sound Of the trumpet of God And what will happen And the dead in Christ Will rise first See what Paul is saying To them here And to all of us Here this morning Is that The same Christ Who is coming Is the same Christ Who died and rose again The Christ in whom They have put their trust It is the Lord himself See the Lord himself Whom they have trusted In this life Will not forget them On that wonderful day The Lord himself He will not forget You put your trust in him And when he is coming again

He will not forget you And he will make sure That this event happens And that is the point Of the command Says with a cry of command With the archangel's call The dead in Christ Will rise first Jesus is not coming Like a visitor to the earth He will come As the king of kings And the lord of lords He will come With all the authority Of heaven And when his commanding voice Comes forth All the dead Will hear The voice of God And they will come To life You remember the story In the book of John When Jesus Was at the tomb of Lazarus The bible says That he spoke loudly And says Lazarus come forth And he came forth

And Jesus himself said That the day will come When the dead Will hear the voice Of the son of man And they will rise From the dead It is the voice The cry of command The dead will hear And they will listen And they will obey And come back to life So there is no power In heaven Or on earth Or under the earth That will stop this event From happening Secondly Paul says That when Jesus comes He will come With the accompaniment Of public acclamation And proclamation Of his victory And kingship The sound of the trumpet See The coming of Jesus Is not going to be A secret rapture But I know That I am stepping on toes When I say this There is no evidence In scripture That Jesus coming

Is going to be A secret affair There is no secrecy About the cry of command And the archangel's call And the sound of the trumpet There is nothing Secret about that This is a public event And that is the point Of the passage there Jesus coming Will be a public Declaration of victory And all eyes Will see him As Revelation chapter 1 says It is the revelation Of the king And it will be public Universal Thirdly When Jesus comes We who are alive Will be snatched up Will be caught up And since Anglicans Don't like to use The word rapture I will avoid it Then we who are alive Who are left Shall be caught up together With them In the clouds To meet the Lord In the air Of separation Permanent separation Between those in Christ Who have died And those who are alive Paul says When Jesus comes back again Those of us Who are alive Will be snatched up We will be caught up In the air To meet the Lord Fourthly and finally Christ's coming Will bring us To this climax Of our Christian hope Which is eternal fellowship With the Lord Together Verse 17 And so We shall always be With the Lord See that's the ultimate hope That those who have died In Christ And those who are alive At the coming of Christ Will meet the Lord In the air And we shall go together And spend eternity With the Lord Forever And the Bible says [23 : 13] When that happens He will wipe away Every tear From our eyes And death Shall be no more Neither shall there be Grief Nor crying Nor pain Anymore For the former things Have passed away And our dwelling Will be with God Forever Paul says Comfort one another With these truths You and I Have hope Today Because of Christ The comfort And the strength That we need In the midst of grief And as we face Our own mortality Comes from remembering That God has promised And will fulfill The promise Of glory And the fullness Of that promise Will happen When Jesus comes Back again And we shall be resurrected And those of us Who are alive Shall be caught up Into the heavens And we shall spend Eternity With God And if you do not Have that hope This morning I'll invite you To speak to God This morning And place your faith In him Amen This digital audio sermon Along with many others Is available From the St. John's Shaughnessy website At www.stjohnschaughnessy.org That address is www.stjohns.org On the website You will also find information About ministries Worship services And special events At St. John's Shaughnessy We hope that this message Has helped you And that you will share it With others We'll see you again From the chat Things From the prophecy Well We hope that this How does it It's Laurie Till It's That you You