

Hope

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[0 : 00] The first of these is in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, breaking into that chapter at verse 13. Chapter 4 and verse 13 of 1 Thessalonians.

Hear God's word.

That we would not have you ignorant, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others 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, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.

[1 : 11] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

And we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. So shall we always be with the Lord.

Therefore, comfort one another with these words. And now turning to John chapter 11, gospel of John chapter 11, reading 1 to 4, and some verses from verse 17.

Gospel of John chapter 11. Verse 1.

A certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.

[2 : 28] So the sisters sent to Jesus, saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. But when Jesus heard it, he said, this illness is not unto death, it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it.

Then going on to verse 17. When Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

Bethany was near Jerusalem, two miles off. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him while Mary sat in the house. Martha said to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give it to you. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again.

[3 : 47] Mary said to him, I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

Do you believe this? She said to him, yes, Lord. I believe. You are the Christ. The Son of God.

He who is coming into the world. Amen. May the Lord bless us. These readings may they be to his praise and to his glory. If you look out of your window and look on the affairs of the world, we find a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty.

Uncertainty about the economy. Uncertainty about employment. Uncertainty about employment. Uncertainty about employment. The events of Westminster means that there's a great deal of fear now.

[5 : 00] But what there's not is hope. As long ago as 1954, the World Council of Churches met in Edmonton, Canada, and took as its theme, Christ, the hope of the world.

And outside of him, this world has no hope. What I want to talk about this morning, it's not a theological word, it's based on the teaching of the Bible.

It's a practical word that addresses the issue of bereavement and death. We turn for that to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

We would not have you ignorant, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep that you may not grieve as others 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.

As far as is known, these are indeed the earliest letters that the Apostle Paul wrote to any church. They can be dated about A.D. 52-53, written from Corinth, when he was on his second missionary journey.

[6 : 29] You'll find detail of that in Acts chapter 15-18. And while it is the case that these letters address the issue of the second coming of Jesus, it doesn't mean that there's other bits of teaching that are neglected.

So in these letters, you will find references to the Trinity, to God, to Jesus as the second person of the Trinity, the death and resurrection of Christ, Satan, sin, the gospel, truth, faith, sanctification, and the Lord's second coming.

So from all this fountain that you find in these short letters, all of Paul's teaching has emerged. And the first point I want to make this morning, looking at this, is the absence of hope.

We would not have you ignorant, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep. In other words, those who have died. It's just a Semitic way of talking about death.

That you may not grieve as others who have no hope. And these words introduce us to his teaching on the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 58] And what the apostle is saying here is, all of us, at one time or another, will suffer grief at the death of a loved one.

But in our case, that grief has hope built into it.

And that hope is the hope of the resurrection. How wonderful it is to say to people whose loved ones in Christ have died, this is temporary.

You'll see whoever again. Not in this life, but in the one that's to come.

But this hope is absent from most of mankind. He says, the rest. You may not grieve as others, or the rest, or whatever, who have no hope.

[9 : 08] So in other words, in the teaching of the apostle, and it's our teaching here, there is a classic difference between those who are of the household of the faith, i.e. ourselves, and those who are not.

Those who are not of the household of the faith have no hope. How tragic that is. Now, why is it that this is the situation which we find ourselves to address?

The apostle Paul, writing to the Romans in chapter 5 and verse 12, gives you the reason. Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, so death spread to all men and women because all have sinned.

This is the problem. The problem is that this is spread like a cancer through the whole of the human race. And people outside of Christ are in a position of spiritual death and are devoid of hope.

When the apostle writes to the Ephesians in chapter 2, which begins, and you he has made alive who were dead. He then goes on in verses 11 and 12 in the same chapter saying this, remember that at that time you were separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

[11 : 08] Dr. Campbell Morgan, who was the predecessor of Martin Lloyd-Jones in Westminster Chapel towards the end of his life said, it must be a terrible thing to enter old age with no hope of the next life.

Thank God I cannot speak from experience. And so what the writer to what Paul is saying here is, he's talking about the privileges of belonging to the family of Israel.

Israel as such was a commonwealth. It was a people of Israel. But the point is that these promises that he's talking about here and in Romans 9 would only be relevant if you belonged to this family, this people of Israel by birth.

And it's equally the case that if we're looking for hope in Christ, we can get it.

But it requires that each and every one of us is born into this family. Not physically, but spiritually.

[12 : 45] They were strangers from the covenants of promise, the covenants that the Lord had made with his ancient people concerning the coming of the Messiah. They were without God in the world, a terrible plight.

hope. But, it's not the end of the matter. Jesus Christ has come into this world to do this very thing, to bring people into the family of God and to give them hope.

Now, that second reading, which was longer than the first one, I read because it's a practical example of Jesus giving hope. Jesus said to Martha, I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. That's the promise of God revealed to you and me this morning in the person of Jesus.

But supposing you're listening to me and you don't have this hope, how can you get it? Jesus said this in Matthew 11, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[14 : 18] Take my yoke upon me and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find a rest for your souls. You see, it's a promise. Jesus says, come to me.

Doesn't matter who you are, what you are, what you've done, what you've not done, come to me, and I'll give you rest.

He'll give you future, hope for the future. And this is not only a promise to people such as who are bereaved, but it's also a promise to those who are devoid of hope, whether that means they are homeless or destitute, in prison, laid aside, whatever.

Come to me. All who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. So that's the absence of hope.

Let's think secondly about the presence of hope. We would not have you ignorant brothers and sisters concerning those who are asleep.

[15 : 36] You may not grieve as others who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus, God will bring with him the those who have fallen asleep.

So what the apostle is saying here is this, to our understanding this morning. By Jesus Christ, by being born of the Virgin Mary, and being incarnate in a person, by dying on the cross, following by his triumphant resurrection, he has introduced hope into this world.

Now to see how great this is, I want you to consider, first of all, what hope there was of the resurrection in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, there are only two verses that speak of the resurrection of the body. The first one is in Isaiah 26, 19, Your dead shall rise, my body shall rise, O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy.

Daniel 12, verse 2, Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

[17 : 09] That's it. that's all there is in the Old Testament about the resurrection of the body. So, when the average Israelite in the Old Testament contemplated death, what did he look forward to?

The future, what he had to look forward to was the place of the dead. And there's a Hebrew term for it called Sheol.

And you find it, first of all, in the record of Jacob, when he's talking about the possibility of losing Benjamin.

So he says to his children, if you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol, the abode of the dead.

not much hope there. Indeed, this is what the psalmist says about it. In death, Psalm 6, 5, there is no remembrance of you.

[18 : 26] In Sheol, the abode of the dead, who can give you praise? it's a shadowy existence. The average Israelite, like David, who penned that psalm, did not want to go there.

The prophets define what it's like. And so I turn to Ezekiel 26, verse 20. And this is being said of the king of Tyre.

I will thrust you down with those who descend into the pit. to the people of old, and I will make you dwell in the netherworld, among primeval ruins, with those who go down to the pit, so you will not be inhabited or have a place in the land of the living.

There's no thought of punishment here in this abode of the dead. It's just a place that there's no hope. But what has transformed our experience is this, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Paul writes about that in Titus 2, verses 11 to 13. He says, the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men and women, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[20 : 10] Christ. Now, what has happened to this hope as far as Paul the apostle, Paul the Jew is concerned, is he has made it his own.

My hope. And we are encouraged to do the same thing. So how did he get it? Well, he claims it was made known to him, along with other gospel truths, by revelation.

I did not receive it from men, neither was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. And the revelation this morning is contained in the book that we read from.

It's your revelation. You claim it by faith. Let me remind you of what Jesus said to his disciples.

Let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms, if it were not so, would I have told you I go to prepare a place for you.

- [21 : 28] Paul the apostle, Paul the Jew, he's made it his own. So that when he writes to Timothy, the last letter before his death, he writes this, 2 Timothy 4, verse 8, Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to also all those who have loved his appearing.

My hope is it your hope this morning? Let's think of the consolation. Comfort one another with these words.

Why is it that this great message can be such a comfort? God? Once again, I go back to John 14, Jesus talking to the disciples, saying this, let not your hearts be troubled.

He had prepared them for his death, which was going to happen just in a few days' time. Let not your hearts be troubled.

You believe in God, believe also in me. In my father's house are many rooms, if it were not so, would I have told you I go to prepare a place for you.

- [23 : 03] And then he adds this, and when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, but where I am, there you may be also.

So here, in these words that he's spoken, they're intended to be a comfort, to live them above the sorrow of their moment.

In John 16 he says, when my death occurs, you will have sorrow, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.

The bereavement of the disciples is found in Mark 16, 9-10. When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene from whom he had cast out seven demons.

She went out and told those who had been with him as they mourned and went. Now, Jesus had said in the Beatitudes, blessed are those who mourn, them.

- [24 : 24] They shall be comforted. So the report that Mary Magdalene gives to the disciples should have acted as a comfort, but it didn't, because they didn't believe what she had told them.

A few verses later on we read, afterwards Jesus appeared to the leaven themselves as they sat at table. So at this moment their sadness of bereavement was turned into joy because they had been reunited with the one that they had loved on this earth, Jesus himself.

That is one aspect of the bereavement, the comfort that Jesus gives. Not only is it a comfort to the disciples in the sense that they saw Jesus again, it's a comfort to us, for all of our loved ones who have died in Christ.

We would not have you ignorant brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others 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.

And he goes on, 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, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.

- [26 : 19] The dead in Christ will rise first, 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, so we shall always be with the Lord.

So here's another layer of comfort. And the comfort this time isn't between the disciples of Jesus and the Lord, and that includes us.

But the area of comfort now is between us and members of our family. and how many times I've stood before an open grave taking such a service, reassuring the individuals, this is temporary.

You will see your loved one again, not in this life, but in the world that is to come. This is the consolation of hope.

So the apostle says, therefore, comfort one another with these words. I said at the beginning, this is a practical word, and practical it is, because the Christian gospel meets us at every area of our need.

[27 : 48] All you have to do is to make it your own, to make the hope that the apostle talks about your hope.

And you can do that very simply by the area or the action of faith. Jesus says to you as he has said to me and others, come unto me, and I will give you rest.

Amen. May the Lord bless that meditation. May it be to his praise and to his glory.