



JANUARY 30, 2022 | PASTOR EDGAR NHO

“Grieving Differently” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

¹³ Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For 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. ¹⁵ According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For 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. ¹⁷ After 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. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Good afternoon, everyone!

Welcome to our service, to those who are online and the very few of us here.

We will be continuing this series in Thessalonians that Pastor Tim started and last week, Pastor Ron continued, where he addressed Paul’s encouragement of the Thessalonians. An encouragement to continue in their sanctification as they waited for the Lord and to be active in their faith, rather than to fall into sinful desires or the pagan culture or be slothful or apathetic.

We learned last week that Sanctification is:

The encouragement to live our lives to please God, as we wait for Jesus.

Again, to be active in our faith.

Waiting for Jesus properly and to do this better and better as time goes on.

Or in Paul’s words “more and more”

Looking back to the hostile persecution that the Thessalonians faced then and looking to today, for us in the pandemic and some persecution we face today. Regardless of persecution or pandemic, there should be no reason that we should pause to live lives that please God. There should be no reason to pause it, but in fact, strive and ask God for help to do this better every day.



This was encouraging for the Thessalonians and for us as well, from what we heard last week. It is good to hear for those who were alive back then and who are currently alive now. But what about the believers that passed away?

Many of the believers in Thessalonica, during Paul's time, believed that Christ would return in their lifetime. But there were some that passed away/asleep due to persecution or other reasons and they wondered... What of their fate? The ones that died.

Remember, that it was in Thessalonica where Paul and Silas had to escape and probably did not have time to fully instruct them on what happened to the believer in death. So, the Thessalonian believers had uninformed ideas.

Like the Thessalonians we too should be living in active anticipation of our Lord's return. But again, what are our views of those who passed away and what happens to them?

Because all of us will lose someone. And if you haven't, you will. And it will be a time of sorrow and grief.

And even after years, when you think about them there is a tinge of sorrow and grief.

This is not going to be an easy sermon to preach and it's not something we want to hear every Sunday. But we need to know and need to be informed, for our sanctification. A growing life that pleases God.

I remember about 12-13 years ago there was in one month where I had to attend 6 funerals and for 4 of them, they asked me to be the pallbearer (the person that carried the casket). All of them were believer saints that passed on, some of them were senior saints, but I remember vividly that one of them was my friend's father and I can remember the sorrow and anguish that my friend, his sister and mom went through, with the loss of their father and husband. And I'm sure when they think about him today, there is that tinge of sorrow and grief.

Then a few years later my father passed away from a sudden heart attack.

I remember the sorrow that my mom and myself and later seeing my older brother (he had to fly in from Hong Kong) went through.

The Saturday night that my father died, I remember my mom crying and myself crying till the next morning and feeling this numbness of sorrow and grief.



And to this day at every milestone of my life from my graduation of me getting my MDIV, getting ordained, getting married, there is that thought and feeling in the back of mind where I miss him.

What is the fate of all the believers, including my father, that had passed away?

What informs me about them that will lead me to live a life that pleases God more and more?

Well in the midst of grief and sorrow God gives an encouraging and powerful Word through Paul.

Because the longer we live, the more we will face people passing away, and we will need to hear and be informed or re-informed of what God has to say about this matter every time.

So, let's go to today's passage and read this informing and encouraging word that will lead us to please God.

Passage: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For 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. 15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For 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. 17 After 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. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

From what is being clearly said in this passage is that...

God cares about our sorrow and gives us hope in the midst of it.

Today's passage begins with encouragement and ends with encouragement for those who are in grief and sorrow.

Paul is writing this, so that the Thessalonians back then and us today are not uninformed about those who have fallen asleep and how it can lead our lives to please God.



He starts by saying, that we may "...not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope."
That's the encouragement.

That we don't grieve like them, that we grieve differently.

That we can have a different grief and a different sorrow for those who have fallen asleep.

And when we talk about their word sleep, we are talking about the physical death of the believer, where they look like they are sleeping.

And I know there is this debate where we can believe in soul sleep, where the person dies and remains dead in Christ until the return of Christ

Or

The more common belief that our souls go into the presence of God and await the resurrection.

That can be a debate for another time (and if you want to know more about it, feel free to ask me), but either way and regardless of the view, the believer is resting in the Lord until what Paul tells us is the resurrection.

God is informing the Thessalonians back then and us today, through Paul, that we can have a sorrow and grief that is based in hope vs. a sorrow and grief that is not based in hope.

What is the hope or information that our sorrow and grief is resting on?

We see this in vv. 14-17

In verse 14 it says,

14 For 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.

Note how Paul says, Jesus died. One commentator states that Paul wanted to let us know the difference between Jesus' death and our falling asleep/death. Jesus's death is different from any believers' death because he took on the sins of the world and that He really died. Meaning, there was separation between Jesus and God the Father. There was wrath poured out on Christ. He did that for us, that we in turn can fall asleep and rest in Christ.



And then it says that Jesus rose again and in this we will share the same resurrection as Christ and it says that right after.

“...God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”

This is not talking about Jesus bringing souls from heaven, but talking about the raising of the saints from the grave.

Because the way vv. 15-16 starts, it starts in a way to explain what that is going to look like.

15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For 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.

So according to the Lord's Word, the dead will be raised to be with Christ before those who are still alive. And the way that is going to look like is that there will be a loud command from Jesus, telling the Archangel (Michael presumably) to declare it and to sound the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Imagine that...

Ever heard of that Idiom “loud enough to wake the dead”?

I've led a few retreats where you can hear the kids laughing and yelling from the other side of the retreat centre at 1am, when they should be sleeping, and I thought that can wake the dead.

But this will be something to behold.

And when that happens all our family and friends who were dead in Christ will rise up first.

How encouraging is that to the grief that we will face when our fellow saints fall asleep before we do?

So encouraging.

And then in v.17 it says...

17 After 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.



So, the raising of the dead will proceed us and they will be with Christ first in the resurrection and then we will be caught up to be with Christ and be with him forever.

Many call this the rapture.

We will be able to see those fellow family members and friends who have fallen asleep in Christ again.

And again very encouraging.

But not only that, we will be with Christ forever!

And in Christ our grief and sorrow are met and answered in him and we will get to what that means soon.

This is what informs our grief and sorrow and if we hold onto this truth, we can see that this informed grief will lead us to more and increasing trust in God and therefore to please God even in our grief and sorrow. Sanctification.

Informed grief = Encouraging us to trust in God more.

But I want to be clear that informed grief doesn't mean less grief and sorrow.

Just different as I said before.

Even though when a believer dies, they gain, as Paul said in Philippians 1:21

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

It doesn't mean that we should not grieve or grieve less or hold a party and sing songs of joy.

It's sad because we will miss them for now and our love should be reflected in our grief and sorrow. Especially if we are a people who are called to love.

So, if you think it's mature to be stoic and to deny grief and sorrow. It's not.

When informed, it's ok to grieve. We don't have to use that excuse that it's hot in here and that our eyes are not crying, but just sweating.



In Philippians 2:27

Paul was going to be filled with sorrow upon sorrow if his buddy Epaphroditus died from illness, but it was because of God's mercy that he didn't and spared Paul from going through that.

Paul was going to lose it if Epaphroditus died, even though he would have gained.

Therefore, informed grief is still grief, and not less grief.

But what about those who are not saved and we grieve for them? The Thessalonians had family members and friends that weren't believers that died. What about them?

It's pretty clear in the bible in what happens to those who do not believe in Jesus. They will be eternally separated from God and to see those funerals are really, really hard.

Or what if you weren't sure if they were a believer?

And you're wondering what about this or what about that, or this scenario or that?

Or what about babies that die, do they go to heaven? Before they were able to make a decision for Jesus Christ.

Some may argue that they do and they would go to passages like 2 Kings 24 where God calls the children sacrificed by Manasseh "innocent". So, one may assume so, but the bible is not as clear as I would like it.

There is nothing in the bible that directly says that all babies go to heaven.

I wish the bible said that clearly.

And I do have ample hope that the bible gives to think or to hope that every baby does go to heaven.

But it doesn't say clearly or directly as it does with believers.

What informs our grief with all of this?

What encourages us in those times?

This is when we go back to where “in Christ our grief and sorrow are met and answered in him.”

Well, when we look at the last part of v. 17, it says:

And so we will be with the Lord forever.

That’s what informs our grief in those times.

Because some day Jesus Christ is going to return and he says in Revelation 21:4 that... ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’

And one pastor that I heard said:

This, “tells me that when Jesus comes again, no matter what the circumstance, no matter what the grief, related to death or anything else. That being with Jesus answers every question. And He so works in perfecting everything, that there isn’t an ounce of grief left in my heart, for everything that has been and everything that will be, it is the presence of Jesus Christ that informs my grief, that every step that enables us to grieve like those that have hope, no matter what.

It all rests upon whether or not you believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Cause unless you believe that He is the Son of God that overcame sin and death, none of this will encourage you. But if you believe that truth, you have every reason to believe He is capable of making every wrong right and erasing every element of grief from our lives no matter what.”

Jesus will inform our grief. Jesus alone can answer our grief. Jesus alone will take away our grief. Jesus alone is capable of that.

Now the final verse.

18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Because Paul wasn’t there with the Thessalonians, he had to encouraged them to encourage one another and likewise, we too need to do the same.

I know many of us may have the tendency to want to isolate ourselves when we experience a loss and for someone that is witnessing someone going through a loss, we sometimes tend to back off and not reach out.



But in this passage, we are being exhorted to encourage one another and allow ourselves to be encouraged.

We were not meant to grieve alone.

The enemy wants us in isolation and to grieve alone. But, it's not wise to grieve alone.

What God wants us is to encourage one another and to grieve together. To grieve differently.

Please obey the Lord and reach out for encouragement

And if you know someone who is grieving, it's ok to roll up your sleeves and reach out to them.

We are all going to grieve.

Informed and different grieving is always better

We are going to grieve.

Let's make sure we obey God and encourage each other, or receive encouragement.

This will please the Lord.

And when it's all said and done, not one of us will be disappointed in the Lord.