

Therefore Encourage One Another

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Most of the time when I think about celebrating Easter I think about it in terms of looking back.

I think about how fearful, alone, and sad the disciples must have been.

Twice they had laid their heads on their pillows at night with the devastation of Friday on their minds.

How many times do you think Peter had his failure rolling around in his mind as he tried to sleep?

Do you think that maybe James and John wished that they had stayed awake to be with their Master a little bit longer?

There was nothing they could do except lock themselves away and grieve the loss of everything they had known for the past three years.

And then the sun dawns on the third day.

Some faithful women make their way to Jesus' tomb to honour Him one last time only to find the stone rolled away and an angel who says to them, "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen!"

That announcement means that everything has changed.

[It is important to look back on Easter and remind ourselves of the resurrection of Jesus, but this year as I have reflected on Easter it has been on my heart to the future hope that comes from that first resurrection Sunday. This morning we are going to take a few moments and turn our attention to what scripture teaches us in **1Thessalonians 4:13-5:11**. These verses show us what the glory of Easter means for believers. They point us to what is in store for us on account of our Lord conquering the grave. First we learn here that because of Easter...]

Point #1 – Every believer will enjoy the glory of Jesus' resurrection.

The historical fact of Jesus dying on the cross and leaving the tomb alive is the bedrock of our future hope.

It would seem that at the writing of 1Thessalonians the shadow of death is hanging over the congregation.

Because of this the apostle Paul reminds them of and likely further clarifies the Christian hope of resurrection.

He does this first by looking back to Easter (**4:13-14a**).

The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 7:2 that "Death is the destiny of everyone" which if we open our eyes we can see plainly day after day.

In the greco-roman world of Thessalonica hope in the face of death is severely lacking.

While most people believed is some sort of existence after death, by and large it was a bleak outlook which came from idolatrous notions of false gods who are fickle and self-serving.

Little has changed in the intervening centuries.

Most people in our culture are dead in their sins and live without hope under the shadow of death.

They try and cling to empty sayings like, “He/she is in a better place” or they go through empty rituals or false religion.

Some simply try to ignore death and bury their hopelessness in entertainment, drugs/alcohol, or other vain pursuits.

God the Holy Spirit by inspiring the apostle to write this is telling us the He wants something better for Christians.

He wants us to know genuine hope as we live in the brokenness of this world.

Do you see what He bases the hope of the church upon? (verse 14a)

First we believe that Jesus died. We spent some time thinking about that together this past Friday.

Jesus died in our place, bearing God’s wrath on our behalf which opens the way for us to be made right with God if we believe!

Jesus’ death is a incomprehensible display of God’s love, but it cannot stand alone.

If Jesus simply dies than nothing is gained because the curse of death would still remain.

Jesus does more than die, we read here that He **“rose again”**.

Early on that first Easter morning all that Jesus accomplishes on the cross is declared to be right and true when the stone is rolled away and He leaves the tomb empty.

He then meets His followers and over the course of 40 days proves beyond doubt to over 500 eye witnesses that He is Alive.

Paul points us to what is historically true in the resurrection of Christ and He applies it to what is to come (verses 14).

Somehow in the church of Thessalonica the people had become concerned about how dying effects a person’s participation in the second coming of Christ.

Since the resurrection of the dead was at the core of Paul's preaching they had certainly heard about the resurrection, but they are wondering particularly about who get's to participate in the Lord's coming.

We are told here that when Jesus comes "those who have fallen asleep (died) in him" will be coming with Him.

No believer is going to miss out on what is described in **verses 15-17**.

Scholars point out that the language here is intended to bring a familiar image to the first hearers of this description.

At that time when someone important would visit a city, he would arrive with a great announcement, and all the important officials of the city would go out to meet him and then accompany him back into the city.

That is what happens with Jesus here on a scale unlike anything that has ever happened before.

Paul mentions three things in verse 16; a loud command, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet call of God.

The point seems to be that everyone will hear the announcement of Christ's coming.

At the irresistible command of King Jesus all those who have died belonging to Him will be physically raised from the dead with their bodies being joined again to their souls and they will join His triumphant procession to the earth.

In addition to those who have died "in Christ", the believers who are alive at the time will also join the Lord in the air and have their mortal bodies transformed "in the twinkling of an eye" (1Cor 15:52) as they enjoy the coming of our great King.

No one who belongs to Jesus will miss out on this.

[Jesus in John's gospel likens Himself to a shepherd and that is a helpful image of what is being described in these verses. When it is time for the sheep to come in from the pasture, the Shepherd calls them and they come. A good Shepherd (Jesus is the Good Shepherd) always makes sure He has all the sheep.]

If we have believed upon Christ, If we have made Him the Lord and Saviour of our lives, then we are people of hope.

Hope that is based on the objective historical reality of Jesus being raised from the dead.

Because He is alive and reigning in heaven we have the certain hope of His glorious return and each and every genuine Christian will get to enjoy it.

[Many people think that because it has been nearly 2000 years that means Jesus isn't coming. That type of thinking has been around since the early church. That is why Peter reminds us in NIV 2 Peter 3:9 that, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand

slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” Jesus is going to call all of His people at His coming and it will be amazing and so Paul can say **verse 18**. The certainty of this on account of Jesus’ resurrection leads us to a second important lesson that we learn here at the beginning of chapter 5 which is this...]

Point #2 – Every believer should be expecting Jesus to come again.

We may be awestruck at the indescribable glory of the sight and sounds as Christ descends, but we should not be surprised that it is happening.

After addressing who will be part of Jesus return, Paul turns his attention the question of when it will take place (5:1-2).

Paul’s answer to the question of when is Jesus coming back is in keeping with what the Lord Himself said, “No one knows about that day or hour”.

No believer should spend an ounce of brain power trying to determine the day of Jesus coming because it will all be a waste of time.

The only thing the rest of us will learn is the day Jesus is not coming back.

Instead of trying to guess the exact time of Jesus arrival, every believer be concerned himself/herself with being ready.

Sadly, that will not be the case for everyone when that day comes (**verse 2-4**).

Unbelievers will be saying to themselves everything is good and in a moment destruction will come.

The events of recent days have demonstrated how easily this can happen.

The bible talks about someone called the “antichrist”/ “man of lawlessness” receiving the worship of the unbelieving world for a brief period leading up to the end of history.

Revelation talk about people not being able to buy or sell anything unless they have ascribed their allegiance this ultimate hater of the Lord Jesus.

I’ve wondered from time to time how something like that could happen.

How could the whole world bow so easily like that?

Well we’ve seen the whole world paralyzed by a microscopic virus at a pace unlike anything we have ever seen.

Please hear me carefully on this, I am not joining the crowd that is saying the coronavirus is a plague out of the book of Revelation.

What I am saying is that this is exactly the sort of scenario that would create the conditions of someone rising rapidly to power and everyone thinking that he is their rescuer.

We will know it is the antichrist because his help is going to be based on worshipping him and rejecting Jesus.

When the world goes over to him they will think they have been delivered, they will be saying, “peace and safety” and none of them will be expecting heaven to open and King Jesus to arrive (Doomsday clock 100seconds to midnight).

Unbelievers will be surprised, but as believers Paul says in verse four that we should be expecting this to happen.

The first person language Paul uses here in regards to Jesus coming tells us that he thought it was possible, not guaranteed but possible, for Christ to come back in his own lifetime.

While neither he nor any other Christian can know that for sure we should all expect the possibility.

[That is what Jesus is driving at in the parable of the ten virgins waiting for a groom to arrive at the wedding banquet. Five of them are wise and bring extra oil for their lamps and five of them are foolish and bring no oil. It takes a long time for the groom to show up and when he does only the five with extra oil are ready and able to join the groom at the feast. The Lord's point there is quite simple, don't be caught off guard. Be prepared expecting that Jesus could come at any moment.]

Are we expecting Jesus to come?

If He were to show up in the near future what would our reaction be?

It is really clear from these verses that a genuine believer should not be caught off guard when the Lord comes.

If the Holy Spirit has taught us the truth of Easter, if we know that Christ has been raised from the dead, and we know that He is reigning at the right hand of the Father, then we ought to know that He is coming again.

[It is important for us to look back on Easter Sunday and remember the resurrection of the Lord, but it is equally important for us to look forward as well. The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation for the hope of every believer, namely that He will come again. We should live expecting that to happen. There is a little more to this than merely expecting it to happen though. It is possible to expect something to happen and not be looking forward to it. For the genuine believer Jesus coming again is much more than a fact that we carry around in our brains. Knowing the joy of Jesus resurrection means that...]

Point #3 – Every believer should be living for the return of Jesus.

The only way to enjoy Jesus' return when it happens is to love the things He calls us to at salvation.

In the context of talking about the hope of Jesus coming, Paul tells us about what living with the expectation of that day does for us in our day to day living (5:5-8).

We are to be 'alert' and 'self-controlled' according to verse six.

As believers looking forward to the day when Jesus will reign upon the earth and sin will be eradicated from the world, we no longer mindlessly follow after the desires of our sinful nature.

One of the greatest lies being pressed upon people in the church today is that people cannot help what they do.

It is both deeply troubling and extremely sad when I hear people deny clear commands from the Lord based on how they feel as though the feelings and desires of the human heart are infallible.

It is heart breaking beyond words when people tie their identity to things that God hates.

We are not like someone in a drunken stupor who has lost their ability to govern their behaviour in a proper manner.

We are blood bought sons and daughter of God.

We have been brought from the darkness into the light and the Holy Spirit living in us gives us the capacity to put sin to death in our lives rather than be controlled by it.

As children of light we are encouraged here to put "on faith and love as a breastplate."

The breastplate is the piece of armor that covers the chest.

It is meant to protect the heart and lungs from danger.

Paul applies that in a spiritual sense here.

If we want to protect our hearts from the influences of evil?

We need to trust God. We need to believe what He tells us.

If we want to protect our hearts from chasing after things that lead to destruction then we need to pray that God would make known to us to a greater degree His love for us in Christ which is beyond all measure.

If we want to protect our minds from fear and doubt, then we need to think upon the certainty of our salvation.

We must delight ourselves daily in the good news of the gospel (5:9).

When we think upon our salvation it is wonderful to think about what we are being saved to.

Through faith in the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sins we have the sure hope of being with God in glory forever!

That is truly amazing, but we must also keep in mind what we are saved from.

God is Holy and justly bring His terrible wrath against every act of wickedness, but because Jesus bore the Father's wrath for those who believe we are saved from it.

I know very well that it is becoming increasingly unpopular to talk about hell, but as long as it is in the Bible we must take seriously God's wrath.

There is a judgement to come and to ignore it's severity only diminishes the work of Christ in our hearts.

Heinrich Vogel puts it well when he says, "Whoever thinks he can smile at God's wrath will never praise Him eternally for His grace."

These are the means by which we live for Christ from day to day as we wait for Him to come again.

If we have no love for the things of God now, how in the world will we rejoice when our Risen Lord returns?

[Imagine two children taking piano lessons once a week on Saturday mornings. One child loves music, listens to the piano teacher, and practices all week. The other child goes because he has too, barely listens, and never practices through the week. Which child is going to be happier when the day of the piano recital arrives?]

The same is true with the coming of Jesus.

If we love the things that He loves, if we delight ourselves in His commands, then when He comes we will rejoice which is the point of **5:10**.

If we are alive when He comes we will be overjoyed because we will get to live with Him forever.

If we die before He comes we will still be overjoyed because we still get to live with Him forever.

With all of this in mind Paul repeats his exhortation from the end of the previous chapter (5:11).

As we live in a world darkened by the shadow of death we can encourage one another because Jesus has conquered the grave.

Today let us be reminded of that first Easter Sunday.

Jesus Who died upon the cross for our sins, left the tomb empty, He is risen from the dead!

But let us also look to the future.

Jesus' resurrection is the means by which we will get to enjoy being with Him forever both body and soul.

Be encouraged today! He is risen! He is risen indeed!