

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11**  
**A hope that endures 1**  
**Talk 4 in a series of 5 at Ascension**

Sunday 6 May 2018

**Talk**

Our series is Faith, Love and Hope.

Three badges of a Christian.

If you're a Christian you wear a faith badge because your faith is in Jesus. You trust him and you turn your life around to serve God.

If you're a Christian you wear a love badge. You want to help people and serve them and help them to trust in Jesus.

And today we start looking at the hope badge.

How can you tell a Christian from someone else? You look at them and see they are wearing the hope badge. They have hope. And you can see it in their lives.

Here is the key verse in the passage.

**5:10 is the key verse**

**"He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live together with him."**

**What does this verse mean?**

Jesus died for us.

But he is now alive and he is coming back for us.

If we are alive when Jesus comes back we will see him and he will welcome us.

If we are not alive when Jesus comes back, because we have died, he will wake us up and we will see him and he will welcome us.

And so we will be there along with every Christian who is alive or who has and we will all live together with Jesus.

That is our hope.

That is what Christians believe, and it's our view of the future.

And Paul says encourage each other with this truth.

That is our hope

It is different from other types of hope

The other type of hope says:

"I hope it's going to be a white Christmas"

"I hope you'll get better soon."

"I hope my team will win"

"I hope everything will go ok."

They would all be nice things. But we don't know if they will happen. Or when they will happen.

Christian hope is different. Christian hope is based promises of God in his word.

A Christian doesn't say

"I hope Jesus will forgive my sins."

"I hope I can go to heaven when I die"

"I hope granny will be there too."

"I hope everything will be ok."

Because of the promises of God in his word a Christians says

“Jesus died for my sins, I trust in this.”

“Jesus rose from the dead, and so will I, I look forward to heaven.”

“Granny trusted in Jesus, I look forward to seeing her again.”

“My future may have some challenges, but God is will me so everything will be ok.”

Hope means, we look forward to the future with confidence, because of the promises of God for us in Jesus.

This is really important for us, because life can throw us all kinds of wobblies. And in the face of wobblies God wants us to be encouraged and keep going trusting him.

The first people who got this letter faced a lot of wobblies. And Paul was writing to them.

He knows they were on the receiving end of persecution, maybe they felt unsafe as Christians in their culture, for some of them they their families turned against them, their friends wanted nothing to with them and they felt alone, sometimes they were scared. Some have died. Some are scared they might be next. They need to know what the future holds for them. Will they be safe? Will their faith make a difference or is it better to give up their faith and be like everyone else? And what if they die before Jesus comes back, will they miss out on Jesus' reward?

So Paul talks about hope that endures. How our hope in Jesus helps us keep going.

There are two big issues in our passage this morning.

The first is “what happens to people when they die?”

The second is “how can I be ready when Jesus returns?”

So we will look at those two questions.

And you may notice we have missed out a section 4:1-12 “living to please God” and we will come back to that next week. Because if we can answer these questions first, it will help us to know how we can live to please God.

Throughout this passage there is the expectation that believers are different in the way that they approach both of these issues – both the prospect of death and the prospect of Jesus' return.

The reason for this is that this is part of what it means to live a life that pleases God. What is the life that pleases God?

Firstly it's

### **Grieving with Hope v13-18**

Hope encourages us to face death differently from everyone else

Secondly it's

### **Living with Focus 5:1-11**

hope encourages us to live differently to everyone else.

and these are our two headings.

I wonder if you are a person of hope? When it comes to what's at the end of road. Because what you think is at the end of the road will make a big difference to how you live today.

### **Firstly, Grieving with Hope.**

It's a difficult topic.

But Christian hope helps us to face death differently, verse 13:

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.”

Let’s start with that second idea. “or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.”

Christians grieve. Of course. We grieve over the loss of loved ones. There’s the pain of parting and the severance of relationship. Jesus wept at the death of his friend Lazarus. Death is a terrible parting and it is product of our broken world. It is right and natural to grieve in the face of death. But Paul says we do not grieve like the rest of men who have no hope.

Christians grieve differently. Hope makes a difference.

#### V14 READ

For the Christian death is like a sleep. And those who sleep will wake and be brought with Jesus, who also woke from the dead. This is our hope. This is what makes the difference.

But I think we are so often thrown by the death of loved ones. It feels so final. It can feel so wrong, and sometimes we are left asking why, why this person, why now? And we don’t have answers to those questions. The only answer we have is this one. There is hope for those who die in faith. Because death is not the end.

I think these first Christians here were thrown by death, because they were first generation to respond to the gospel of Jesus. They understood that Jesus died for our sin, and that when he rose he also had victory over death. So he was returning for his people. And they expected him soon. But as they were waiting, they experienced death of loved ones and they questioned what this meant.

It is quite hard for us to get back into their shoes because, two thousand years on, we’ve grown used to the idea of Jesus not coming yet. We don’t expect it to be in our lifetime. We plan for our old age in different ways, we calculate the number of years to our retirement, to assessing our pension provision, we get our savings planned out, and try to complete our mortgage payments, we think about our wills and so forth.

No, perhaps we are not asking the same questions that these Christians did, and perhaps that is to our loss. But we do need the same answers because we need Christian hope to help us to face of the inevitable.

Hear the words from a sonnet by John Donne, ‘Death Be Not Proud’,  
The last two lines read:

“One short sleep past, we wake eternally,  
And Death shall be no more; death thou shalt die.”

We do not need to be anxious for our fellow believers who have gone before us because our hope in Christ transforms everything. We don’t grieve as people without hope but people with hope, and our hope rests on a solid foundation.

No indeed they have a privilege  
V16 READ

They get to be with Jesus first.

I think somehow the first Christians were worried that when Jesus comes back those who were not still alive would miss out. Far from it. They will rise first, and after that v17 we who are still alive shall join them. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

[] Like, in the Peanuts cartoon, we meet Lucy and Linus again, the great theologians.

Lucy says to Linus, "Boy, look at the rain! What if it floods the whole world?"

Wise Linus, "It will never do that. In the ninth chapter of Genesis God promised Noah that that will never happen again and the sign of the promise is the rainbow."

"Oh, you've taken a great load of my mind."

Some theology has a way of doing that.

So three principles that underpin our hope in the resurrection:

### **Firstly, Christian hope for the future is grounded in the past.**

We saw that in v14:

"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."

Jesus own death and resurrection are our reason for hope in the face of death. It's not wishful thinking. It's not hope hard enough believe strong enough and maybe it will be true. It's God himself saying look at what I have done. Trust in this.

[] It is the hope of the engagement ring. I haven't yet been fortunate enough (or otherwise) to have fulfilled for someone else the promise of an engagement ring. It's not the same as a wedding ring, it's the promise that gives the hope of fulfilment. Most brides are reasonably confident that on the basis of having received one of those things (on the basis of what has already happened) there is a realistic expectation, a confidence that a wedding will take place one day. The engagement ring will have a wedding ring added to it and everything else that comes with that. Most of the time.

It's that sort of hope, that sort of certainty. "Go back to the cross", says Paul, "to renew your hope. To focus your mind. A promise has been made there, which shows you where you're headed, where it all ends. Death leads to new life in resurrection." Christian hope is grounded in the past.

**Secondly, Christian hope for the future is centred in the Lord.** Our hope isn't just heaven, our hope is Jesus and what he will do for us. Verse 15

"According to the Lord's own word"

It's not just what God did for Jesus in raising him. But is it what Jesus himself said. That is what we place our faith and trust in. It's the question we always have to ask, do I trust Jesus. Do I know what he has said, do I believe his words, do I trust what he has done for me?

It's what drives us back always to reading the gospels. Let that be your first diet as a Christian, to read the gospels and to soak up the person of Jesus. His mission on earth and his words of life. Do you trust in him afresh, every day.

You may not have the same technical questions that need answering that Jesus addressed and Paul refers to here – what will be the mechanics of the final day.

But as a believer our hope is centred in the Lord. The person of Jesus, his trustworthiness, his words of life, and his work which saves us.

[] The great American evangelist, D.L. Moody is recorded as having said, "One day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody has died. Don't you believe it. I shall be more alive than I have ever been."

He had Christian hope centred on the Lord. Grounded in the past.

**The third thing to note is that Christian hope is realised in the heavens,**  
verse 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 for ever."

Paul said in 1 Cor 15 "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is *futile*." *Similarly if all we ever have is a hope of resurrection our faith is futile. But according to God's promise our hope will be realised. It is a certain hope. It's a hope of what will happen.*

And here Paul says. We will be caught up together to meet the Lord and will be with him forever.

The living Church will literally be snatched up.

Just as in the Old Testament, Enoch walked with God, then he was no more because God snatched him away.

That is what he is going to do to all the Church that remains on earth at the coming of the Lord Jesus. Snatched away to be with him.

It's not something I think we can visualise, but I think the point is that we need not fear being left behind. Christian hope is realised in the heavens. We will be with Jesus.

No believer is going to miss this. No one will miss out or be left behind. No believer will be excluded.

Verse 18:

**"Therefore encourage each other with these words."**

Can you imagine anything more encouraging and enriching than this? If Jesus said "I go to prepare a place for you and I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am." That's the essence of heaven, isn't it? It's to be with the Lord forever where he is.

Sometimes people sneer at heaven and the idea of heaven.

Of sitting on a cloud with a harp forever.

But the essence of heaven being with the Lord. This is our hope, our destiny.

Paul wanted these Christians to come along side one another and to strengthen each other with this teaching to overcome their anxieties because the Lord's word turns grief into hope.

So when grieving the death of a believing loved one we need encouragement with these words. When facing the reality of our own demise we need the encouragement of these words.

Not platitudes, not wishful thinking, but solid hope which is grounded in the past, centred on the Lord, and to be realised in the heavens.

Christian hope makes an absolute difference to facing death, but it also makes an absolute difference in living life.

I think I'll say very little on this today. But come back to it next week as we conclude the book.

But the second point is this

### **Living with Focus.**

#### **Christian hope helps us to live life differently.**

Let me just show it briefly.

V2 the day of Lord will come like a thief in the night.

None knows when Jesus will return.

V3 some people think they are living in safety but for them the return of Jesus will be a terrible shock.

Not so for us v4 no because we are living in the light, our hope of Jesus return causes us to live differently so that when he comes we will not be surprised or caught out.

V9 the day of Jesus return will not be a day of wrath for us, but a day of salvation.

So v11 encourage one another and build each other up.

Point of this – if we are trusting in Jesus, his return will be a good thing for us. Because our lives are safe in him. Not so for those who don't. We need to pray for them. Because Jesus return will be a terrible shock. And because we are appointed to receive salvation on that day, we actually live our lives differently today.

is to cause Christians not to worry about when Jesus comes back but to live in the light, lives pleasing to God of faith, love and hope.

If we have that future perspective firmly in view, then we will persist in the work Jesus has called us to do, and we will encourage each other to live the way he has set out for us, trusting that his way is the best way, whatever the world around us says. Summed up as a life of self-control. Putting on faith and love and hope.

Jesus told many parables about the readiness of the servant whose master has gone away. He said, "It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. You must also be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. It will be good for that servant whom the master finds serving when he returns."

You see how it is hope that makes the difference. We know our lives are not our own, Jesus is coming back, we live not for ourselves, we live for him. And we encourage each other in this. Let's encourage each other today that we might live this coming week in the light of Jesus return.