

4/21/21 - 1 Thes. 4:13-18 - "Encouragement During Grief"

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[0 : 00] Now, there's fewer conversations that can often make us cringe and send chills down or up our spines than the discussions that we have to face revolving around death.

We avoid it like the plague. And maybe a couple of worthy opponents that come close to those conversations with death would be maybe discussing the physiological changes within our teenagers' bodies or maybe the dreaded discussion about the birds and the bees.

We don't enjoy necessarily walking through those moments, nor do we enjoy the discussions that revolve around death. No one wants to talk about it.

Nobody wants to talk about death. But I got to ask, why? Why does nobody want to talk about it? Why don't Christians want to talk about it?

Think about it. A climatic moment in our faith, and nobody wants to talk about it. A climatic moment of being united with God in heaven, and nobody wants to talk about it.

[1 : 09] For eternity, and nobody wants to talk about it. I believe it's because death cannot be separated from grief.

Grief is heavy. It negatively affects our body. It negatively affects our health at times.

And it's a time and a season where it's deep in sorrow. Maybe that's why nobody wants to talk about it.

As we look, maybe scour the shelves of a funeral home, as we're observing some calling hours of loved ones who have gone, We might get some literature or seek some other outside help to help mend us through those seasons of grief.

And we're given often many different coping mechanisms to help aid the process of grief. To almost act as if we're mechanical beings that sort of have this winder behind us.

[2 : 21] That we just wind up and then we get back into life as it was before. That, okay, death set us back and we'll just pop right back up as mechanical beings. Grief.

The Bible tells us something about grief. Especially how we can have great comfort amid grief. And today we're going to be looking upon Paul's first ever section within this entire letter to the Thessalonians.

About something that they do not know. All along this way, leading up to almost the fifth chapter of this book. We're actually going to pick up on next week in chapter five of something that they know. But right here, for the first time, he's saying, I need you to know something. Before it was all, I want you to encourage you more and more to continue in this manner.

To continue imitating me. To continue dying to your flesh in these different ways. First ever, reinforcing something within their actions and convictions.

[3 : 33] And today, Paul, it seems, is that he's filling in the gaps concerning death. And specifically, how we can grieve with hope when we experience the death of somebody that we love.

This is essentially a pastoral encouragement. And we're going to do this together in a couple different sections. But we're going to see that while the world minimizes the existence of death, goes to great lengths to ignore the reality of death, the church embraces it.

And we embrace it with a hope of something greater than what meets the eye on this earth. So we're going to do that together. Let's pray as we enter the text and the preaching of his word.

And we'll ask for the Lord to help us at this time to understand his word and to apply his word in our lives. Let's pray. Father, I pray that our ears and our eyes and our minds can be open and receptive to the words within your holy scriptures.

Father, we pray that your Holy Spirit softens our hearts, eases our minds, and clears our head of all the garbage of the world and that we can hear something divine today.

[4 : 54] something that reaches through any circumstance within our lives, something that can lift us out of a pit in our lives, something that can be everlasting, that can change us from the inside out.

Father, help us through your Holy Spirit to be encouraged by your word today and to be informed of hope. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. We're going to split this up into two separate sections, the first being a smaller section and the next being a larger portion of scripture.

The first section we have today is gospel-informed grief. I want to apologize in advance. Our projector seems to be on the fritz.

It might go blue and black and blue and black. If that's starting to be distracting and you see somebody turn the projector off, I told them to. I said, you know, we don't need the projector to receive God's word. So the first section that we're going to see is verse 13 and 14, and gospel-informed grief.

[6 : 03] Verse 13 says, We see here clearly Paul's intention.

We don't want you to be uninformed. There's something that needs information. There's a conviction that needs highlighted and to be spent a little bit of time cultivating and understanding about.

And Paul makes that very clear as he begins this passage and section. He's filling in the theological gaps of their understanding, specifically about those who have fallen asleep.

This isn't just a hibernation. This isn't just going to bed at night. This is falling asleep, meaning a euphemism for death, essentially.

And by way of implication, the basis of this information is provided to a church who seems to be grieving as the world does. That when people die, they're grieving, they're responding to that season without hope.

[7 : 25] They're responding to the death of people that they care about and grieving as the world does, who has no hope. Paul is informing this church, almost saying, remember your sanctification.

It's interesting that the passage just before this, when we were talking about sexual immorality, we got into a little bit of a dicey conversation about porn and all of that illicit behavior.

It was just previously in chapter 4, verse 3, that he said, abstain from sexual immorality. And here, he's continuing in that sanctification journey, saying, do not grieve as the world grieves.

Remember the demarcation line between where the world is and where the church begins. He's saying, there should be a clear, defining attitude and attribute in our grief, separate from the world. Grief is a part of life that the world often avoids like the plague. I mentioned that they go to great lengths to avoid it. They'll jump into a new Ford. You know, they'll get a new house.

[8 : 36] They'll try a new job maybe to fill in the gaps in their life, to take their minds off of that grieving process. And we all know what happens when we sweep things under the rug in various situations.

There's only so much dust that that rug can conceal before you realize that you're honestly just putting a band-aid on situations. You're not taking care of the problem.

I read about 60 years ago that it was common practice to take toxic waste and toxic garbage and just dig a hole in the ground and just bury it.

And voila, your problems go away, right? And it wasn't until that they realized that that toxic waste was being absorbed into the soil and entering into the aquifers deep within the earth.

And then people were getting sick. Often the world acts like this when they experience death and when they experience grief. To not take care of the problem, to not address those emotions properly.

[9 : 46] I mean, who would blame the world for not handling this well and avoiding a season of grief? I think often Christians, we try to avoid it like the plague as well. I mean, grieving is expressed in deep pain.

There's an entire book dedicated towards lament. And often we try to avoid it. It's a time of deep pain, of sorrow, the season of lament.

Psychologists have actually identified five different stages of grief. That being the first one being denial. The second stage moving to anger. Moving to bargaining.

Then moving to depression. And then moving to finally acceptance of the new changed reality. Ultimately, all grief is driven by a unique broken connection between somebody that you care for and that you cherish.

It's essentially a loss in life when we grieve. It can happen at the moment when somebody falls asleep and dies. It can happen in the moment of a friend moving away to another location or another city or your family or friends moving away.

[11 : 03] Grief is hard. It comes in many different ways, shapes, or sizes. But you wouldn't grieve, essentially. The same way that if your neighbor five houses down and around the corner their dog dies, you wouldn't be losing sleep necessarily over that situation.

But when you experience grief in a deep level, it's because of that unique connection that is broken in your life that you're experiencing.

Maybe Vision from WandaVision, the Marvel TV show, said it right. Where Vision, Marvel character, says, What is grief if not love persevering?

Think about that. That is a beautiful snapshot of truly what grief is. So much truth within just this short statement.

Notice something important. Paul isn't telling this church. He's not saying to abstain from grief. He's not saying, Go out there in the authority of the Holy Spirit.

[12 : 09] I want you to rebuke that grief. I want you to name it and get it out of here. It doesn't belong in your life. He's saying, As you grieve.

He's making it clear that we are to have a certain attitude as we grieve. We ought not to minimize and cast the demons of grief away.

But rather, might God be calling us to embrace it? And use these deeply saddened seasons to allow us to draw near to the God and creator of heaven and earth.

Because we know, according to Scripture, God responds to grief. Psalm 34, verse 18 says, The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirits.

You might recall a sermon on the mount. Matthew 5, verse 4. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. And most of all, probably the hallmark that has spoken most largely in my life is John 11, verse 33 through 35.

[13 : 24] This is around the time when Jesus' best friend, Lazarus, dies. Jesus, when he saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

And he said, Where have you laid him? And they said to him, Lord, come and see. In the shortest Bible verse in the entire Bible, verse 35, Jesus wept.

It doesn't say that he bound the spirits of grief and cast them into the fiery sea. He wept. Grieving is an opportunity to reflect and recognize the frailty of this life, the fleetingness of this life, and the biblical reality that life is fleeting.

And most of all, in everything, as everything in life is an opportunity to worship God, it is an opportunity to worship the living God in the midst of death.

That when we experience death, we know that there will be a resurrection in our maybe emotional state, in our emotional turmoil. It's coming, but God wants you to grieve right now.

[14 : 55] Isn't there times when we realize our fragility in life that we are often reminded of God's strength? Right? That our strength is made perfect.

Sorry, that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. If anything is made perfect in our weakness, it's our weakness. God's strength is made perfect in our weakness.

What grief naturally does is face us to look directly in the eyes of temporal reality that this world seems to make everlasting. That everything that we see, what meets the eye, will last forever.

And that these little moments and blurps in time, just pick yourself up, wind yourself as a mechanical being, and get back out there and continue to pursue your dreams in life. But grief, it drives us to inform our emotions with the word of God.

It reminds us of all reality in this life is fragile. All reality in this life is fleeting. And in verse 14, it says that we are reminded then of our identity, of who we are.

[16 : 07] If the world is saying this is who we are, the Bible through the gospel reminds us who we are. Look at me with verse 14. It says, for since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep, those who have died.

It is in times of grief, Paul is saying, do you not know who you are to be grieving as the world does without hope? Have you completely forgotten, church in Thessalonica, who you are?

If you are in Christ, you are a new creation. You are set apart from the world. And if in Christ's death you died, then in Christ's resurrection, you will rise as well.

This is sound doctrine. This is hope. R.C. Sproul said it greatly when he says, Christ's resurrection affords Christians a deeply seeded hope and assurance of never-ending fellowship with him.

Therefore, their genuine grief over departed brethren is softened, and they are upheld in hope. Church, when our sadness in this life is informed by sound doctrine, that being the gospel, our grieving becomes a worshipful season of rest in God and assurance of the future.

[17 : 46] There's nothing that can take away our rest in God and assurance of the future than when we allow sound doctrine to inform our grieving season.

This is the promise of the gospel that is our only hope. Christ alone is where our hope is found, which we will sing in just a little bit when we lose a loved one.

And for the church in Thessalonica and today, when we experience those five steps of grief, it's kind of freaky how, if you've ever gone through the seasons of grief, how those five steps sort of like resound.

You're like, yeah, that's exactly what I was going through. And then after that, it was this. Grieving is a process that has been wired within our being, and it's something that turns us to God.

It's an opportunity to worship the living God. It calls us to walk through seasons of lament, seasons of sadness, and turmoil. And this church should not be strange to us.

[18 : 50] This should not be strange for us to walk through, nor should we act like everything is okay and put on this fake face of something that reflects not a season that God has put us in, but an authentic transparency in our lives that we're worshiping God through our grief and our times of lament.

We don't need to mask it or hide it. But the church can walk through the grieving process with hope. Our tears don't represent a loss of hope. Our tears represent an adoration of God, a worship of God, turning our, as we align our emotions toward Him.

And this hope is hidden in Christ and God, as Colossians says, that those who believe in Him, we can not only grieve our loss, but we can celebrate their gain.

Get that? Get that? That it's actually our loss that we're left here. And it's their gain because they're with the King. So we can celebrate that.

And Paul does this in this passage as he continues. He continues to bring an emphasis, a sort of basis of comfort. And we see the foundation of this comfort and hope.

[20 : 06] It's not through a little literature book that's probably about this thick that says, five steps to handle your grief. He gives you the foundation of that hope and the basis of hope and comfort in our grief.

Let's continue in verse 15 and just look from 15 to 16. It says, simply meaning that those who have gone before us, who are already asleep, who have already died, are going to be, they will precede us in that grand arrival of Jesus Christ.

And verse 16 continues, for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with the cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.

And the dead in Christ will rise first. Church, there is going to come a day where Jesus is coming back.

Amen? It could be today. It could be in just a moment from now. I might not be able to finish my sermon.

[21 : 35] It could happen at any given moment. Think about that. There's only a couple handful of times in my life, 33, I haven't experienced all the life.

There's a couple people in the congregation who are probably double my age that have experienced many instances in life. Instances where time seems to stand still.

In my life, it happened September 11th, 2001, with the World Trade Centers and the attack on America, 9-11. And it was at those moments where it seemed as if nothing mattered except what was going on on the TV.

Yeah, we had class and grade school to go to, but that bell would ring. Nobody would move. I'm sure the stock market, people out at Wall Street were probably all concerned about their trading investments and things hitting rock bottom.

But when at that moment of that occurrence and that event, nothing else mattered. It seems like time stood still.

[22 : 46] And at this moment, when Jesus comes back as he is planning and is intended to, all is going to stop. No more deadlines on your schedule.

I'm a calendar freak. I have everything laid out like crazy. So my wife and I, you know, work together and I'm not over here while she's over there. You know, we have all these plans, agendas, and the kids have to go to soccer practice and everything.

Just think about that. Jesus is coming back and time is going to stand utterly still. Nothing will matter. And it's in this moment in coming history that Jesus will descend from heaven, coming back just the way he ascended.

And with a couple things in the mix, there will be a cry of his command. There will be a cry with that of the voice of an archangel.

And the sound of the loud trumpet, meaning that all of this will be known to public. There will be no question of what is going on at that moment.

[23 : 56] It is going to be a very public spectacle. And it will be a moment where at this moment, those that this church is grieving that have gone, they were concerned, they were grieving as if they are going to miss out on this time, on this moment in history that would come.

But what Paul is encouraging this church is saying, actually, you're not actually going to experience this before them.

you're going to be left on earth. They're going to rise first. Think about that. At the moment that this happens, the dead will be raised. Graves will be open.

There will be a resurrection, a bodily resurrection, of those believers of the Old Testament and all the way into the New Testament. And it will happen as 1 Corinthians 15, 52 says.

It will happen within a twinkling of an eye. As 1 Corinthians 15, 52 says, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpets, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed.

[25 : 08] And then he goes on to say, he quotes Isaiah and Hosea. He said, when the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on the immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, quoting Isaiah, death is swallowed up in victory.

Hosea, oh death, where is your victory? Oh death, where is your sting? It reminds me of our, the song that we sing in our church, Cornerstone.

When he shall come with trumpet sound, oh may I then in him be found, dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless we stand before the throne.

Oh man. Now, we don't need to dissect too much of, you know, some implications within this text. It doesn't appear that this is the trumpet of judgment as people have argued in the past.

We see that more detailed in Revelation 8 through 11. But rather, this is a trumpet sound of gathering. We are just going through Exodus in our Bible reading plan as a church and this is listed in Exodus 19 where Moses sounds the trumpet and the people gather at the base of the Mount Sinai to meet God.

[26 : 39] This is the trumpet sound of gathering. Real history to come and a great comfort in grief indeed, right? And it doesn't stop there.

Obviously, Paul is saying those who have gone before, they're going to rise first. If anybody is going to be missing out, it's going to be us on earth. But he says it doesn't end there.

In verse 17, as it continues, it says, then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these words. Now for the dispensationalists, I know any millennial, avid millennial debater is probably like, yeah, he's going to go there.

Any dispensationalists, these are the hallmark verses of the rapture. It just reminds me of all the Left Behind series with Kirk Cameron.

[27 : 48] He takes a literal view a little bit too far in various instances. I wouldn't recommend those movies. But we can mistakenly build our theology on such a small set of verses and miss the whole context of the whole.

And so we don't want to apply things that Scripture isn't saying in this instance. And I don't believe that Paul wrote this passage for us to argue the mysteries of the end times, to figure out what's

happening here and then what happens.

What is that trumpet? Well, let's try to figure out what that trumpet means. Paul is trying to say what comfort means in this passage. Yeah, there's other passages that we can talk about in length probably over a coffee up Bob Evans.

And we could talk about what those other trumpets mean. We could talk about those things, but he's trying to tell this church and us today what comfort means so that we are not grieving as the world grieves.

And so there are other locations that provide much more adequate basis of forming an eschatological view, but I wouldn't say that this is the most exhaustive in this passage. So we can go on a long tangent of end time beliefs, but this would just, this would not provide a, I believe, a just treatment of Paul's writing and the basis of his writing.

[29 : 05] But in even those end time beliefs, let essentials unite us and let there be charity in the non-essentials. Okay? What Paul is doing here is instead clarifying.

He's saying something important that when Christ appears, essential doctrine, when Christ appears, believers will appear. Those who have been long gone since before Jesus walked the earth and also people who just passed away this morning, they will appear.

Glory to God. And because of that, the church does not have to grieve as the world does without hope. Okay? Essential doctrine. End of story.

This is what we believe. And in this reality, Paul is saying a proper eschatological view, an end time view, should drive us to worship.

That a proper end time eschatological view should drive our doxology and our singing and our praise, even as it's driving our tears.

[30 : 19] Now remember, Paul's intention, he's urging and instructing a grieving church who is without hope. Paul is not simply in with a chalkboard of talking about this is the premillennial view and this is the postmillennial view and this is the allmillennial view.

There's no millennium. And this is the premillennial dispensationalist, you know, the Kirk Cameron weird kind of view. And so, you know, these are all the views and these are things that will divide us and we should all be divided.

No. He's not in a classroom at this time, church. He's in more so of a funeral home comforting those who are grieving, saying, when Christ appears, that's what matters.

He is going to appear and at that time, the dead will be raised, the living will be raised, all who are found in him, whether it's before the tribulation, after the tribulation, before the millennium, or if there's no millennium.

That's not what matters. He's coming back. And he's coming back, church, okay? Okay. Simply, Paul is instructing this church why they can have hope, why they can push through their grieving process and have assurance in Christ for those who are dead and now the living.

[31 : 42] At that moment of Christ's second coming, those who remain here on earth will be raptured from the earth, body, and soul. And for those who have died and who died and previously gone, their bodies, their lifeless bodies will be united with their soul, that is, with God in heaven at the moment of their death.

For those who were in deep-seated grief over their loved ones, it would be a time where they can collectively experience the glory of Christ's second coming and not a single believer is going to miss out on that.

We will all witness in great glory and spectacle the cry of his command, the trumpet sound. sound. For this reason, we have hope that is not of this world, church.

And we too, church, can therefore encourage one another with these words. As verse 18 says, why? Because grieving is difficult.

Death is difficult. We can't undermine it. We can't ignore it. We must grieve well and worship well. So as we come to a close today, we have to understand the gospel is the undercurrent of hope in all things in this life.

[33 : 03] Any other hope that exists in this world is a facade. It's empty, it's void, and it is often meaningless. The gospel doesn't promise us health, wealth on this earth, nor does the Bible.

What the gospel does bring us is hope in things that lay waiting ahead, as it details, an inheritance laying ahead.

The perfect transformation and union with Jesus. So we can obviously see grieving is not something that we should rebuke, we should bind and cast away from our lives, but we can embrace our grief.

We can embrace the process of grieving and we can grieve well and worshipful in times of deep sorrow and emotional turmoil. But maybe you're not in Christ today.

Maybe you're one of those who won't be caught up in the cloud, or you're not assured of the fact that you might be left.

[34 : 12] it would only be equally important to know that those apart from Christ should recognize that if there is only hope in Jesus Christ in the gospel, then hopelessness rests outside of the gospel.

You can try to feel good in your life if you're not in Christ. You could try to fill your void in your life with various things, and addiction and sex and pornography and drugs and alcohol and keep going through the rhythms that the world says to self-medicate yourself and hit those emotions of instant gratification, but at the end of the day, you are without hope.

You can ignore it with another high. You can ignore it with another drug high, but I've got to tell you when the second coming of Christ appears, when he appears with a cry of his command, when you hear that trumpet sound, you're not going to be left on earth to party like it's 1999.

It's not going to be a party at all. You want to experience grief? That's going to be a time of grief, but at that point, it's going to be too late.

Your opportunity will have lapped. You will enter into eternity without God, without a Savior, without blood to cover your sin, and without hope.

[35 : 47] There's much grieving in life for those who are apart from Christ, and the grief of disobedience, sin, and rebellion, but God has set all of us free.

We can grieve our sin of being once set apart from Christ, but we rejoice in our union through our faith in Christ, and that's bought by the blood of Jesus Christ.

So, whether you're in here today or on the live stream, if you are apart from Christ today, if you are not assured of your salvation, right now, it's time to have faith in the hope that exists in this world that is available to you while there is still time.

Again, I might not get to the end of this sermon. Accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior in your life. Come to him through your faith and simply say, God, I believe in you.

I've tried all these other methods. I'm churning my life. I'm repenting of my sin. I know there's no hope in that, and I've been trying to fool myself all this time. I'll give you all of myself now, Jesus.

[37 : 02] Come to Jesus today. God has destroyed death through Jesus Christ. There is no victory in death any longer, and in this we can grieve with hope and allow our grieving emotions to submit under biblical truth.

In this we can encourage one another of this hope, the hope of the past, the hope of the present, and the hope of a future laying waiting ahead for our future inheritance as his church.

Amen. Right. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.