

Bible Study Notes

(A basic transcription with modifications for style and clarity)

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

Brian Orchard, February 3, 2017

Greetings again. We have the opportunity to spend a little more time looking into God's word and to continue looking at some of the material that the Apostle Paul has presented to us through his first letter to the Church in Thessalonica.

God's unique calling presents us with some very unique challenges. It is a way of life that is narrow and difficult. Christ said it would be. It's difficult because this way of life goes against the course of this world, the way of the world itself and also the way of our own nature. Working against those things is very, very difficult even though we have the assistance of God's Holy Spirit.

But, our loving Father does provide us with some motivation. That's what we want to look at here for just a moment, first of all. He provides reasons why the effort is worthwhile. These reasons give us the desire and the determination to put out the effort that is required. I'm not denying that we get a great deal of assistance from the power of the Holy Spirit. We do! But I think we all appreciate that there is effort required on our part to allow that Spirit to work through us and to be activated within our minds.

The motivation that God provides for us is hope. Hope carries the notion of expectation. A positive expectation as it is presented to us in God's word. Our modern usage of the word tends to diminish its power – we sort of hope that something might happen. It's a sort of a wanting on our part for something to be so. Whereas hope, from a biblical perspective, is much more powerful. Hope from God's point of view is based on solid and certain facts. God backs up what He says with absolute certainty. If He makes a statement that something is so, it will be so. And our hope can be based on that certainty. Hope is directed towards God. It is not something out of the human mind. It is directed towards God. It's not something out of our imagination; it's not our desire or wanting. What we hope for is of God. Let's look at Psalm 38 and in verse 15 here to begin with where this clear statement is made.

Psalms 38:15 For in You, O Lord, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God.

“For in You, O Lord” could be translated “I wait for You.” And, as we look at hope there is an aspect of waiting that comes into play here. “For I wait for You, O Lord, I hope; You will hear me, O Lord my God.” So, there's that positive expectation of an

answer from God based on the waiting and the hope that is involved. Patiently waiting is involved in hope. Psalms 37, verse 7. (Recently we had an excellent sermonette on the subject of waiting that will fill in a little more detail than I'm presenting here. Mr. Jim Sampson gave that sermonette. You might want to reread that after this.)

Psalms 37:7 Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,

This resting and waiting patiently certainly is an aspect of hope. We're told to rest and it really means to be dumb or to be silent; to be quiet, trusting and looking to God. This Psalm begins by saying:

Psalm 37:1 Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.

Don't fret, just rest and wait patiently for God. Waiting is not passive. It's not sitting around doing nothing. There are things that we have to do, as this Psalm 37 brings out.

Psalms 39:7 "And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You.

What do I wait for? We're waiting for what God said is our future, what God has presented for us. And our hope is in Him, not in this world, not in our thoughts, our minds, our imaginations. "Our hope is in You."

Psalms 71:5 For You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust from my youth.

So, this hope in God covers a span of time. It's not an instant thing. It's not just a one-day thing or a one-week thing. "You are my trust from my youth." God is the confidence, our expectation. Our hope is with us day in and day out with what God has provided. Hope and waiting can be quite long-term. There's not a definitive time to it. Jeremiah captures the action concept of hope very well and there is action involved with hope. In Jeremiah 29, we'll just pick it up in verse 10:

Jeremiah 29:10 For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place (referring to captivity and what would follow it).

11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.

13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

The hope that God would provide for them would motivate them to do what was necessary to seek God. And so, this concept of giving you a future and a hope is highly motivational and it is intended to be.

Hope, of course, is a major aspect of the gospel. And, not only are we thinking of ourselves as we focus on hope (and, of course, that's the message that Paul gave that allows us in the Church to focus on hope in a certain way); but this world is in desperate need of hope. And I rather suspect in the time ahead, as more people become disillusioned with those whom they have put their trust in at this present time, that there will be the need for us to frame and present a message of hope to this world. Look in Colossians 1, verse 5, in reference to the aspect of hope in the gospel message.

Colossians 1:5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,

“The hope which is laid up in heaven, which you heard about through the gospel that was brought to you.” The gospel message is a message of hope. And it's certainly a message that this world needs. But for those called, the gospel message of hope contains a call to action. So, let us go to 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 13:

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,

And right there we have something to place our hope on. We're chosen for salvation. We've been set apart, sanctified by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

That requires action, too. That's not passive. To be able to hold the traditions and stand fast, that takes a great deal of effort for us as humans.

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace,

17 comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

So, there is action required on our part and the hope that God gives us motivates us to do what is required. We're going to see several sets of action here that we can be quite specific about before we're finished. The Apostle John addressed hope as action and gave some substance to one aspect of hope. In 1 John 3, verse 2 tells us:

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed (at the return of Christ), we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

And so, John tells us that not only do we work at purifying ourselves because of this hope, but that “We will be like Christ.” That tells us that we’re talking about the resurrection. The hope of the resurrection is a magnificent hope for us as physical human beings. 1 Peter 1, verse 3; since we’re here in this section of scripture:

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Now, that living hope is because Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead. He died, was buried and was resurrected. But it also is a living hope because of our association, our sanctification through Jesus Christ’s resurrection and the Father’s acceptance of that sacrifice on our behalf. So, we have a living hope.

In Hebrews 11 there are lists of people who died in faith. They saw the promises afar off. The promises are listed here in verse 4:

4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

There is a certain promise aspect of the hope that God holds out to us. These people mentioned in Hebrews 11 saw that promise, they embraced it; but they saw it afar off. It motivated their lives at that time, not knowing exactly when those promises might be given to them in terms of timing.

So, we have a certain promise aspect without a complete and full guarantee of when that might happen. The hope of the resurrection really should be a highly motivating factor for us. Now let’s see how Paul uses this hope to encourage the Church in Thessalonica. Actually it’s being canonized here as instruction and hope for us at any time for God’s Church. We’re picking it up in chapter 4 of 1 Thessalonians, verse 13, where Paul says:

1 Thessalonians 4:13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

Throughout this letter Paul has referenced Christ’s return a number of times. Now, remember as we began this letter we noted how encouraging it was. It was a letter to a young Church. This was written somewhere around 50-51 AD. The Church had not been in existence for a very long period of time. Paul was being very encouraging. And a number of times throughout the letter he references the return of Jesus Christ. Chapter 2, verse 19:

1 Thessalonians 2:19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? (That’s a very positive statement that he’s making there. And at the end of chapter 3 verse 13:)

1 Thessalonians 3:13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. (And so, Paul is giving some detail now about that resurrection, about what is going to occur at Jesus Christ's return.)

The first comforting factor that Paul gives us is about death itself; describing it as being sleep, as it says here "who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope." Knowing that death is compared to sleep removes the absolute despair that some people feel and experience at death when they have no idea of what happened to that loved one that has just died. They have all sorts of vague ideas that theology from various religions present to them. But they don't really know and they just despair. There's loss without any answers.

God helps us understand that death is not an end. It's just a period of time between two parts of this plan of salvation that God is working out. It's just like being asleep. You wake up from that period of time of being asleep. You're not aware of what has transpired while you were asleep. So, we start off here with the knowledge that there is something beyond death. Death is not the end of everything.

It doesn't take away the fact that we've lost somebody that we're close to, that we've loved and lived with perhaps a long period of time – a family member. But it takes away the despair and we know there is a future for this person.

We'll look at John 11 just momentarily before we go on here with the rest of this section in Thessalonians, because there's a very interesting story here where Christ is teaching about life; human life, death and the resurrection. It's very instructive. It's an interesting section because it involves a man who was loved by Christ, known well by Jesus Christ, Lazarus of Bethany. Lazarus was very ill. We know that it was a serious illness, because later Christ states that he died. So the illness that he had caused him to die a physical death.

He was the brother of Mary and Martha, again well-known identities to us. A family that was very close to Christ. Christ knew that He was going to use this situation of Lazarus' illness to demonstrate something. And He said Himself, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Those around Him didn't understand fully what He was talking about.

After the sisters had requested Christ come because Lazarus was sick, Jesus Christ stayed where He was for two days. He didn't rush down there to take care of the situation. He knew exactly what He was doing. He knew Lazarus was going to die. But He also knew that he was going to live. So, He didn't rush down. He spent two days and then He said after two days:

John 11:7 ...to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

Now the disciples thought that was a crazy idea because the last time they were there recently, they tried to stone Him. It was hostile territory. They said, basically, "You're crazy. Why would you go down there?" Well, one of the answers was:

11 "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."

They thought He meant just physical sleep, but He meant death. So, death, again, is being portrayed as being asleep. He then went down there and there was this discourse with Martha and Mary. Then Christ says these words to her.

25 "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."

That is the hope, brethren, that is extended to us; that's held out to us. We know that physical life has a termination point. It is going to end at some point. It's physical, it's temporary. But, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and our calling and our sanctification and our being involved in God's plan of salvation, we shall live.

26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Then Jesus Christ went on to go down to the tomb and call out Lazarus. Lazarus got up, bound in all of the burial gear. He walked out and he was alive. He had been resurrected back to physical life to make a very powerful point to not only the family that's involved, but the onlookers who witnessed this particular event. And it's a strong example for us, too.

So back in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, picking it up in verse 14:

1 Thessalonians 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

And again, Hebrews 11. There's a whole list of people there who died in the faith, not having received the promises. But they will receive the promises at some point in the future.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

A resurrection of those who have died in Christ over the two-thousand-year period of the Church, as well as those that God worked with before that.

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

It just shows the order of events here. I'll come back to a comment on this verse. Let us read the remaining two verses.

17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

This Church was a young Church, as we've already covered in a couple of previous Bible Studies. They're coming out of a thoroughly pagan situation and death is probably something that they were afraid of; that they were concerned about. So Paul is trying to give them a hope that will provide comfort, such that they should encourage each other and comfort each other as they look at the true hope that God holds out.

But, we see here some factors. We see, first of all, the timing of the resurrection. It is at Christ's return, the seventh trump. Now, just to add well-known verses to that, Matthew 24 verse 29 tells us:

Matthew 24:29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

So, the timing is the seventh trump at Jesus Christ's return.

Secondly, we know the nature of the resurrection. We know that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. Our fleshly bodies have to be changed.

1 Corinthians 15 makes this perfectly clear to us in verse 42.

1 Corinthians 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.

43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

This is reference to the first resurrection, which is a change of substance from physical to spiritual.

44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

And you read on down through verses 50 through 54, where it confirms "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom", that "at the last trump...the trump will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Therefore, those

who have died are resurrected from the grave to a spirit, eternal body. Those who happen to be alive at the point of Jesus Christ's return are simply changed from physical to spirit being. That's what Paul is outlining here.

Those changed will live and reign with Christ a thousand years at least, initially. And so, for the millennial period, those who are spirit beings, made so at the resurrection of Christ's return, will rule and reign with Jesus Christ for a thousand years.

John identifies this as the first resurrection. He literally calls it the first resurrection, because we know there are others to follow. Paul wrote to the Church about the resurrection to provide comfort in the knowledge of death and motivation to continue in the way of life God had called us to. We need that motivation because life can get a bit tedious. It can get very wearing, tiresome. For the difficulties that I mentioned at the beginning that we have to face, we need encouragement and God has given that encouragement.

Paul spoke to the Church, or at least he wrote to the Church, of the first resurrection. Because for those in a covenant relationship with God, this is their resurrection. This is our hope. This is what we look forward to, brethren; a resurrection at the soon coming return of Jesus Christ.

Paul concluded this letter by underscoring the certainty of this promise. And it's in verse 24 of chapter 5 where he says:

1 Thessalonians 5:24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

The hope of the resurrection is absolutely certain. And that is something that we absolutely grab with both hands and hold onto. It motivates us to the action that we need to do right now, as we wait for the return of Jesus Christ. ♦