

I THESSALONIANS 4:13-18
WALK IN HOPE!
PART 1

Please turn in your Bibles to I Thessalonians chapter 4 as we continue our study through Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica. A few weeks back we began the last section in this letter. And this section deals with practical lessons on how the church is to walk.

And as we began this section we saw that the church is to walk in holiness. The church is to walk in love. The church is to walk in honesty. And this morning, we are going to look at the idea of the church walking in hope!

We are going to spend several weeks in this section dealing with hope because this hope is linked to the coming of the Lord for His Bride, the Church. It is what has been called the rapture of the church.

What is interesting to me is that there are many out there today who put down this idea of the rapture of the church. They feel it was something that was invented in our recent past. And yet, when you look at the Scriptures, as we will see, it is very clear that the Lord is coming for His Bride, the Church prior to the start of the seven-year Tribulation Period.

And as you negate this teaching, you are removing the hope that the Lord has given to us. In fact, here in I Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 18, Paul, as he finishes up on this teaching in this chapter, says, "**Therefore comfort one another with these words.**"

And, if the Church is to go through the Tribulation Period, why would Paul say these words in I Thessalonians 5:9-11, **“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”**

I don't know about you, but when I read what is going to take place during the Tribulation Period, that is not too comforting to me. But Paul tells us that God did not appoint us to wrath, His wrath that will be poured out upon a Christ rejecting world. Thus, we will be removed before this starts and what comfort, what peace that should bring to our lives. It gives us great *HOPE!*

What I would like to do is go through these verses and then we will dig in and take a look at eschatology or end-times events because it is important. I do realize that for some, they are not interested in end-times events. But the Bible is filled with information about the days we are living in and what is ahead and thus, I believe God wants us to know what is coming, He wants us to understand these things.

Listen to what the Lord has to say regarding prophecy. In Isaiah 46:9-10 we are told, **“Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure.’”**

I like how one writer summed this up. He wrote,

Time and again, God has proven beyond question that He alone is God by “declaring the end from the beginning.” What He was telling us in context (which is the way all Scripture should be taken) was that ***I am going to reveal prophecy to you so that when it is fulfilled, you will know with certainty that I am God.***

Essentially, God was saying that when we see prophecy (which is basically history written in advance) fulfilled, we will realize that He alone is God, and that He alone is able to accurately describe (through His prophets) other events recorded in the Bible, such as creation (for there were no human witnesses to creation). Furthermore, we will know we can fully trust everything He says, including what He has stated about our eternal future.

The magnitude of the statement in Isaiah 46:9-10 is seen in the fact that no other so-called holy book in the world outside of the Bible can prove its own divine origin – unlike the Bible, which is able to authenticate itself through the many prophetic statements that have been accurately fulfilled.

- Tim LaHaye, Thomas Ice, Ed Hindson, *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture*

So, I believe that this is important for us to understand and I think you can easily see why so many Christians have lost hope because their hope is in this world and not in the Lord and His return. The early church, as we will see, was looking forward to the coming of the Lord for His Bride, the Church, something we call the rapture!

With that said, let's read through verses 13 through 18 of I Thessalonians chapter 4 and then we will break them down and look at them, see what the Lord has for us as we look to this blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

I THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

Keep in mind that the church in Thessalonica was filled with young believers and yet, Paul taught them about the return of the Lord, the Rapture of the church. And as Paul left them, there was some confusion about those who died knowing the Lord, what would happen to them? Would they miss out on the rapture of the church? So, Paul is going to answer these questions and restore their hope.

VERSE 13

Notice how Paul starts out here. He says, “**But I do not want you to be ignorant . . .**” and the focus here is on those who have died in the Lord, believers and the rapture of the church and we will see that as we read on.

As you read Paul’s letters, there are four things that Paul asks Christians not to be ignorant of. And guess what? Those are the things that many Christians are ignorant about. Let me share them with you and then we will deal with the issue of the rapture of the church and Paul does not want us to be ignorant about this event!

First of all, this word, “**ignorant**” in the Greek is AGNOEO, (ag-no-eh’o) and it speaks of not understanding or that a person does not know because of a lack of information or intelligence. I think the information is there, I don’t think that is the problem. And I can’t speak about intelligence in those that deny these things, if they have it or not.

But I think I can say, if they read what the Scriptures have to say and believe it, they will not be ignorant of these things. But the problem is that as they read it they let their prejudices or pre-conceived ideas drive them away from what the Scriptures are saying and that is not a good thing! So, let's examine these four issues that Paul wants us to understand.

First of all, in Romans 11:25-27 Paul tells us, **“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.’”**

I think that is very clear. Paul is saying that God is not done with the Jewish people, that He is still working with them. And, when **“the fullness of the Gentiles has come in”** God will bring them back to saving faith. They will come to their Messiah, to Jesus and repent of their sins and ask Him to be their Lord and Savior. Not that Jewish people aren't saved today, they are. But the nation will turn to Jesus at the end of the Tribulation Period, the nation of Israel, the Jews!

Now that phrase, **“the fullness of the Gentiles”** speaks of when that last Gentile gets saved and the Lord calls His Bride, the Church home. We call it the Rapture!

And yet, there are many who say that God is done with Israel and to support Israel as God's people is wrong. Listen to this article by Benjamin L. Corey who is a graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary. He wrote,

Not many days go by without seeing some sort of “Stand with Israel” image pop up into my Facebook news feed. And, each time it does, my heart grieves over the fact that so many of my fellow Christians have been taken in by this new and dangerous theology, and in so duped into supporting terrorism and oppression . . . all in the name of God.

I grew up believing that Israel was God’s favorite country (also commonly expressed as “the Jews are God’s chosen people”), and the center of all God’s activity in humanity. Not only were they considered God’s “chosen” people, but we were taught that failing to support the nation of Israel would result in being cursed by God, whether you were an individual or an entire nation. This has caused much of American Evangelicalism to develop a blind love affair with the modern nation of Israel, who they see as the center of God’s past and future activity in the world.

I believe that this theology of the “Church and Israel Distinction” is actually one of the most dangerous and destructive theologies in the world today. It is unlike many of the other “secondary” theologies that are privately held beliefs which do not impact others one way or another. Conversely, this theology is causing a great many Evangelical Christians to embrace violence, condone oppression, support torture, and is actually *creating terrorism*. Ironically, this theology leads one to support not Godly behavior, but instead embrace behavior that is anything but Jesus-like.

The purpose of this post is to explain why this “pro-Israel” theology is ridiculously unbiblical, and how “standing with Israel” ironically causes one to stand opposed to God. I will give a brief overview of the basic tenants of this theology, the history of how it became popular within American Evangelicalism, why this theology is blatantly opposed to scripture, and why it is a major cause of terrorism in the world today.

- <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/formerlyfundie/standing-with-israel/>

Let me ask you this after hearing what this man had to say. If you were to read Romans 11:25-27 and see what Paul has to say about **“all Israel will be saved”** and not read anyone’s comments on what they think about Israel, what would your conclusion be?

Very simple, **“all Israel will be saved.”** And yet, I think you would be shocked by how many Christian churches, denominations, Christian’s in general believe that God is done with Israel and now the church has replaced Israel. In fact, they will come down upon you, like this gentleman and say that you are promoting terrorism if you support Israel. I think it is the other way around if you support the Palestinians. Not that we are not to love them and witness to them, but they want Israel, the Jews destroyed!

Now those who reject Israel will even go as far as to say that when it speaks of Israel in the New Testament it is speaking of the church. But let’s look at that in light of what Paul said here in Romans chapter 11 and see if it makes sense.

If Paul is speaking of the church when he says Israel, then he would be saying, **“all the church will be saved.”** Does that make any sense? Of course it doesn’t! And listen to what Paul goes on to say there in Romans chapter 11, **“. . . ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.’”**

He is quoting out of the Old Testament, Isaiah 59:20-21, and if you are still not sure if this is speaking of Israel or the church, when has the church ever been called **“Jacob”**? It hasn’t because we are not Jacob, the Jews are descendants of Jacob!

So, Paul does not want us to be ignorant of God’s plan for Israel, that they will be saved as a nation one day as God takes away their sins and the only way God has ever taken away a person’s sins is through repentance and receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior!

Another area that people are ignorant about is spiritual gifts, and yet, Paul tells us that we should not be ignorant of them. In I Corinthians 12:1 Paul wrote, “**Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.**”

I do understand that there are many who deny the gifts of the Spirit, they believe some of the gifts of the Spirit are for today while many of the sign gifts are not for today, they were only for the first century church so that Christianity could get started, so the Word of God could be completed.

And one of their proof texts comes from I Corinthians 13:10 where Paul wrote, “**But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.**”

The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, “**But when the complete and perfect (total) comes, the incomplete and imperfect will vanish away (become antiquated, void, and superseded).**”

Thus, prophecy, tongues, knowledge, the sign gifts were to be used until the Word of God, the Bible was completed, for “**that which is perfect has come**” and then they would pass off the scene.

The only gifts I see passing off the scene is the office of apostles and prophets, for in Ephesians we are told that they came to lay the foundation of the church and now the church is being built upon the foundation that they have laid.

I don't believe that is what Paul is speaking of here for if you read on he says in I Corinthians 13:12, “**For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.**”

The Living Bible puts this verse like this, **“In the same way, we can see and understand only a little about God now, as if we were peering at his reflection in a poor mirror; but someday we are going to see him in his completeness, face to face. Now all that I know is hazy and blurred, but then I will see everything clearly, just as clearly as God sees into my heart right now.”**

You see, as we read God’s Word we have a picture of Him but it is not complete, we see Him but it is cloudy. But one day we will see Jesus face-to-face and we won’t need prophecy, we won’t need tongues, we won’t need knowledge for we will be with Him!

I truly believe these gifts are for today and Paul doesn’t want us to be ignorant about this subject, it is important, he wants us to pay attention to what he has to say because it is what was needed in the early church to move the Gospel message forward and it is what is needed today, the empowerment of God’s Spirit upon our lives to bring glory to God and to build up the body of Christ!

Now if you want a more in-depth study on the gifts you can go to our Foundation of Faith series on our web page and we go into great detail not only why I believe these gifts are for today, but how they are used in the church because there is much abuse and misuse of them.

I think it is a very important study for we should not only understand the things that God has for us, but apply them to our lives.

So, Paul did not want us to be ignorant about spiritual gifts and their use in our lives. May we be open to what God is saying and listen to His Word instead of what people think God is saying!

Another area that is important for us to understand and something that Paul does not want us to be ignorant about is suffering and trials in the Christian life. In II Corinthians 1:8-11 Paul tells us, **“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.”**

As we read these verses does it seem like Paul was discouraged, depressed, down? That is exactly what Paul is saying here. Paul does not want us to be ignorant about difficult times that will come into our lives. There are sufferings that we will go through. There are trials we will face in this life.

For Paul, it was so bad that he did not know if he was going to live or die each day according to verse 8.

Now you read that and you may wonder why God allowed it? There are different reasons why God allows these things in our lives. Sometimes we need to come to the end of ourselves so we can look up to God for our help. No matter what though, God is teaching us, maturing us, helping us to grow.

And if you think about it, when things are going well in our lives we tend to become lax in our relationship with God. But when the fire is turned up, when we have no control, when we come to the end of ourselves, we come to God who comforts us and lifts us up, something He wants to do in our lives.

In Isaiah 41:10 we are told, **“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”**

And in Isaiah 40:31 we are told, **“But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.”**

Thus, we should not be surprised when suffering and trials come into our lives as Christians, but we should bring all that we are going through to the Lord, the God of all comfort. Let us not ignorant of these things.

And the one that Paul speaks of here in I Thessalonians 4:13, the focus is on the rapture of the church and Paul does not want us to be ignorant of this event!

Let me show you what I mean regarding many who are, what Paul says, ignorant about the rapture. We are told,

A third of America’s Protestant pastors expect Christians to be raptured - or taken up in the sky to meet Jesus - as the end times begin. About half think a false messiah known as the Antichrist will appear sometime in the future.

A surprising number think the Antichrist has already been here, or isn’t on his way at all.

Mainline Protestant pastors (36%) are more likely to say the rapture isn’t literal. Pastors who hold this view include about half of Lutherans (60%), Methodists (48%), and Presbyterian/Reformed pastors (49%). Few Baptist (6%) or Pentecostal pastors (less than 1%) hold this view.

I find it interesting that some 36% of mainline Protestant pastors don't think the rapture is a literal event! If that is true, and it is not, then there really is no hope that Paul is giving to these Thessalonian believers.

Another writer who thinks this is just ridiculous to believe in the rapture, that it is not Scriptural, had this to say. He wrote,

. . . Rapture doctrine is one of the most recent "new doctrines" in the history of the Church. The only doctrine more recent is the invention of the sinner's prayer for salvation by Billy Sunday in 1930, which was made popular by Billy Graham in 1935.

. . . The fact that John Nelson Darby invented the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine around 1830 AD is unquestionably true. All attempts to find evidence of this wild doctrine before 1830 have failed, with a single exception: Morgan Edwards wrote a short essay as a college paper for Bristol Baptist College in Bristol England in 1744 where he confused the second coming with the first resurrection of Revelation 20 and described a "pre-tribulation" rapture. However Edwards ideas, which he admitted were brand new and never before taught, had no influence in the modern population of the false doctrine. That prize goes to Darby.

. . . Prior to 1830, no church taught it in their creed, catechism or statement of faith.

. . . Darby has had a profound impact on religion today, since Darby's "secret rapture" false doctrine has infected most conservative, evangelical churches. While the official creeds and statements of faith of many churches either reject or are silent about Rapture, neither do they openly condemn this doctrine of a demon from the pulpit.

. . . While not all dispensationalists believe in the Rapture. All those who teach the Rapture also believe in premillennialism. Both groups use Israel's modern statehood status of 1948 to be a beginning of a countdown to the end.

- <http://www.bible.ca/rapture-origin-john-nelson-darby-1830ad.htm>

What is interesting to note is that when a person has a misconception about Israel, that God is done with the Jewish people, then their view of End Times Theology is way off as well, and that is what we see here.

And to say that there is no evidence prior to 1830 when John Nelson Darby introduced this doctrine, is fake news! Sorry, but it is. And as we will see over the next several weeks as we look at this doctrine of the rapture that it was something that the early church believed, something that they taught.

And if there is no rapture, then what in the world is Paul speaking of here when he says in I Thessalonians 4:16-17, **“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. 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.”**

You see, the dead in Christ will get their resurrected bodies at the time of the rapture and we who are alive when this event happens, we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. We will not die but we will be taken up!

In the New Testament, there are three places that we see this idea of the rapture of the church. Of course, here in I Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Also, listen to what Paul says in I Corinthians 15:50-58, **“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”**

Now I don't want to spend too much time on these verses here in I Corinthians chapter 15 this morning, we will deal more with what Paul is saying as we continue on looking at this idea of the rapture.

But notice, Paul uses similar language about sleeping and it is speaking of death, and not all will sleep but all will be changed. And this change will take place instantaneously as these bodies will be transformed and our spirit and soul will get an eternal body to dwell in and thus, we shall be with the Lord.

There is another passage that is not often looked at regarding the rapture and that is found in John 14:1-3 where Jesus tells us, **“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”**

Jesus is saying to us that He is preparing for us a mansion in heaven. I do not believe that this is speaking of a literal building to dwell in, but a new body.

Paul put it this way when he said in II Corinthians chapter 5, **“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”** II Corinthians 5:1-8.

You see, now our spirit and our soul resides in this body, a tent, a temporary dwelling place, but one day, when this body goes back to the dust of the earth, our spirit and our soul will inhabit a mansion, a new body!

Or, if we are alive when the rapture happens, we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and we will receive our new bodies, our eternal bodies. Jesus tells us that He is going to receive us where He is at, and that is heaven. That is where we go when the rapture happens and then, in the Second Coming we come with the Lord to the earth to establish His Kingdom on this earth!

Now, back here in I Thessalonians 4:13, where Paul says, “**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.**”

In the Scriptures, when a believer dies it speaks of him going to sleep. When you go to sleep there is rest, there is peace, there is comfort.

Now, when an unbeliever dies the Bible never speaks of him being asleep because they have no rest, no peace, no comfort.

When we die, as Christians, our body goes back to the dust of the earth and our spirit and soul go to be with the Lord. That is our hope.

Now for those who are left, those whose family member, friend has died and gone to be with the Lord, it is not that we don't sorrow, we are sad but we also know that we will see that person one day in glory. We don't suffer like unbelievers do because unbelievers have no true hope!

Think of it like this. It is like sending a loved one off on a long trip, you will see them again but it will be a long time before it happens and thus, you are sad, you sorrow, but not like the unsaved will sorrow, as I have said. You see, for the unsaved there is no hope for them in death, as Barclay points out for us when he wrote,

In the face of death the pagan world stood in despair. They met it with grim resignation and bleak hopelessness. Aeschylus wrote, “Once a man dies there is no resurrection.”

Theocritus wrote, “There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope.”

Catullus wrote, “When once our brief light sets, there is one perpetual night through which we must sleep.” On their tombstones grim epitaphs were carved, “I was not; I became; I am not: I care not.”

- William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, p. 203

What a sad place to be. But in Christ our hope is that as He rose from the dead God will raise us up one day in glory. Why be in a place where there is no hope when Jesus wants to give you hope?

Now let me also say this because there are those who believe in a doctrine called “*soul sleep*.” And what that means is when we die we go to sleep, kind of a suspended animation as we wait for the resurrection of these bodies at the rapture.

Hiebert put it like this, “Since to depart from this world in death to ‘be with Christ’ is described by Paul as ‘very far better’ (Philippians 1:23) than the present state of blessed communion with the Lord and blessed activity in His service, it is evident that ‘sleep’ as applied to believers cannot be intended to teach that the soul is unconscious.”

And Paul makes that point very clear in II Corinthians 5:8 as he said, “**We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.**”

I think that is very clear. There is no soul sleep! There is no suspended animation! Absent from the body, death to these physical bodies, and present with the Lord!

Of this Spurgeon tells us, “He did not expect to be roasted alive for the next thousand years, and then to leap from purgatory to Paradise; but he did expect to go, as soon as ever his earthly house was dissolved, into his eternal house which is in the heavens. He had not even the thought of lying in a state of unconsciousness till the resurrection.”

Thus, get rid of those false doctrines that are not helpful but they are hurtful. And what a glorious promise we have, when these bodies go to the dust of the earth, we will **ALWAYS** be with the Lord!

And when Paul says, “**lest you sorrow as others who have no hope**” he is speaking of unbelievers and they have no hope, as I have said! Now some will argue that point but here is the reality of what Paul is saying.

I think everyone has some kind of hope for what is ahead, that is not the issue. The real issue is this, is that hope real? You see, false hope is empty hope. But for us as Christians, our hope is in the Lord and His Word, the Bible. And what God has said to us we can trust as we walk by faith trusting in God’s promises to us.

Yes, we do sorrow but not like the unsaved because we know where are loved ones have gone when they die. And really, if you think about it, Christians don’t die, they just move!

You see, this earthly tent their soul and spirit occupied fell apart, it wore out and thus, it is time for an upgrade! And that is what the new body that God is preparing for us is all about. It is the ultimate upgrade and we will never need a new one for this one will never wear out, fall apart, decay!

And yes, death is a terrible thing. It was not something that was around in the beginning. When God created the heavens and the earth it was perfect. No death at all! But then sin entered this world through Adam and everything was affected by it, death reigned!

Paul said in I Corinthians 15:22, "**For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.**" Sin affected the human race and because of sin, all will die. But the wonderful thing here is that in Christ, we shall be made alive! Again, absent from this body and present with the Lord!

J. Vernon McGee puts this in perspective for us as he wrote,

I met an old man at the corner bus stop many years ago. He must have been pretty close to eighty. He was swearing like a sailor. I said to him, "Brother, you won't be here very long, and you are going to have to answer to God."

"How do you know I won't be here very long?" he asked.

"God is telling you so. He has put gray in your hair, a totter in your step, a stoop in your shoulder, and a shortness of breath when you walk. He is trying to tell you that you won't be here much longer. You are living in a little tent down here, and you are going to be slipping away soon."

I am told that when President Adams was an old man, a friend inquired about his health. He answered that he was fine, but the house he lived in was getting rickety and was not in good repair. That is the kind of body each of us is living in, my friend.

When I was a young man, I could bound up and down the steps to my study. Today it is different. I come down the steps one at a time, and there is no more bounding. My knees hurt, and I groan. My wife tells me I groan too much, but I tell her it is scriptural to groan. Paul said that we groan in these bodies.

These old bodies are going to be put into the grave, and there they are going to sleep. The spirit goes to be with the Lord.

Paul wrote, “Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)” (2 Cor. 5:6–7). Now we are at home in this body; this is where we live. People don’t really get to see *us*, you know - we are hidden in our bodies. Sometimes people who come to rallies or services when I speak, tell me they have heard me on the radio and they have come just to see how I look. I always feel like saying, “You really haven’t seen me. All you have seen is a head and two hands sticking out of a suit of clothes. You don’t see me - I live within this body.” This house I live in isn’t in such good repair, but that’s where I will live as long as I walk on this earth.

- J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Vol. V*, pp. 396-397

So, death is not the end for Christians, for you and me and that is why we don’t sorrow like unbelievers who lose loved ones! Maybe you heard the story of the Christian wife whose husband recently died and this man came up to her and said, “I am sorry you lost your husband!” To which she responded, “O, I didn’t lose him. I know exactly where he is at!” Praise God for that hope that we have!

VERSE 14

Now keep in mind that the believers in Thessalonica were confused on this issue of the rapture and those who sleep in the Lord or those who had died and gone to be with the Lord. You see, they thought their loved ones would miss out on this glorious event and Paul wants to assure them that they are not going to miss out on anything!

And please understand when Paul uses the word “**if**” he is not speaking about doubting or it can happen, that he is unsure. Not at all!

He is saying that because of the fact that the Lord rose from the dead He will bring with Him on that day those who have fallen asleep in Christ, it is our hope!

In John 14:19 Jesus said, “**... Because I live, you will live also.**”

But for the unbeliever, as we have seen, there is no hope. The unbeliever will have an eternity to think about the wrong decision he made and regret every moment as he is in the Lake of Fire, while we rejoice with our Lord!

Morris expounds on what Paul is saying here as he wrote, “It is best to understand the words to mean that Jesus will bring the faithful departed with Him when He comes back. Their death does not mean that they will miss their share in the Parousia.”

Now think about what people place their hope in today. They place it in the shifting philosophical speculation made by men and those ideas come and go very quickly.

Listen to this article about hope for those who deny Jesus. This person wrote,

All my life I struggled to stretch my mind to the breaking point, until it began to creak, in order to create a great thought which might be able to give a new meaning to life, a new meaning to death, and to console mankind. - Nikos Kazantzakis

To give people a reason for living is a great gift, especially people for whom the consolations of religion are empty. For believers the problem doesn't exist because for them life's meaning is coextensive with the existence of supernatural beings. I have written extensively why this proposed solution doesn't satisfy, and I will not revisit the issue here except to say that the religious solution is question-begging. And even if the proposed solution were valid, it satisfies only those who accept the existence of divine beings. Instead I'm here to speak for the more educated non-believers whose numbers grow as science advances - despite arguments from the science/religion compatibilists. Darwin noted as much long ago:

I am a strong advocate for free thought on all subjects, yet it appears to me (whether rightly or wrongly) that direct arguments against Christianity and theism produce hardly any effect on the public; and freedom of thought is best promoted by the gradual illumination of men's minds, which follow[s] from the advance of science. - Charles Darwin – (Letter to E. B. Aveling, 13 Oct 1880).

But what do you do if you find you have no hope that life has meaning. Should you tell others to have hope anyway? Or confess that you think life is meaningless? I think you should tell the truth and let others conclude what they want - which they will do anyway. If the truth doesn't matter, then nothing does.

I do know that hope does not derive from the past, both because the past is closed and because an honest look at it is not uplifting. Hope is for and about the future, it is what keeps us going.

In a century or two, or in a millennium, people will live in a new way, a happier way. We won't be there to see it - but it's why we live, why we work. It's why we suffer. We're creating it. That's the purpose of our existence. The only happiness we can know is to work toward that goal. - Anton Chekov

- <http://reasonandmeaning.com/2014/02/08/hope-and-meaning-for-non-believers/>

So, it would seem that each generation has this hope about the future but they are not there to enjoy it. That is foolishness. Jesus has given to us life, abundant life and we don't worry about the future, because we know where we will go, to be with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Now, in saying that, listen to where Americans are at as they have turned their backs on God and placed their hope in the shifting philosophical speculations of man. We are told,

Suicide in the United States has surged to the highest levels in nearly 30 years, a federal data analysis has found, with increases in every age group except older adults. The rise was particularly steep for women. It was also substantial among middle-aged Americans, sending a signal of deep anguish from a group whose suicide rates had been stable or falling since the 1950s.

The suicide rate for middle-aged women, ages 45 to 64, jumped by 63 percent over the period of the study, while it rose by 43 percent for men in that age range, the sharpest increase for males of any age. The overall suicide rate rose by 24 percent from 1999 to 2014, according to the National Center for Health Statistics, which released the study on Friday.

The increases were so widespread that they lifted the nation's suicide rate to 13 per 100,000 people, the highest since 1986. The rate rose by 2 percent a year starting in 2006, double the annual rise in the earlier period of the study. In all, 42,773 people died from suicide in 2014, compared with 29,199 in 1999. . . .

“This is part of the larger emerging pattern of evidence of the links between poverty, *hopelessness* and health,” said Robert D. Putnam, a professor of public policy at Harvard and the author of “Our Kids,” an investigation of new class divisions in America.

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/22/health/us-suicide-rate-surges-to-a-30-year-high.html?mcubz=1>

Like it or not, agree with it or not, as Christians, our hope is in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ! It is the Gospel message! And since Jesus rose from the grave, Paul tells us that those who died in Christ will be raised as well! Hope that is built upon the Rock, Jesus Christ will not be shaken, it will not be moved!

Listen to what Paul says here in I Corinthians 15:16-23, **“For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.”**

Paul speaks of Jesus Christ’s resurrection as being the firstfruits. Keep in mind that the Feast of Firstfruits was a Jewish feast that took place on the day after the Sabbath following Passover.

At this feast, which took place in the spring, they would bring a sheaf of grain and wave it before the Lord and it represented a fruitful harvest that was to come as they gave to the Lord. (Leviticus 23:9-14).

Jesus rose from the dead on the Feast of Firstfruits and thus, as Paul said in Romans 6:5, **“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.”**

Trapp summarized it like this, “As in the Firstfruits offered to God, the Jews were assured of God’s blessing on the whole harvest; so by the resurrection of Christ, our resurrection is insured.”

It is as Paul said in Romans 8:23, **“Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”**

Paul continues on and shows us that through Adam we have all be born into that sin nature and with it came spiritual death, separation from God.

But Christ has come to give us life once again as Paul said in I Timothy 2:4-6, “**who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.**”

Now please don't come to the wrong conclusion that Paul is saying or speaking of some kind of universal salvation, where everyone is saved in the end, that is not at all what he is saying here in Corinthians.

Listen carefully to what he does say, all who are *IN* Adam will die and all who are *IN* Christ will be made alive! Thus, if you are not in Christ, if He is not your Lord and Savior, then you will not enter into that eternal life with him, your spirit will remain dead because we have all been born into Adam and thus, we need to be born again!

So, Christ is the beginning, He was the firstfruits and there is coming a bountiful resurrection from the dead.

Now for some, they have a hard time with Jesus being the firstfruits because we read in several instances in the Bible of people who were raised from the dead long before Jesus was! So how could Jesus be the first?

Think about it for a minute. They died and were resurrected once again in their physical bodies that eventually died once again but Jesus was raised in glory, He received a new body that will never fade away and that is what we are waiting for in our own lives.

Thus, the order is as follows: Jesus is the start, He is the firstfruits of the harvest that is coming.

Then there is the harvest of the saints which has an order: From Pentecost till the Lord comes in the rapture all the dead and those who are alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and receive our new bodies. (I Thessalonians 4:16).

Next are those who come to Christ during the Tribulation Period and are martyred for their faith, they will receive their resurrected bodies at the end of the Tribulation Period. (Revelation 20:4).

The Old Testament saints some feel will receive their resurrected bodies here at the end of the Tribulation Period while others feel it will be at the time of the rapture. (Daniel 12:2).

Lastly, those who are born during the Millennial Kingdom and those who enter into the Millennial Kingdom after the Tribulation, those who survive the Tribulation Period and are saved will get their resurrected bodies at the end of the Kingdom Age, after Satan's short rebellion.

You see, there is an order!

Now, this question, "What happens to those Christians who die before Jesus returns at the time of the Rapture?" We will look at that next time.

What I want to leave you with this morning is this wonderful hope that we have and that Paul does not want us to be ignorant about. And that hope is in Jesus and His coming for us, His Bride, the Church at the time of the Rapture. Maranatha!