

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-14 "Our Hope Is In Christ For Today and Tomorrow"

1TH 4:13-14 "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. 14 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."

Our text this morning is one of those areas of scripture that fascinate as well as encourage all of God's people because it addresses the Second Advent or Second Coming of Jesus Christ into this world.

His first coming was a humble one as a babe born in manger. He left His throne of glory and chose to lay aside that glory for our benefit as He came to reside in a sin-filled world with the specific purpose of delivering us from that penalty of sin.

Paul sums it up this way when writing to the Philippians.

PHI 2:6-11 [Jesus Christ] "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus Christ took on flesh to redeem men from their sin. But Jesus Christ, though He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, did not give up, nor could He give up His divinity, that is His Godship.

Paul also tells us in COL 2:9-10 "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."

This is why we can say that Jesus Christ is fully God as well as fully man; not half man and half God.

And so, His first coming was certainly a humbling experience. This threw many of the Jews of Christ's day because they were expecting a conquering King who would come into Jerusalem and clean house to give them back their nation and city.

But, Jesus explained to them that His first coming was not to establish an earthly Kingdom and to be served and waited on as a conquering King but rather He was to be a servant for them.

MAT 20:28 "...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Now, with all of that said, we must understand that Jesus Christ's redemptive mission has been fulfilled through His death and resurrection. This means that He has conquered death and when He comes to this earth again it will not be as a humble servant but as the King and Ruler that He is and the God who will bring justice.

The apostle John in writing of the Revelation that he received from Jesus Christ opens his letter with these words giving us a glimpse of the Lord Jesus who is the King of kings.

REV 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

Our Almighty God, Jesus Christ, is coming again with the express purpose of separating the wheat from the chaff, the lambs from the goats. In other words, to separate His children from the children of the devil who have rejected the Lamb of God, who is the Lion of Judah.

When Paul was with the Thessalonians he undoubtedly told them of Christ's second coming in power and glory. And yet there still seemed to be confusion about this matter that created doubt in the minds of these people. Regarding the second coming of Christ I'm sure Paul conveyed what Jesus Himself revealed to His disciples before His death and resurrection.

You see they understood that the end of the age or the end of the world would be something that would issue in the new heavens and the new earth, but they weren't sure how it would happen or when, and so they asked Jesus questions on this issue.

Let's look at how Jesus responds to this. Turn with me to Mat.24:3-44.

The Thessalonians were surely told of how Jesus would come back, but they, like Christ's original disciples had other questions regarding how it would personally affect them. This next section of the letter to the Thessalonians gets into some of their questions and the answers Paul gives to them.

Their main concern was not so much for themselves as much as it was for the saints in Thessalonica who had died before the second coming of Christ.

1TH 4:13 "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."

There are churches and cults which believe that this verse and others like it teach what is referred to as soul-sleep. They contend that when we die our souls or spirits go into a deep sleep and that at the end of the world we will finally be awakened by God.

And so, for example, according to this unbiblical belief, believers of 2,000 years ago are not cognizant of Jesus Christ right now, but they're actually somehow asleep, (as if spirits can sleep), waiting for the second coming of Christ when they will be awakened.

The reason for the confusion is by not comparing scripture with scripture. When we run across parts of the word of God that raise questions we must dig deep to find out what in fact the Lord is teaching on any particular subject.

What does the bible have to say about where we will go at death? It says a great deal. Let me just assure you that when we die in Christ we do not sleep in the grave, we immediately go to be with Jesus. Jesus assured the thief on the cross who believed on Christ that he would be with Jesus that very day.

LUK 23:39-43 "One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "***I tell you the truth***, today you will be with me in paradise."

No soul-sleep inferred here. When Paul writes to the Philippians in PHI 1:23-24 he says, "I am torn between the two: I desire to

depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."

He says something similar to the Corinthian church in 2CO 5:8 "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

When you and I die as believers in Christ we immediately come into the presence of our Savior and Lord. We are not denied access by some sleep in the grave. So what does Paul refer to in 1 Thes.4:13 when he says, "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep," ...

Simply put, this is one way the bible speaks of the physical death of the body.

PSA 13:3 "Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;"

PSA 76:5 "Valiant men lie plundered, they sleep their last sleep; not one of the warriors can lift his hands."

When king David died it is recorded in 1KI 2:10 "Then David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David."

The NAS translates it, "Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David."

The same is true in the N.T. When Stephen was being stoned to death for his faith in Christ it is said that he fell asleep, (Acts 7:60). When Paul admonished the Corinthians for abusing the Lord's Supper he explained to them the seriousness of that by saying this.

1CO 11:28-30 "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep."

But, I think the best example of what this sleep is all about is when Jesus tried to explain the death of Lazarus.

JOH 11:11-14 "After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "**Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep**; but I am going there to wake him up." 12 His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." 13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his

disciples thought he meant natural sleep. 14 So then he told them plainly, "**Lazarus is dead,**"

Your body will die and it will decay, but don't worry because your spirit continues to live; the part of you that inhabits your physical body and will one day depart from it at death. In a euphemistic way the body may sleep in the grave, but you've long gone to be with the Lord if you have placed your faith in Christ.

We need to be informed about these sorts of things. And this is why Paul says, "I do not want you to be uninformed about those who have fallen asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope."

Paul explains that in Christ we have a great hope. But, he infers that those who do not accept Christ have no hope.

In fact, if you talk with people who don't know Christ, most of them will tell you that if they were to die today they wouldn't know what their future would be. This is one reason the unbelieving world doesn't want to talk about death.

I've heard people tell me that they believe that when they die it's all over. There's no life after the grave, they just rot 6 feet under the ground with no hope of any existence, good, bad or indifferent, after death.

Others just don't know what awaits them. They would like to think that a merciful God would just over look sin and allow them to come into the Kingdom, but they have no assurance. What a way to live. What a way to die.

The ancient Pagans felt the same way. Homer from his Illiad writes of death in battle. "He slept the sleep of bronze." Bronze is an inanimate object with no life, no hope, no future; cold and lifeless.

Another by the name of Theocritus writes, "hopes are for the living; the dead are without hope." And it's true. You and I have no hope without Christ. The only thing that awaits the unbeliever at death is eternal separation from God and eternal torment in punishment for their sin.

Paul explains to the Thessalonians that they do not share in that hopelessness. Nor should they be concerned about their loved ones who died before them, because they too are now living in the hope of their resurrection.

Keep in mind that these Thessalonians spent their entire lives in hopelessness. They were all Gentile Pagans who didn't have any certainty about their futures past the grave.

In fact, you and I were in the same boat outside of Christ. Paul puts it into perspective for us when he writes in EPH 2:1-3 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."

If that doesn't make you grateful for the salvation you have in Christ I don't know what could. You have a hope that is secure, that is reserved in heaven for you because of what Christ has done on your behalf.

The writer of Hebrew puts it this way.

HEB 6:17-19 "Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."

This is why we can live in a world that does not offer hope and still rejoice even when life wants to get us down, because our hope is not in this life, but in the life to come when we go home to be with our God.

And with the Thessalonians, they now have, for the first time in their lives, a solid hope based on the solid truth of God's own Son who was sent to purchase us with His own blood. This is why we must understand that we don't belong to ourselves, we belong to our God and we should desire to do all that would please Him by faith.

1TH 4:14 "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."

Our hope is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Again, this is not some sort of fairy tale devised by the minds of disillusioned

disciples of Christ. Jesus Christ really died on the cross and He really rose, bodily, from the grave. His resurrection is the basis for the hope of our resurrection.

You see, all of us who die and go to be with the Lord will one day receive a body like Christ's.

1CO 15:35, 42-44 "But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" 42 The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."

We are going to be given new bodies; imperishable bodies which will dwell in the new heavens and the new earth which Jesus will bring about to be part of His eternal Kingdom.

Our bodies here on this earth get old, they get sick, they become weak and ultimately die. Our new bodies at the resurrection will be perfect and will be reunited with our spirits to dwell with our Lord and Savior.

Our resurrected bodies will be just like Christ's, fitted for the purpose of glorifying our Lord and living in the reality of His presence forever.

That doesn't mean we will be like Jesus in the sense that we will be gods. There is only one God, but we will have the sinless nature, and the perfect holiness to dwell in the presence of our God and creator because Jesus is the One who gives that to us.

In the last book of the bible Jesus Himself gives us this assurance of the culmination of our salvation and what it entails.

REV 21:2-5 "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

That is your hope. And that hope is in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This same Jesus as we're told in Acts 1:11 "who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

The reason the Thessalonians were so concerned about their brethren who had died is that they didn't want them to miss out on this most fantastic event of Jesus Christ coming back for His people.

In verse 14 of 1 Thes.4 Paul assures them that they will not miss out. In fact, Paul tells them that they will actually accompany Jesus to the earth. He says, "God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him."

This is exciting stuff because these people anticipated Jesus coming back in their lifetime. What this means is that Jesus could come back in our lifetime. The point is that we should encourage each other to live with that same sort of anticipation and be working for the Lord as though He will come today, knowing that we have a message of hope for a dying world.

Next week we'll look at some of the specifics of when and how Christ will come back and how that affects us personally when He does come. We'll look at some questions like:

Can we know the exact time of His return?

What is the rapture and how will that take place?

Will the whole world know when Jesus comes back or just the believers?

What will we do for the rest of eternity; hang out on clouds with golden harps?

And what does God say about our present life as it relates to the future?

I hope you're beginning to see that our Christian lives are just at the very beginning of a great and glorious future. But, I also hope you're seeing how important it is for us to be serving Christ right here and now so that others may share in that eternal hope we have in Christ.

There's a lot of work to be done for Christ's Kingdom, but we don't do it alone. The battle belongs to the Lord and so does the victory.

But, remember what Paul said about our past when he put us into the same category as those who did not know or desire the things of God.

EPH 2:3 "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."

But let me end with the rest of what Paul says about us in Christ.

EPH 2:4-7 "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

This is the kind of love that we should be grateful for and thankful for everyday of our lives. We are new creatures in Christ and we are commanded by our God to take this message to the world and to live this message out in our lives for the world to see Jesus in us.

Let me end with an exhortation from the apostle Peter.

1PE 3:18 "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,

1PE 4:1-2 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. 2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God."

Do the will of God. Love Him with all of your heart, soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself. Don't continue to seek the things in life that only have you at the center of it. Seek to be the ambassador for Christ that He wants for you as He empowers you with His Spirit, and tell the world of His great salvation and the future hope we have only in Him.