

SERMON THEME: LIVING TO PLEASE GOD

SERMON TITLE: CHRISTIAN HOPE – WAITING WITH CONFIDENCE

SERMON TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-5:11

(Chapter 4)

¹³Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴For 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. ¹⁵According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

(Chapter 5)

¹Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ²for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

PROLOGUE

- Today's sermon will be about what Paul speaks of specifically in today's reading:
 - The last things – death, resurrection, and Jesus' Second Coming.
 - The Christian's view on eternal and not the temporal things
- We are bound to have the fear of death at some point in our lives, especially when faced with life threatening experiences.
 - The fear of death stems from our fear of the unknown, areas of life where we are unable to exercise control over.
 - Some would wait for death during their last days, without hope.
 - But this is not the case for the Christians – We wait with confidence, as we have hope in Jesus and know that He is coming again.

A. DEATH (1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18)

- Paul wants us to be informed about death/dying, it is an important part of his teaching.
 - Death is not final.
 - This teaching most likely came from Paul due to the persecution of the Thessalonica church.
 - Brothers and sisters may have died in this period of persecution.
 - The surviving believers grew concerned and worried over their deaths.
 - Hence, Paul is trying to reassure the Thessalonica church, and us, that in Jesus' Second Coming, the status of a believer who had passed on, is the same as a surviving believer.
- Christians have Hope in Jesus Christ:
 - When we die, we know that we are going on a journey elsewhere.
 - We know that Jesus is coming again, so we can live confidently with our eyes on the things that are eternal and not temporal.
- When Jesus comes again, all Christians, dead or alive, will be raised into a new life to meet Jesus.
- For those who have died, we will somehow be in God's presence in paradise – Concept of an interim state.
 - Just as Jesus had told the dying thief who believed in Him at crucifixion, "Today you will be with Me in paradise."
 - It is not yet the time of new heaven and new earth, because Jesus hasn't come again.
 - Between death and the final judgement (day of the Lord), we will be without a resurrected body as it has not been given to us yet, but somehow we will be with Jesus.
 - 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:23 also suggested that we are away from a heavenly body, but we will be with the Lord.

B. THE DAY OF THE LORD/JESUS' SECOND COMING (1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11)

- The day of the Lord is spoken about by many of the Old Testament prophets.
 - It is a day of final judgement/justice/deliverance.
 - Paul borrowed this term into the New Testament.
 - There is this sense that this will be the day of the Messiah's return.
- Paul confidently writes that we need not know the specific details of Jesus' Second Coming.
 - This must have been an important matter which he has already communicated clearly with the Thessalonica church before he left the church.
 - Jesus also mentioned of His Second Coming in Matthew 24:36-51, and that "No one knows. Only the Father knows."
 - Will we be ready for the day of the Lord, and be found waiting?
 - Or will we languish in the comfort and prosperity that we have in this world?
 - The reference to natural childbirth emphasizes that nobody knows when the exact day will be, but the day of the Lord will certainly come.
- Even though we are unaware of the specific details of the day of the Lord, but we have been informed, and are knowledgeable about it ('light' as mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:5).
 - What are we going to do, since we have been informed about Jesus' Second Coming?
- Paul has a love for using the imagery of 'the armour of God' in his teachings.
 - It reminds the Christians that they are in the spiritual warfare – the fight is not of things of the earth, but the tussle of spiritual powers.

- o We fight confidently with the weapons of faith, hope and love as our armour and our protection.
- We are instructed by Paul, with the knowledge that we have of Jesus' Second Coming, to continue living, encouraging and building each other up.
 - o To Paul, the end is already unfolding.
 - o How can the knowledge of the last things end guide us on how we live today?
 - o Will we make the right decisions on how we live, when we already know the ending? (recall example of 'You vs Wild')
 - o When we abide in Christ, we are already standing in the future, in the victory.
 - o When we die, it is not the end – we will be in a temporary state of paradise with Jesus, as we wait for the Second Coming of Christ with those who are alive.
- Paul urged us not to be caught by surprise.
 - o We know surely it will come and we know what happens when it comes.
 - The kingdom of God will come in its fullness.
 - God's love and justice will be complete.
 - He will usher in a new heaven and new earth.

C. LIVING/WAITING WITH CONFIDENCE

- Do not focus on the search for signs and happenings that will predict the Second Coming of Christ.
 - o This focus on the events of the world is temporal and is a trap.
 - o Paul is very explicit in warning us against the doomsday cult – No one can know, through observing the world's happenings, when Jesus will come again.
- It is also important that we interpret other passages about end-times correctly, especially the book of Revelation.
 - o The book of Thessalonians helps us to understand how we are to read the prophecies of the Bible, especially in Revelation.
 - o The book of Revelation is a letter, and not to be used as a Key to decode current world events in predicting when Jesus will return.
 - We are warned against reading and deciphering the biblical prophecies in Revelation in misguided ways to predict Jesus' Second Coming.
 - Revelation is essentially a letter to 7 churches, just as how Thessalonians is a letter to the church in Thessalonica.
 - It was written by Jesus, through the hands of John.
 - Most of the imagery in Revelation drew reference from the Old Testament prophecies, and events of the first century; something that the 7 churches were keenly aware of.
 - When we understand the framework within which Revelation was conceived, then we are able to draw out correct lessons for current living.
- Revelation is applicable to our lives, but not as a Key to decode events of today.
 - o It is largely figurative; we cannot read it literally.
 - The church is now living in the millennial reign of Jesus Christ.
 - There is no great rapture, where some people will be taken up, while others are left behind to face apocalypse.

- o Thessalonians tells us that the end of time is only a one-time event.
 - Jesus tells us that it is a day of justice, when the sheep are separated from the goat.
 - Those clothed in righteousness, dead or alive, will be with Him forever.
 - God's justice will be on earth.
 - There is no more post-rapture earth – there will be a new earth and a new heaven.
- We can live life confidently, being illuminated about Jesus' Second Coming.
 - o We shift our focus away from doomsday prophecies.
 - o The overall message of Thessalonian is about life and living.
 - Not of living a cloistered life, but living with our eyes on things eternal, guiding our way of living on this earth – in accordance with God's word (signposts).
 - o The section about death in Thessalonians is sandwiched between two sections about practical Christian living.
- When we live, the way we live and the way we act must have an impact on eternity.
 - o There is no point acquiring and doing things that we cannot bring along for the next stage of our lives (e.g. wealth, grades, accolades and achievements etc).
 - o There are things that we can bring into eternity:
 - Christian friendships,
 - Kindness,
 - Love, and
 - Relationships.
 - o These things are our present gifts, but they are also our eternal prize.
 - o Living for eternity now is important.
 - Walking with God and the Christian community – these are the things, that we do now, which we can bring into eternity.
- There are ways that we can live purposefully for God.
 - o We keep our eyes on eternal things and build up on kingdom things.
 - Christian relationships.
 - The work and ministry for God through the church.
 - Christian ministry in our own spheres of influences.
 - o Temporal things are only important in this life but can be used for kingdom things.
 - It is only right that we prioritize and place more emphasis on the kingdom things.
 - We are given access to the temporal things, to use them to build up on the kingdom things, for a heavenly purpose and not an earthly end.
 - Even though our achievements do not define us, they are our steppingstones towards the prize – to love and serve Jesus, and to be with Him.
 - We must keep our eyes on the prize (e.g., of how the Seeker keeps his eyes on the Golden Snitch in a game of Quidditch, in the Harry Potter series).
 - As such, Paul urges us to do our best at our respective vocations, to be a Christian witness in our circles of influence.
 - God calls us into different responsibilities at each phase of our lives, to nurture the gifts and talents that are given to us.
 - Our gifts and talents will be used by God as He directs us purposefully, to where He wants to use us.

- This gives eternal value to where God has placed us at – when the temporal things that we do, yield and eternal impact.
 - What is the most important thing in your life?
 - Don't settle on the peace and safety this world offers.
 - We need to slowly, but surely, turn our focus on things eternal.
- When we have Holy Communion, don't stop at the cross.
 - Paul has given us instructions about death and the end times, to impact our lives and living right now.
 - In addition to giving us these instructions through Paul, God has given us Holy Communion on a monthly basis, as a sacrament, to point us towards eternity.
 - In Holy Communion, we remember that:
 - Jesus has died for us.
 - Jesus is present with us at this table prepared for us.
 - Jesus' death has power because He is resurrected.
 - Beyond the cross, the tomb is empty.
 - Jesus will come again.
 - When we know that Jesus is coming, we can live confidently with our eyes on the prize.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are you looking forward to Jesus' Second Coming? Why?

2. What are the things you are doing that have eternal value?

3. Are there things in your life that do not have eternal value that you can remove?

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4. As we journey with other Christians, how can we help them hope for Jesus' Second Coming?