

November 18, 2018

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17
Saints Triumphant Sunday

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you do not grieve in the same way as the others, who have no hope. Indeed, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then in the same way we also believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.

In fact, we tell you this by the word of the Lord: We who are alive and left until the coming of the Lord will certainly not go on ahead of those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these words.

Through Jesus We Mourn with Hope for All the Saints

What is it that makes Thanksgiving BE Thanksgiving or Christmas be Christmas? It depends on your tradition, right? What do you always do on Thanksgiving? Watch the Lions? Eat Turkey at grandma's house? The location, the food, the people, it all becomes somewhat of an integral part of a holiday. So when one part is missing, then it doesn't feel the same. Not too long ago we were making hamburgers, but we only had a little bit of ketchup left. We frantically searched for the ketchup, because a hamburger just isn't a hamburger without the ketchup in my opinion. That's why Thanksgiving and Christmas are so difficult on some. They are missing a key ingredient that was in the meal plan of Thanksgiving or Christmas. Grandma has moved into a nursing home. The home that we always went to has been sold. A child has moved away. There is sadness over what is missed.

There was sadness among the Thessalonians. They were hoping that Jesus would come soon, and that all of their loved ones would get to see Him come. Paul talked about it often. Jesus predicted the same. It seemed like He was coming soon. But He hadn't come yet, and the Christians of Thessalonica were dying. They were wondering if they would be left out of the glory of Jesus' coming, kind of like the virgins who fell asleep and had their lamps burn out when they were waiting for the Bridegroom to come in Jesus' parable. The Thessalonians were worried that those who died would miss out on the Final Day. But Paul said to them,

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you do not grieve in the same way as the others, who have no hope. Indeed, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then in the same way we also believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.

Notice carefully, Paul didn't say, "**don't grieve.**" He just said not to mourn like the rest of men **who have no hope.** There's a big difference between the two. There's a German type of stoicism that has

been ingrained into some of us, that it's wrong to mourn at death. You keep a stiff upper lip. You toughen through it. You don't talk about it. Some even equate mourning with a weak faith. "Why should you mourn when you know and believe someone is in heaven?" Unfortunately, sometimes we can use faith like a billy club we use on people that we don't want to deal with. We have moved on, and we want them to also. We wouldn't say that to someone who had their leg blown off while we only had some shrapnel in the arm. When you lose a limb it is a completely life altering experience. You try to learn how to walk and run, but it's never the same as it was. It is frustrating and angering and makes life so much more painful and slow. You don't just move on from it. You try to bear through it. Why would dealing with death be any easier when you are trying to live without someone you leaned on or spoke with for so many years? Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus, even though he knew what He was about to do. He wept because He saw the pain and the heartache that death caused on those He loved. You can't ignore pain.

Paul says, "**don't mourn like the rest of men who have no hope.**" Just for curiosity sake I did a search on the Internet to see how people have dealt with death. In New Guinea they used to eat the bodies of those who died in order to have a part of them with them. They would also chop off a part of their fingers to show the pain they had over their loss. In Australia they used to tie the bones of the dead to themselves or have the juices of the dead body rubbed on themselves in order to receive the good qualities of the deceased. 80% of Tibetan Buddhists have dead bodies put on a cliff in order to feed the vultures and keep life of animals alive. Their mourning rituals reflect the belief system that they have.

There are different types of "hope" in America that our culture has. There is a hope that God is nice and kind, so that everyone eventually ends up in heaven. People will speak with a hope that someone is up there somewhere looking out after us, causing good things to happen for us when we catch a fish or don't get hit by a car. There is a growing hope that there is no God at all, that the existence of a human is done at death. The only hope there is that people will remember the good that someone did and live a better life, trying to keep the will and the deeds of this person alive through their actions so that humanity will improve.

This hope is uninformed. It is a rejection of the Word of God and what God says about how people are different - how they have a soul - and how they have a Creator and a God they will have to answer to on Judgment Day. Ignorance is not bliss. Jesus will not just let people into heaven if they're good people. God doesn't just give everyone a pass because He loves everyone. That's not how it works. The holy God can't accept us as we are. No one can stand in His presence without a covering for their sins and without the sacrifice of Jesus to pay for their sins.

Our hope is different than the hope of our society. **we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then in the same way we also believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.** Jesus died for the sins of the world. God accepted that sacrifice, as we see through His resurrection. We don't have to carry around the bones of our ancestors or have the juices of their

bodies rubbed on ours. We are bathed in the blood of Christ and covered in His holy righteousness in our baptism. We don't regard our bodies as nothing more than food of vultures. We look at them as God's creation which will rise from the dead completely free of death and sin. We don't eat dead bodies of our ancestors in order to receive their so called gifts. We receive the living body and blood of our Lord and Savior to receive His forgiveness, life and salvation. So our hope is based on what Jesus did for us. Hope is based on the future. Our hope is in the resurrection from the dead to eternal life through Jesus.

When we approach the holidays as Christians, whether it's Thanksgiving, Christmas, or whatever it may be, it is always good for us to remember what the meat of the holidays are. If I go back to the hamburger illustration, ketchup was always meant to be a condiment of the hamburger. Even the buns are to a point, right? You can order a hamburger without the bun. What is it that makes a hamburger a hamburger? It's cow meat in the middle. I might not like it as much, but if I'm hungry enough I'll still eat it without the ketchup.

What is the meat of Thanksgiving? What is the meat of Christmas? It's God, the God who sent His Son to take on flesh for us, die for all of our sins on the cross, and rise from the dead for us. Don't forget about that as the holiday season approaches you. There's a holy God in the crib of the manger - He's the focus of Christmas. There's a God who gives you spouses and children and grandparents, love, forgiveness and salvation. He also gives you your house, home, wife, children and all the rest. Lord, help us to be first and foremost thankful for the meat and potatoes of our faith - it's Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus. Why do we miss our parents or our spouses or our children more than we miss seeing Jesus? I think about the love of the women and John to sit at the feet of the cross, just to look at this dead and dying man whom they still loved in spite of His seeming ugliness there. They were willing to touch Him and cover Him in spices, even when He was dead. And then when Jesus came alive, Mary Magdalene didn't want to let go of Him! The disciples sat and stared at the sky after Jesus left. They wanted Him to come back down! If we only knew how beautiful it will be to stand in His presence on that Final Day and look at Him as His dear children!

But He gives us so much more! When Paul talks about Judgment Day, Paul paints a picture of a magnet of sorts, where we are attracted to and drawn to Jesus on Judgment Day. **God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.** It's easy to miss the significance of that phrase. God will BRING WITH HIM those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. If God is bringing those who died WITH JESUS, then doesn't that mean that they are WITH Jesus right now?

And what is that picture of death? Sleep! When I go to sleep at night, I am usually so tired. I can't wait for my head to hit the pillow. I hope and pray that I have a good night's sleep so that I'll be refreshed in the morning. Now, that all depends on what kind of aches and pains I have and how many times I'll have to get up to use the restroom, and whether my nose pillows on my cpap machine is bothering me or not. Sleep isn't what it used to be. When you wake up, you aren't exactly the prettiest to look at even when you sleep well. But sleeping in heaven? You're with Jesus! Think of how Jesus

pictured the poor beggar resting at Abraham's side. He seemed very comfortable there! What a wonderful sleep! Our souls REST from our labors. We don't have nightmares in heaven. We eagerly await being reunited with our bodies. (Rev. 6:10) And our bodies will be new and improved - pain free and blemish free! Paul said that this is "**better by far**" than staying here on earth. This is where your loved ones who died in Christ are right now. Someday Jesus will draw their bodies from the ground to be reunited with their souls, which have been with Jesus the whole time!

But God even gives us more! He allows us to see our loved ones again WITH Jesus in heaven. We will get to see them rise from the dead if we are still alive when He comes. This is what we look forward to, the full course meal of salvation, when we are at home with all of the saints.

"Draw us to thee" is a prayer and a hymn that we sing, asking that God would draw us to Him. He does that by showing us how gracious He has been to us in Christ. It attracts us to His Word. We want to take His Supper, because Jesus is there. We long to see Him. We are drawn to Him. On Judgment Day, we are finally going to get to see the One we've been attracted to our whole lives as we are attracted to Jesus in the sky and then permanently connected to Him and each other in the new creation of the heavens and the earth. Listen to the final verse, and pray this prayer with me.

Draw us to thee unceasingly.
Into thy kingdom take us.
And ever dwell where sin and hell
No more can vex our spirit. Amen.