***Press On – With Hope (March 22, 2017)***

“Grieve with Hope”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:5 (NIV & NLT)

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:5 (NLT)**

And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.  15 We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. 16 For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. 17 Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. 18 So encourage each other with these words.

1 Now concerning how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters, we don’t really need to write you. 2 For you know quite well that the day of the Lord’s return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. 3 When people are saying, “Everything is peaceful and secure,” then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman’s labor pains begin. And there will be no escape. 4 But you aren’t in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won’t be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief. 5 For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don’t belong to darkness and night.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:5 (NIV)**

Brothers 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. 14 For 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. 15 According 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.
16 For 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. 17 After 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. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.  4 But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all children of the light and children

of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

***Helpful Background for the Passage***

1. Paul wanted to reassure the Thessalonians that death is not the end and that believers should grieve with hope. Grief is a normal and healthy reaction to death, especially the death of a loved one. Grief is an emotion and an expected part of every person’s experience in life.

2. Christians will and should grieve, but we should grieve differently, as we have hope. For believers, death is merely a transition into a much better place/situation/eternal reality. While we grieve the loss for us, we can have a confident expectation that the loved one is with Christ. We can also have a confident expectation of being with that loved one again and being with our God forever. We can grieve with hope.

3. Christians can have a confident expectation in a future resurrection of the dead because we believe in the resurrection of Jesus. The belief that Jesus Christ was crucified dead and buried, then was raised from the dead, is essential to the Faith. But, it also serves as proof that resurrection is possible. The resurrection of Jesus serves as a model for how God can and will raise every believer from the grave someday (1 Cor. 15:12-20).

4. Believers who have died are presently with God (“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” 2 Cor. 5:8, Phil. 1:21-22). Their souls were secured by God the moment that death separated them from their physical bodies. They haven’t missed their opportunity to be with God just because they died before the second coming of Jesus. When Jesus returns, the souls of the departed Christians will be united with their resurrected/glorified bodies and then will spend eternity in the New Heaven and the New Earth with all other believers.

5. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to realize that this teaching on death, grieving, resurrection, and the second coming of Jesus was not just his human opinion, but rather a direct word from God (4:15). Paul reminded his readers that what he wrote was not just his thoughts but the words He had been given by God.

6. The second coming of Jesus will happen when God the Father commands. He alone brings it about and determines the timing. Jesus Christ will descend from the sky, as promised by the angels at His ascension (Acts 1:9-11). Christ’s return will be “unmissable,” as it will be spectacular. No one will be unaware and it will be very unlike His first coming in Bethlehem (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

7. After the dead in Christ have been raised (their souls reunited with their resurrected/glorified bodies), then those who are still living when Jesus returns will be called to be with Christ. The Christians who are alive when Jesus returns will also be reunited with those believers who had died, and we will all be together for eternity.

8. The verb translated “caught up” (4:17) speaks of a dramatic, quick, and unexpected departure. It also appears in several other scriptures; Acts8:39 when the Spirit of the Lord “caught up” Phillip and again in 2 Cor. 12:2, when Paul was “caught up” by the Spirit into the third heaven. This supernatural event will lead to an amazing reunion of believers and ultimately with God that will last FOREVER!

9. Paul is not trying to provide a timeline of when the events of the second coming will occur. He is also not trying to provide a “step by step” outline of how it all will happen. His point is that it “WILL” happen, and that all believers will be reunited with each other and eternally united with Christ and present with God.

10. Christians are called to remember the future reality of the return of Jesus and use this future fact to encourage each other in the present. We are called to remember that we will ultimately be reunited with the loved ones that we have lost. We are to remember that we will one day understand all that we do not now comprehend about death and dying. Finally, the most amazing reality to remember, we will be with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit forever!

11. We are to be alert for the future second coming of Jesus. We are not to obsess about it, but rather stay aware and live with an urgency that the time is near. We are not to be unaware or oblivious (Paul uses the analogy of light vs. darkness, to illustrate the differences). Most of us struggle to remember that reality, as it has been more than 2,000 years, but the Bible still urges us to live like His return could be today. This awareness is yet another reason why we can have hope.

**Extra Background from the “Home Free/Heaven” study:**

12. How should we respond when other people die? What is the appropriate response to death for a Christian? We should grieve. Because death is unnatural, because death separates us from them, and because the death of someone in our lives hurts so much. It is right for us to grieve when people die.

Some believers have the mistaken idea that because they are Christians, they should not grieve over death. These misguided Christians view grieving as evidence of spiritual weakness, or of a lack of trust in God. They say that: “Since we have Jesus, we have heaven; we have the Holy Spirit living inside us… All that should be enough to keep us from grieving when someone dies.”

But that’s not what we actually see in the Bible. The godliest people grieved over death. In Acts 7, we read about the stoning of Steven, one of the leaders in the early church. As he is dying, Steven has a vision of Jesus. He says so out loud. Then he dies. His fellow believers all knew that Steven had gone to be with the Lord. And yet those early believers – godly men and women to be sure – still grieved deeply: “Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.” (Acts 8:2) Grief is the appropriate response to death (also see Phil. 2:27). Paul nearly lost a beloved brother and would have grieved deeply and Jesus’ grief in John 11:21-45)

13. At the same time, if the person knew Christ, our grief should be framed by hope. We should experience fully the grief of loss, but it should be mixed with Biblical hope, which is a confident expectation. According to the scriptures, this mix is healthy and appropriate, as it is expressed in 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

14. But what about the person who dies and does not know Jesus? What about those that we just do not know about their faith situation? What do we do then? We still grieve, and help others to grieve, and then trust in the wisdom, justice, love, of God. The answers in those painful situations include the reality that we do not and cannot know the hearts of other people, and also that our hope is in the Lord Himself. He will comfort us. He will bring solace and hope to our hearts, even in those cases. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”

15. How should we feel about our own death? The reality of death is certain. Unless the Lord Jesus returns in our lifetime, we will all eventually die. Death for us who are in Christ will be like passing through a doorway, greeted on the other side by Jesus. We should approach death with courage. If you are in Christ Jesus, you do not need to be afraid of dying. We can feel the way David felt when he wrote, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” Psalm 23:4

We can have courage as we face death. Jesus is with us.

16. Jesus does even better than walking along side us when we die. *Jesus goes ahead of us, and provides us with His help. Jesus went first. He blazed the trail, cleared away any obstacles or difficulties, and secured the passage.* He went on ahead and made the way safe.

Hebrews 2:14-15

“He (Jesus) shared in their humanity (talking about us) so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

17. We used to be afraid of death. It’s the default setting for fallen humans. But now, we don’t have to be afraid anymore. Our Lord Jesus already died – and He made it through safely. And if we keep our eyes fixed on Him, He will get us through safely, too.

18. We can also be confident when facing death. We KNOW that nothing, including death, can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:31-39)We are secure in the love of God, through Jesus Christ, and nothing can ever change that reality. Death has zero impact on our relationship with Christ, and we can rest in that certainty. We can also be confident because we know *where* we go when we die and we know who we’re going to see when we get there!

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life…will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (from Rom. 8:31-39)

***Review Questions***

(4:13-14) To whom is this teaching directed? What concerns had the readers express? To what does Paul point as the primary belief that leads to the secondary belief? How does hope relate to grief?

(4:15-16) What’s the source for this teaching? Why is this order important? What is promised? Why is this comforting? When does this take place?

(4:17-18) What is “after that?” Why is this significant? What is promised? What is the future reality going to be for believers? What should we do with this certainty now?

(5:1-3) What do believers already know about the “day of the Lord” to which Paul refers? What will the arrival of this future reality be like? What will happen? What metaphor does Paul use to explain it?

5. (5:4-5) To whom is Paul writing? What is certain about believers? To what reality does Paul point? What does this mean?

*Application: (So What?)*

\*6. What is the reality for those “in Christ” upon death? Why can we grieve with hope? What is the “hope” for those who remain here?

\*7. How can we “Press On with Hope” even when we are grieving the loss of a loved one? Where does the hope come from in such circumstances? How can we maintain the hope through the long journey of grief or even our own suffering/death?

8. What does it mean to be “children of light?” What does this mean about our identity? What help does this provide for today, as well as for the future?