



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA



By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

June 28, 2009
English Standard Version

“Hope that Lasts”

This is the 7th sermon in the series on 1 & 2 Thessalonians entitled,
“Life for the Long Haul.”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

Heavenly Father, we have come to Your Word again this morning and we find that we still need to learn a lot about life and death. We don't understand these things that are so important, and why Paul does not want us to be uninformed. So Lord, once again open our eyes and ears to truly hear and understand and apply this Word to our lives. Do this for each of us, this morning, in His name, and for His glory, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *Vain Promises of Eternity.*¹

¹ The Introduction is adapted from *The Air I Breathe* by Louie Giglio, pages 12-13. I've borrowed this adaptation from Deb Kamienski, who first used it speaking at a women's retreat. Joel Hathaway's quotes

In his book “The Air I Breathe”, Louie Giglio describes an amazing picture of worship: “In multiple cultures, throngs of people numbering into the hundreds of thousands were glued as one to his every move. On every continent they assembled like an army, waving their hands in the air. Some fell to their knees. Others strained with outstretched hands, hoping for a brief touch from his. Seared in my mind is the image of one young girl with a look on her face of total awe.

I couldn’t believe it. What I was watching was some of the most intense worship I’d ever seen...anywhere. Far more “full-on” than much of what I’d experienced inside the church.”

He was watching a video clip of a Michael Jackson concert.

As most of you know, Michael Jackson, the subject of an incredible amount of celebrity worship, died suddenly and unexpectedly this week. In fact, we had several prominent entertainers die this week. And it seems to have affected a ton of people out there. As I was reading some of the reflections various people wrote about this, a few stood out.

Joel Hathaway, the Director of Alumni Services at Covenant Seminary, wrote this on Thursday night, “This world promises glory, but glory fades. This world promises eternity, but death takes away. 1980’s sex symbol Farrah Fawcett died this morning, followed by rock and pop star Michael Jackson this evening. Money, fame, glory, power, and influence are powerful mechanism of trade and economy. Death is blind to such present realities — and cares not for status, ability, popularity, or intention. This world promises what it cannot fulfill. There is only One who has conquered death, only One who can conquer it still.

We read the truth in **James 1:11**, “*For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.*”

In another commentary I read, Andrew Sullivan, a culture commentator for *The Atlantic* magazine, is right on the money in his discussion of the tragic life and death of Michael Jackson. He writes, “There are two things to say about him. He was a musical genius; and he was an abused child. By abuse, I do not mean sexual abuse; I mean he was used brutally and callously for money, and clearly imprisoned by a tyrannical father. He had no real childhood and spent much of his later life struggling to get one. He was spiritually and psychologically [abused] at a very early age — and never recovered. Watching him change his race, his age, and almost his gender, you saw a tortured soul seeking what the rest of us take for granted: a normal life.

But he had no compass to find one; no real friends to support and advise him; and money and fame imprisoned him in the delusions of narcissism and self-indulgence. Of course, he bears responsibility for his bizarre life. But the damage done to him by his own family and then by all those motivated more by money and power than by faith and love was irreparable in the end. He died a while ago. He remained for so long a walking human shell.”

Sullivan goes on ...

“I loved his music. His young voice was almost a miracle, his poise in retrospect eerie, his joy, tempered by pain, often unbearably uplifting. He made the greatest music video of all time; and he made some of the greatest records of all time. He was everything our culture worships; and yet he was obviously desperately unhappy, tortured, afraid and alone.

I grieve for him; but I also grieve for the culture that created and destroyed him. That

come from his Notes on *Facebook*, 6/25/09. Andrew Sullivan’s quotes come from his article, “Thinking About Michael” by Andrew Sullivan, *The Daily Dish*, 6/25/09
http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the_daily_dish/2009/06/thinking-about-michael.html

culture is ours' and it is a lethal and brutal one: with fame and celebrity as its core values, with money as its sole motive, it chewed this child up and spat him out. I hope he has the peace now he never had in his life. And I pray that such genius will not be so abused again.”

And I wrote to several people that as much as I disliked his personal lifestyle, he was a pop culture icon, the Elvis of my generation. He had a radical effect on pop culture — changing music, dance and essentially creating the modern music video. Immense talent, sad life.

Most of you know, I schedule out these sermon series well in advance. This series on Thessalonians was laid out in March. Now it’s the end of June. Only God knew how timely the words of today’s passage would be in light of these events, *“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.”*

And that’s what today’s passage is all about ... trying to understand what hope is and what hope we can have — when our dreams and loves, our friends and families — have died and been buried.

If you have lived for any length of time, you have had to bury someone you love. You have felt the sting of regret, the sorrow of unfinished business, the paralyzing confusion and the emptiness of loss. You have probably also found your mind flooded with questions about life beyond the grave.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 we read the words of Paul as he addresses some of those concerns in the church at Thessalonica. The very first generation of Christians was beginning to die. Most of these people had believed that Jesus would return during their lifetime. Now, they had questions: Did death mean those who died would miss the Second Coming of Christ and His reign on the earth? Would these people miss all the glory that had been promised? This text **answers** some of those questions.

This passage is one of the most popular *“Second Coming”* texts in the Bible. It gives us a great picture of that day. However, the text really isn’t trying to teach up about the Second Coming so much as to help us understand the reason for our hope and to encourage us in that hope in the face of old age and death. We must be careful not to get distracted.

Paul starts by telling us that we have ...

v. 13-14: A BOLD ASSURANCE²

I’m pretty sure that I’m not the only one with questions about death. Listen in on any discussion about the return of Christ, and someone will inquire, “But what about those who have already died? What happens to Christians between their death and Jesus’ return?”

Apparently the church in Thessalonica asked questions like that too. The Thessalonian church had buried her share of loved ones. And Paul wants the members who remain to be at peace regarding the ones who have gone ahead.

Many of you have buried loved ones as well.

And just as God spoke to them, God speaks to you.

If you’ll celebrate a marriage anniversary alone this year, He speaks to you.

² The Exposition of the text is adapted from *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado, pages 34-38: the sermons *“Encouraging Words”* by Rev. Bruce Goettsche, Union Church of LaHarpe, IL, 7/9/06; *The Communicator’s Commentary: 1, 2 Thessalonians / 1, 2 Timothy / Titus* by Dr. Gary Demarest, pages 80-85; *The Gospel & The End of Time: The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians* by Dr. John R. W. Stott, pages 92-107. A small part of the first section is taken from the devotional *“A Year with the New Testament”* by Dr. David A. Dorst, September 23.

If your child made it to heaven before making it to kindergarten, He speaks to you.

If you lost a loved one in violence, if you learned more than you want to know about disease, if your dreams were buried as they lowered the casket, God speaks to you.

He speaks to all of us who have stood or will stand in the soft dirt near an open grave. And to us He gives this confident word, *“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.”*

Paul contrasts two kinds of people: those who grieve **without** hope and those who grieve **with** hope. Notice, both groups grieve. There is nothing wrong with being sad about someone dying. It’s a natural, normal and perfectly appropriate response to loss. There is never a reason to be embarrassed by tears or by wishing to have someone back who has died.

Paul refers to believers who die as those who sleep. Because of this some people have developed a doctrine called *“soul sleep”*. They believe that when we die we go into a state of something like “suspended animation”, somewhat of an unconscious state, until the return of Christ. At that time we awaken and are raised from the dead. **I don’t believe this is what the Bible teaches**. Scripture clearly refutes that idea, though it isn’t clear exactly what form our bodies will take between our death and the Second Coming of Christ.

In **2 Corinthians 5:8** Paul talked about being *“away from the body and at home with the Lord.”* He sees a distinction between the body that is buried and the soul that inhabited that body. **Philippians 1:23** says, *“I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”* Paul faced his possible execution and struggled with whether it would be better to die and be with Jesus (which he said is far better) or to remain alive to labor for the Lord on earth. If death results in soul sleep, the debate would be rather pointless! If we aren’t going to be with Christ any sooner whether we die now or later, then why not remain alive as long as you can? In Revelation 6 we read about the souls of the martyrs who cry out to the Lord during the time of Tribulation. They couldn’t do this if they were in soul-sleep. It seems evident that when we die our body is buried but our soul (who we really are) lives on.

Think of it this way: when you physically go to sleep your body rests but your mind continues to be active. You dream, you are still aware of sounds (like your alarm clock), you continue to hash over the problems of the day even as you sleep. Death is something like that. The body is laid to rest but the soul remains very much alive. It is not asleep or dormant.

When the thief on the cross was dying, Jesus didn’t say, *“Someday you will be with me in paradise.”* He said, **Luke 23:43**, *“Today you will be with me in paradise.”* Those who die in Christ, go to be with Him immediately.

There are some who may say, “This is simply wishful thinking.” Paul says our **confidence** of these things comes from the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because Christ died, our sin is paid for. We are forgiven. Because Christ was raised, we know that there is life beyond the grave. Jesus said, **John 11:25-26**, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”*

Our confidence in Heaven is based on the strong and reliable testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of sinners.

The Bible does not teach that everyone goes to Heaven! Paul said, verse 14, *“through Jesus, God will bring with Him those **who have fallen asleep.**”*

These promises are only for believers; they are only for Christians.

It's surely politically incorrect, but that's what Jesus taught.

And for believers, there is the assurance that death doesn't get the last word, but that the last word belongs to Jesus ... and that should bolster our faith. Furthermore, after giving this assurance, Paul goes on to make ...

v. 15- 17: A CLEAR DECLARATION

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is going to return to earth. It's not a secondary but **a central doctrine**. Here are just a few of the passages that point to a return (the Second Coming) of Christ ...

Acts 1:11, *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.”*

Matthew 24:30-31, *“Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”*

2 Peter 3:8-10, *“But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”*

Add to these verses almost the entire Book of Revelation and the Old Testament prophets, primarily Daniel and Ezekiel, whose prophetic passages point to a future Day when Christ will reign and you see that the Second Coming is a **cornerstone doctrine of the church**.

Paul tells us he is passing on to us **“a word from the Lord”** about what is going to take place. This word could have been from the teaching of Jesus during His lifetime (like from His teaching in Matthew 24) and the additional details in found here may have been things Jesus said but were not recorded in the gospels. It's also possible that this was a word that was revealed directly to Paul by the Lord. The text just doesn't make it clear.

This is what it says, *“For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”*

We learn at least four things from this text.

First, those who are living at the time of the return of Christ will not precede those who have died. The great day of His coming is going to involve **all believers**, those who have already died, and those still living on earth. No believer will be excluded.

Second, the Lord will come down from Heaven **unmistakably**. There will be **“a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.”** The picture is that of a bugler in the military summoning the troops. Or maybe a better picture for you when as a kid you were playing outside and your mom came to the door calling out that “supper is ready.” In either case, people come running. Although a lot of the moms might dispute that.

Depending on how you read the text, these could be **three** different things (a loud command, a voice from the archangel, and a trumpet blast) or it could be **one** thing: (a loud command from the voice of the archangel that serves as the trumpet call of God.) I don't think it matters.

Third, dead and the living believers will be "*caught up together*." In the Latin the word for "*caught up together*" is *rapto*. It's from this phrase where we get the doctrine called **the Rapture**. All Bible believing Christians believe in the Rapture. In other words, they all believe that there will be a day when we will be "*caught up together*" with Christ.

However, there is division on how to understand this Rapture. I don't want us to lose sight of the main context of the passage but I do believe you need to understand the term because it is so prominent in bad Christian literature.

There are two primary beliefs about the Rapture. One group believes the Rapture will be a "**secret**" event. The Lord will come and suddenly take all believers from the earth leaving the rest of the world bewildered. The non-believers who are "**left behind**" will face a time of intense persecution called the *Tribulation* (a period clearly pointed to in Revelation). This will happen either before the Tribulation starts or midway through the Tribulation (depending on your viewpoint). This is the view proposed by the Left Behind books and many of the prophecy preachers on television. And I personally think it's bad and misleading theology, and a gross misinterpretation of Scripture.

A second group would point out that the events that describe this gathering of saints (also found in Matthew 24 and in 1 Corinthians 15) give the impression that this event will be **anything** but secret — because it's described as being preceded by trumpets and shouts, that are very public and very attention-getting. These people believe the Rapture will take place *after* the Tribulation and will happen at the same time as the actual Second Coming of Christ. They believe the saints will be "*caught up together*" to be part of a massive welcoming party for the coming King. One scholar explains,

The words, "*to meet the Lord in the air*," translate a term used only two other times in the New Testament. In the parable of the ten maidens in Matthew 25 the maidens are called out "*to meet*" the groom and join the marriage procession. Outside Rome, in Acts 28, some Christian brethren came "*to meet*" Paul and escort him back into the city. The word was a technical term for meeting a visiting dignitary. A delegation honored the visitor by going outside the city and meeting him and his entourage on the road. Together the entire party would then proceed back into the city with great fanfare.

In other words it will be something similar to the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. People came with Jesus from Bethany and some came out of Jerusalem when they heard He was coming to meet Him and welcome Him. This view of the Rapture sees the Tribulation period as a time of purifying the church; separating the true and false believers just as persecution has done in the past, and continues to do today.

But be careful! People get pretty dogmatic about which view of the Rapture they hold. The important thing in my mind is that when we die we are caught up with Christ and we live beyond the grave. I encourage you to examine the evidence and draw your own conclusions. On this issue I am less concerned with being dogmatic and more concerned with remaining open to the truth.

Let's get back to our context. **Fourth** don't miss the most important words: "*and so we will always be with the Lord*." This is the great prize. It's the ultimate goal. On this great day

we'll no longer have to search for God. We'll no longer feel alone. We'll never again feel like our prayers aren't getting past the ceiling. We'll never be afraid or feel lost because **we will be with the Lord.**

And because that's true, then we are to consider it ...

v. 18: AN ABIDING COMFORT

"Therefore encourage one another with these words."

These are encouraging words. Certainly we'll still have some questions. This idea of the souls of those who have died remaining alive with Christ in some sort of embodied form and the bodies of those who are still alive meeting together in the air is a little hard to grasp. In 1 Corinthians 15 the Apostle Paul explains a little more, **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**, *"Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed."*

It seems that at this *"gathering of the saints"* the dead will receive their imperishable bodies and those who are *"caught up"* from the earth will be transformed (or *"changed"*) into their new bodies instantly.

Surely someone will ask, "What kind of bodies will these bodies be? Will we be old or young? Will we be able to recognize our family and friends"? There has been endless debate on these issues. Based on what we know in the Bible, it seems that these new bodies will be ageless (they will not be worn down by disease, decay, and infirmities all of which are the effects of sin). In other words, they will be different from what we know now or can even conceive of. Paul likens this difference to the difference between the seed that is planted in the ground and what actually results from planting that seed. Our new bodies will be different from our current bodies ... thank God.

If you have ever gone to a reunion you know that there are times when you don't recognize people who at one time were close friends. We're all a little concerned that we'll get to Heaven and won't recognize family members, close friends, and the saints of old.

I think we're going to know each other in a deeper way. We'll know the person rather than simply knowing each other by the form we inhabit. In other words, I believe I will recognize YOU, not your form. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul reflects on the future with these words, **1 Corinthians 13:12**, *"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."*

These things should encourage us. Think about it this way. When you are headed someplace you have never been before on your vacation, you can find yourself preoccupied looking for road signs, exit numbers, and landmarks. You get to your destination but you often miss the joy of the journey. On the other hand, if you are traveling someplace you have been many times (or if you are the passenger) you tend notice what is around you. You see the sights, you enjoy the beauty, you notice the changes in terrain, and you see the people.

Paul wants us to understand that **if we know where we're going** when we die, we should find courage for life here and now. If we understand that death is not the end of the story but simply a turn on the road to our ultimate destination, death loses its sting. If we understand that Christ will one day return, we can spend less time trying not to die and more time actually living.

Good to know. But Paul wasn't sure the Thessalonians really knew this as well as they should. And to be honest, I'm never sure that we know this as well as we should. Therefore, I think each of us needs to answer ...

APPLICATION: *Three Critical Questions*

The critical question then is: Are you one who is “*in*” Christ or are you living apart from Him? Perhaps you aren’t sure. Let me try to help you.

- **Have you ever recognized that you are a sinful person?**

Do you see that you have lied (making you a liar), you have taken things that weren’t yours (making you a thief), you have looked at and thought about people in a lustful way (making you an adulterer at heart); and you have made other things more important than God in your life (making you an idolater)?

- **Do you see that there is nothing that you can do to erase your sin?**

Doing what is right doesn’t erase the wrong you have done any more than doing your homework in school overcomes missed assignments. When we do what is good we are really just doing what is required. There is no way to undo the bad. And we can live in slavery to this idea of having to be good enough for God ... knowing all the time that we can’t be.

And therefore, people are stricken with a fear of death, because they have to face up to this “not good enough” scenario. But the Bible speaks to this fear as well, **Hebrews 2:14-15**, “*Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,*¹⁵ *and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*”

And so with this in mind ...

- **Do you see that the sacrifice of Jesus is your only hope to be right with God?**

Do you see that Jesus was God who became man to give His perfect life as a payment for the sin you committed? Having seen this, are you willing to put your trust and your confidence not in your goodness but in His gift? Are you willing to trust Him for the future and follow Him in the present? Have you done so? If you trust Him then you are His follower and can have absolute confidence that you will live even though you die.

But what about those who don’t turn to Christ? Here’s what Paul says in 2 Thessalonians, **2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10**, “... *when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels*⁸ *in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*⁹ *They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might,*¹⁰ *when He comes on that day to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.*”

So, there are dramatically different conclusions to life depending on whether you believe Christ and His Word, and you get to marvel at the majesty of Christ upon His return. But if you don’t believe Christ and His Word, then the Bible says you will suffer punishment.

Perhaps that’s another reason people fear death ... and even if they don’t believe, they try to find ways to live on after this life is over. As we see in this story ...

CONCLUSION: *Diamond Dave*³

I gravitate toward weird news, which I’m pretty convinced is a demonstration of the need for continued progressive sanctification in my life, but it’s true, I read a lot of stories thinking, “You can’t make this stuff up.” Anyway, I came across an article entitled “*Many Baby Boomers Are Dying to Find Creative Alternatives to Typical Funerals.*”

³ The conclusion is adapted from the sermon “*An Expectant Outlook*” by Rev. Danny Hall, Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, CA, 7/27/03. The article referenced was “*Many baby boomers are dying to find creative alternatives to typical funerals,*” by Steve Steinberg, *Dallas Morning News*, summer 2003.

Here is an excerpt ...

“Jeweler David D’Aquin knows that he will be stone dead some day. The idea tickles him. At least the “stone” part. That’s because D’Aquin will become a brilliant half-carat diamond that will dangle from the neck of the woman he loves. Similar diamonds will become rings for each of his three sons. D’Aquin is 49 and in fine health. But when he dies, he plans for his cremated ashes to be made into four royal blue gems. One will go to Rebecca Green, who is now his fiancée. He will also design the signet rings bearing the diamonds that go to his sons. D’Aquin, whose nickname is Diamond Dave, had this thought when he heard about his post-cremation option: “I can be Diamond Dave forever!”

D’Aquin’s choice reflects a growing movement toward **non-traditional funeral alternatives**. The funeral industry sources say people are choosing more unusual ways of making their final farewell. Six feet under? How about 24,000 miles above? Your ashes can be loaded into a rocket and fired into orbit around the earth. Or, if you like, your remains can go to the moon or into deep space. Prefer to explore new depths instead? Then sleep with the fishes. Have your ashes mixed with concrete, cast into a replica of a coral reef and sunk at a spot of your choosing. A California company packs ashes into fireworks and puts on a show. Talk about going out with a bang. A Mississippi firm blends ashes into paintings. And an Iowa outfit stuffs ashes into duck decoys, basketballs, or shotgun shells.”

Seriously? Shotgun shells? “Say goodbye to Grandma ... pull!”

I guess that’s one way of scattering the ashes.

The specter of death has a weird effect on us. We do all kinds of things to deny that it’s going to happen. Sometimes we live in mortal fear of it. Sometimes we are driven to conjure up a bizarre or creative legacy or funeral. But death is one of those sure things in life, and it poses great spiritual and emotional challenges for us.

And just in case you’re wondering, when it comes to those momentous ceremonies in life — baptisms, weddings, and funerals — I’m very much of a traditionalist. Why, because I have **hope**, and **hope** is the theme of the traditional funeral service.

You know, life is messy. I wish it weren’t. But somewhere along the way we will run the full gamut of human experience. We’ll face tragedy and discouragement. We’ll be overwhelmed and we’ll want to give up. Instead of waking up in the morning saying, “This could be the day when Christ will come,” we’ll wake up and say, “I can’t believe I have to face another day.” We’ll want to somehow cocoon ourselves away from all the pain. What then?

Well, we’re still a part of the company of faith. We still have **the same sure hope**. We can walk alongside one another and remind one another constantly that the pain of this life has an end. There’s a day coming when Christ will come again to be crowned the King of kings and Lord of lords, when He will wipe away every tear, when justice will be meted out fairly and everything will be set right, when God’s new heaven and earth will come and this place will become what God always intended it to be. In the midst of tragedy and struggle we can stand with each other and say, “Jesus, the one who died and rose again, the one who is coming again, **is our hope**. This is where we place our faith.”

When we fully understand the glorious hope that is out there for us, when by faith and the testimony of God’s word and the reality of what He’s already done for us, we look down the road and anticipate that day when He’ll come again, then we’ll be liberated from the slavery of ourselves, and the slavery of the drudgery of life, and the slavery of the fear of death, because we’re living in the stream of history that points toward **that great event of Christ’s return**.

People who are living in hope are liberated people. People who have no hope are enslaved people. People who question their hope are certainly burdened. But God calls us to live in the hope of Christ's return and **to encourage each other** until that day.

That's what Paul's saying.

That's what we're to believe.

And that's how we're supposed to be living.

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the church in Thessalonica. Thank You for their faithfulness in the face of affliction. And thank You for their faithfulness in the face of confusion. Thank You that they received and accepted the Word of God and it changed their lives. May we do the same. And may we demonstrate that change by how much we believe Your Word ... and by the evident Hope that it gives us. We ask that You would do this within us ... in the Name of Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.

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1 Thessalonians 5:9-11

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.