

## **Spiritual DNA: A Examination of the Church**

A Church that Has a Hope that Lasts

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

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**Introduction to Text:** The last couple of weeks we have looking at this idea that we are calling Spiritual DNA: An Examination of the Church. Our guiding text is 1 Thessalonians 1:3 which tells us that Paul gave thanks for this church which exhibited a faith that works, a love that labors, and a hope that lasts. This morning our examination concludes with a look at a church with a hope that lasts.

**Text:** <sup>13</sup> We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. <sup>15</sup> For we say this to you by a revelation from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly have no advantage over those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are still alive 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. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.

<sup>1</sup> About the times and the seasons: brothers, you do not need anything to be written to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> When they say, "Peace and security," then sudden destruction comes on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you, brothers, are not in the dark, so that this day would overtake you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> For you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We're not of the night or of darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then, we must not sleep, like the rest, but we must stay awake and be sober. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we are of the day, we must be sober and put the armor of faith and love on our chests, and put on a helmet of the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup> For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.

### **Introduction:**

It was one of the most famous promises in history. It is one of the most famous quotes from Douglas MacArthur. Just months after their attack on Pearl Harbor, the fearsome Japanese military was rapidly advancing on Manila where General Douglas MacArthur was Allied commander.

When President Franklin Roosevelt commanded him to leave the Philippines, MacArthur considered resigning and fighting on as a civilian. He didn't want to leave his men or the Filipino people to face the overwhelming might of the enemy alone. However, on March 11, 1942, he obeyed the order and made his way to Australia. But he made this promise to the Filipinos: "I shall return."

In the face of what seemed an unbeatable foe, General MacArthur's words held out a glimmer of hope.

The full quote has him telling journalists in Australia, "The President of the United States ordered me to break through the Japanese lines and proceed from Corregidor to Australia for the purpose, as I

understand it, of organizing the American offensive against Japan, a primary objective of which is the relief of the Philippines. I came through and I shall return.”

On Oct. 20, 1944, he fulfilled his “I shall return” promise. (Copied)

One of the reasons that I like this story so is the similarity with our LORD’s promise that he will return. Much more significant is our LORD’s promise of His return.

When life comes to an end, there is great hope in knowing what God has planned for us in death. That seems to be the issue for the Thessalonians. The passage before us today has a very specific context. The issue comes up rather suddenly in the letter. All agree that Paul is addressing a question that the Thessalonians have raised with him. The question seems to have to do with the death of believers before the anticipated and much heralded return of Christ. Paul is quick to point out that the nature of death for the Christian is such that they will be very much a part of the glory of the return of Christ. So, the whole idea of death for the believer and/or the return of Christ to consummate this age are the basis of the great hope of the church. This is the hope that endures. So, what about a Christian’s hope? Let’s talk about the **characteristics of the Christian’s hope, the commands of the Christian’s hope, and conclusions about the Christian’s hope.**

### **The Characteristics of a Christian’s Hope**

#### 1. Christ-Centered

First of all, a Christian’s hope is based exclusively in Jesus. Everything about the Christian’s hope is based in Jesus. We base our faith on *facts* about Jesus. The Christian life is based, as verse 14 indicates, on the death and resurrection of Jesus. So, when we talk about the hope of a person’s resurrection, we are basing that on the resurrection of Jesus. We also have the *promise* from Jesus that gives us hope. He did everything else He said He would do. Then, our hope is based on our own *faith* in Jesus. This hope is not promised to everyone, but again as verse 14 indicates, to those who “sleep in Jesus.”

#### 2. Based on Concrete Information

Secondly, a Christian’s hope is based on concrete information. Paul gave, by the word of the Lord, very specific information in regards to the return of Christ. Now, I’m not suggesting that we ever doubt the word of the Lord, but I think it makes a difference that we have specific information. What gives you more confidence? Somebody says, “I’ll call you sometime and we’ll do something.” Compare that with someone saying, “Come to my house for 6:00 p.m. on Friday for dinner.” The details that Paul gives are just enough to give an expectation to our hope.

#### 3. Calls for trust

But, the details are just ambiguous enough to call for trust on our part. When it comes to the matter of the return of Christ or matters about heaven, we don’t have all the details. The main reason is that our earthly minds cannot comprehend the glory that is going to be revealed to us on that day. Warren Wiersbe gave this advice, “Why substitute human speculation for Divine revelation?”

I remember reading about a man who a few years ago, in preparation of his death that would eventually come at the age of 24, left instructions that his body be frozen. Steven, an avid reader of science fiction believed that he could be at the “forefront when science fiction turned to science fact.” So, at his death due to an intestinal disease, according to his wishes, his mother had him frozen by the Cryonics Society of New York. She commented that his death did not have the same finality of burying someone. However, when asked if she expected Steven to live again, she made this tragically significant comment. She said, “I have only a remote hope in my boy’s resurrection.” What a contrast to the kind of hope spoken about in our text and the kind of hope that we have as believers in Christ.

### **The Commands of this Hope**

Let’s talk now about the commands of this hope. This information of our hope ought to lead us to live a different kind of life. The whole purpose of this text is that we would not live like the uninformed, but live like the informed. (that we would not live as those without hope, but live as those with hope) Several commands emerge from this text—commands that are based on the hope that we have in Christ.

1. Don’t grieve as those who have no hope.

Please understand that the command is not that we would “not grieve.” Rather, the command is to not grieve as those who have no hope. There is a big difference. Many of you have experienced real grief in recent days. God is not displeased with your grief. Your grief is not a sin. That is not the impact of this text. The idea of this passage is that we ought to grieve differently than those who have no hope. We grieve because our relationship with our loved one in this life is complete. However, we have a confidence that because Jesus has defeated the grave, trust in Him allows us to have victory over death.

2. Comfort each other with this hope.

Second, we are commanded to comfort each other with this hope. Comfort has the idea of encourage. The first command seems to be targeted to those who grieve. This commands is targeted to all. We are to take the message of the hope that we have in Christ to others—both believers and unbelievers. Comfort for those who are believers and encouragement to those who may not yet be believers.

3. Live like you have hope.

Third, we are to live like we have a hope. We are not of the darkness; we are of the light. We are informed. Those who are informed about their future in Christ live ready. We should live with a confident expectation that His return could be any day. We should live with a confidence that either at our death or at His return, we will be with Him forever.

### **The Conclusions**

Finally, we come to several conclusions.

1. The only way to be confident is to be "in Christ." If you are not "in Christ" you are not worried enough about the future. If you are "in Christ" there is no need to worry.
2. If we are "in Christ" our future ought to be the lens through which we view the rest of life. Paul said in the letter to the Philippians, "our citizenship is in Heaven." (Philippians 3:20) To the Colossians, he said, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." (Colossians 3:2) Our hope in Christ should be the lens through which we view all other things. Our problems, our possessions, other people, everything should be viewed in light of our future in Christ.
3. Our hope should last. Our hope in Christ should be of such confidence that we should remain hopeful no matter what.

During those years between General MacArthur's promise of "I will return" and his actual return, the saying was printed on all sorts of items—cigarettes, matchbooks, chewing gum, and candy bars for example—and spread throughout the Philippines. The idea was that the Filipino people would stay encouraged. Similarly, as Christians, we are told to encourage one another with these words of the LORD's return. Some early Christians are said to have greeted each other with the word "Maranatha" instead of a hello or a goodbye. "Come, LORD Jesus." In our coming and going, we ought to remind each other, "He is coming again!"