

**Abounding in Hope**  
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18  
*Halifax: 29 October, 10:30 AM*

**Introduction**

Today we have come to chapter 4:13-18 in our sermon series from Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians.

- When we got to chapter 4, we saw how Paul began to exhort the Thessalonian church to continue abounding in their walk with the Lord.
  - Everything changes when we enter into union with Christ.
  - We are reconciled to our heavenly Father, accepted, forgiven, embraced, and we are able to live for Him...to reshape our lives in the beautiful ways that please Him.
  - And Paul is simply pleading with us to abound more and more in that new life.

After this brief (it is only two and a half verses) but powerful introduction to this second part of his letter, Paul begins to address specific areas for them (and us) to abound in.

- First, he calls them to abound in sexual purity...from the middle of v. 2 to v. 8.
- Next, he calls them to abound in brotherly love...what we looked at last week (9-12).
- And today in 4:13-18, we have his plea to abound in hope...the hope of Christ's parousia—
  - A parousia is an official coming of a dignitary, such as when the queen comes to visit in Halifax and people go out to meet her.

Please listen as I read this portion of God's word to you, remembering that it is indeed the very word of God, written for you and all of God's people.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. <sup>15</sup> For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words.**

May the Lord bless the reading and the exposition of His Word.

**I. Here is a description of the most glorious parousia ever!**

- A. Parousias were important and memorable features of Greco-Roman culture.
  - 1. Typically, the dignitary would come with a glorious entourage and be given divine honours.
    - a. Officials would dress in special clothing, great arches were sometimes built, sacrifices were made, and lavish gifts such as golden crowns were distributed.
      - Parousias were events that everyone looked forward to, and they went down as significant events in the history of the city with lasting monuments to commemorate them.

- b. Here is an example from the Jewish historian Josephus of the parousia of Vespasian as the new emperor of Rome in 66 AD.
- Amidst feelings of universal goodwill, those of higher rank, impatient of awaiting him, hastened to a great distance from Rome to be the first to greet him. Nor, indeed, could any of the rest endure the delay of meeting, but all poured forth in such crowds – for to all it seems simpler and easier to go than to remain – that the very city then for the first time experienced with satisfaction the paucity of inhabitants; for those who went outnumbered those who remained. But when he was reported to be approaching and those who had gone ahead were telling of the affability of his reception of each party, the whole remaining population, with wives and children, were by now waiting at the road-sides to receive him; and each group as he passed, in their delight at the spectacle and moved by the blandness of his appearance, gave vent to all manner of cries, hailing him as “benefactor,” “saviour,” and “only worthy emperor of Rome.” The whole city, moreover, was filled, like a temple, with garlands and incense.
2. The Thessalonians would have been especially familiar with such parousias because they lived in the capital city of Macedonia where emperors and other dignitaries would sometimes visit.
- But the Thessalonian church was waiting for a much grander parousia than the coming of some earthly figure...
    - They were yearning for a parousia not just to a city, but to the whole world...all in one event...
    - And a parousia not of some earthly monarch, but of the Lord of glory who rules over the living and the dead and who comes from heaven!
- B. Paul refers to this parousia in verse 15 as **the coming [parousia] of the Lord**.
1. When He was here on earth, Jesus had announced His parousia—that He would come in all His glory with the holy angels accompanying Him.
    - He talks about this, for example, in Matthew 25:31 & 32 where He says: **When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.**
    - This became a standard part of the church’s creed from the very beginning, even while the New Testament was being written.
  2. In Acts 1:9-11, we are told how the angel assured Jesus’ apostles who watched Him ascend into the glory cloud of God that He would return in the same way.
    - It says: <sup>9</sup> **Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, <sup>11</sup> who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”**
- So the parousia of Jesus has been the hope of those who believe God’s Word ever since the time of Jesus’ ascension.

- C. My brothers and sisters, just think how glorious this parousia will be!
- Truly, it will be like no other!
1. First of all, as Paul says in verse 16, it will be *the Lord Himself* who comes!
    - When He was here before, He came as a servant, but when He comes again it will be as the awesome reigning Lord of heaven and earth!
      - As the victorious exalted victor who has authority over all things.
      - As the judge of all from which heaven and earth will flee away—the wicked will call upon the mountains and rocks to hide them.
      - Every eye will see Him! It is not a secret coming as some have erroneously suggested!
  2. What a marvelous thing that He comes from heaven!
    - He does not come from another city or from the battle field...but from heaven.
    - He actually comes in the air...in the same manner as He went away.
  3. There will be a shout—an assembling shout...
    - A call so powerful that it will bring all people from all nations to Him...
      - And that is not all—
      - It will be call so powerful that it will awaken the dead from the graves—all of them—all who have ever lived on the earth...
        - In John 5, Jesus Himself told us that: **the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice <sup>29</sup> and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.**
  4. With that great shout, Paul says that the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God will also be heard.
    - What a glorious thing it will be!
      - Who can fathom it all!
      - What a day it will be!
      - What a worship service it will be!
  5. And Paul says that we believers will have the privilege of going up to meet Him in the air as He arrives.
    - a. He explains at the end of verse 16 that the dead in Christ will rise first.
      - The resurrected bodies of Christians will rise to join their spirits which will already be with Christ.
        - Those who are not in Christ will be raised, but they will be left in terror on earth as those wanting to hide from Him...
    - b. And after the dead in Christ are raised, Paul adds in verse 17 that **Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.**
      - This is what is sometimes called the rapture—this word comes from the Latin word *rapere* which means *to snatch up*.
        - You are familiar with the great birds that are called *raptors*—because they snatch up their prey with their great claws.

- The Greek word that is translated *caught up* or *snatched up* was used by the Jews to refer to the catching up of Enoch and Elijah into heaven...
  - This word was also used to refer to Paul when he was snatched away by the Roman guards from the rioters in Jerusalem...
  - And it was used of Philip when he was caught up from the desert lands after he baptised the eunuch...
  - Paul uses it to describe how he himself was caught up to the third heaven.
- c. So just think of it, we will be caught up like this to meet the Lord in the air!
  - The word *meet* is a special word in the original— *ap-an'-tay-sis*.
    - It is a word that was used to refer to going out to meet a dignitary or special person at his parousia (coming) for the purpose of escorting him into the city!
      - *Ap-an'-tay-sis* was the word used in the quote from Josephus about the people going out to meet Vespasian.
      - Cicero describes the progress of Julius Caesar through Italy in 49-BC with this word:
        - “Just imagine what *apantesis* (meeting) he is receiving from the towns, what honours are paid to him!”
          - Five years later he says the same thing about Caesar’s adopted son Octavian: “The municipalities are showing the boy remarkable favour...Wonderful *apantesis* and encouragement.”
      - It is consistently used in this way in the Bible.
        - It is the word that was used in Acts 28:15 when Paul went to Rome and the believers heard that he was coming and went out to meet him on the road.
        - This word is used of the wedding processions that would occur when the bridegroom came (Matt 25:1 and 6).
    - Gene Green says, “The custom that forms the background of the previous verse, that of going out to meet a visiting dignitary, implies that the delegation that goes out will return with the one who comes. Since no other explanation is offered of the events after this meeting, we may assume that the Thessalonians would have understood that the Lord would continue His *Parousia* until he arrived at the final destination of the city or the earth.”
  - So you see what is described here—this meeting of the Lord in the air.
    - The dead in Christ will be given the place of honour, and then we who are alive will come after them to greet Him as He comes to the earth.
      - What a glorious procession it will be as we gather to Him and escort Him to the earth.
- 6. And notice how it says that we will meet Him in the clouds...why are the clouds always mentioned with reference to the coming and going of Christ?
  - This refers to the glory cloud that contains the presence of God.

- Such a cloud went with Israel in the wilderness (Ex 16:10).
  - Such a cloud was seen over Sinai when God gave His law to Israel (Ex 19:16).
  - Such a cloud filled the temple when God entered into it (1 Kings 8:10-12).
  - Such a cloud is referred to as God's chariot when He comes in judgment against His enemies (Isa 19:1).
    - The chief priests accused Christ of blasphemy when He told them that they would see Him coming in the clouds to judge Jerusalem.
      - Only God rode in the glory cloud!
  - Such a cloud appeared at Christ's transfiguration (Mark 9:7).
  - Such a cloud received Christ when He ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9).
  - And such a cloud will bring Him back to earth (v. 17 of our text).
  - And Paul says that we will go into that cloud to meet Him in the air!
    - Oh the glory of it all!
      - How marvellous it all is!
7. But I have still not gotten to the best part of all...
- At the end verse 17, Paul says,
    - **And thus we shall always be with the Lord.**
  - This is no temporary visit of our glorious exalted Lord!
    - He is coming to stay with us forever.
    - We will never be separated from Him again!
  - Here is the source of all of our happiness that Jesus prayed for in John 17.
    - That we would be with Him forever to behold the glory He had with the Father before the world was made.
      - It is inconceivable!

TRANS> But the focus of Paul in our text here is on the parousia itself and our meeting of Him in the air when He first comes!

- He is writing about this because the Thessalonian church had a concern about the parousia.

## **II. They were thrilled by this glorious expectation, but there was one thing that troubled them...a thing about which they were ignorant.**

A. That they were thrilled is evident from the way Paul writes to them.

1. It is clear that they were expecting the parousia of the Lord.
  - This was their hope from the very beginning as Paul shows back in chapter 1 verse 9 & 10 when he describes how onlookers spoke of the initial conversion of the Thessalonians:
    - **1 Thessalonians 1:9-10: For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**
  - You see how it says that they were waiting for God's Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead...

- They were looking forward to this.
2. In fact, this hope was so strong for them that Paul calls it their **patience of hope** in chapter 1 verse 3.
    - When we looked at that some weeks ago,
      - I explained to you how hope was essential to their very survival, for as soon as they came to Christ, their lives in this world were ruined as far as the world goes...
        - They were cut off from friends and family and were persecuted.
        - There would have been implications for their livelihood and for their standing in the community.
      - But like the apostles, they did not have hope only in this life.
        - If only in this life they had had hope, they would have been of all men most miserable.
          - But no, they were eagerly waiting for God's Son from heaven.
- B. So how was their joy in the hope of Christ's parousia hindered?
1. Their sorrow seems to have arisen out of their high esteem for this glorious coming of Christ.
    - It seems to have arisen out of a concern that some of their beloved brothers and sisters in Christ might miss this glorious event of the parousia.
      - It was an occasion they were so looking forward to that they were concerned that those who had died might not be able to share in it.
    - Perhaps they thought that those who were alive on the earth when Christ came would be the only ones who would see His coming,
      - Perhaps that those who had died before His coming would not be raised until He arrived on the earth.
      - They would miss His glorious appearing in the clouds with the angels and the sound of the trumpet.
    - As more died before His coming, their sorrow increased.
      - They did not want them to miss out.
  2. It is not certain, but it seems reasonable to suppose that they had asked Timothy about this when he had visited them, and that he did not know the answer to this question.
    - If he had, Paul would not have needed to inform them, but to remind them as he does with other matters he addresses in this letter.
    - It is possible that *nobody* knew the answer to this question, because there is nothing about it in the gospels.
      - We are told of the glorious appearing of Christ and of the dead being raised by His mighty voice to be sure,
      - But we are not told when the dead will be raised and if they will be able to participate in the parousia.
        - A spiritual participation would not be the same.
    - There is a hint that Paul is giving them a new revelation here...

- Because when he answers their question in verse 15, he begins with the words: **For this we say to you by the word of the Lord.**
  - **For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.**
  - That part about, *this we say to you by the Word of the Lord...*
    - seems to suggest that he received this answer by special revelation.
    - He was not speculating here about the sequence of events, but has received a word from the Lord.
3. In any case, Paul tells them that he does not want them to be ignorant about what happens to those who are asleep in Jesus so they will not sorrow as those who have no hope...
- They did have hope—but this question seems to have so disturbed them so that they were sorrowing like those who do not have hope when someone died.
  - Look at how tenderly Paul speaks to them in verse 13—in no way faulting them for not knowing the answer to this question...
    - **1 Thess 4:13: But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.**
    - How could he fault them when it grew out of such a warm love for their brothers and sisters who had died?
      - He simply wants to relieve their ignorance and their sorrow.
- And you see how Paul answers the question that had distressed them—
- C. He declares to them that those who have already died will not miss out on the parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ at all!
1. In verse 14, he explains that Jesus will bring their spirits with Him when He comes to earth:
- **For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.**
  - We assume that he is referring to their spirits here because their bodies are not in heaven, but asleep in the dust of the earth.
  - The spirits of believers go immediately to be with Christ when they die, as Jesus told the thief on the cross.
- But Paul continues his explanation...
2. And in verse 15-17 he explains how, far from being excluded from the parousia, the dead in Christ will be given the place of honour.
- They will be the first to meet Christ in their resurrected bodies...
    - **1 Thess 4:15-17: For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.**

- Far from being excluded, those asleep in Christ will have the preference!
  - There is no disadvantage for them.
- 3. So Paul tells them to comfort one another with these words!
  - Comfort those who are dying that they will not miss the parousia—
    - and comfort those who are mourning the death of their brothers and sisters in Christ that though they have the sorrow of their loss, there need be no sorrow for the sake of those who have died!
      - They will not miss out on a thing!
  - This is not idle speculation—it is by the Word of the Lord that Paul has spoken to them of this hope.

### III. Now consider how all of this applies to us today!

#### A. First of all, we should apply this directly.

- We should obey Paul's command to **Comfort one another with these words.**
- 1. We should comfort those who are facing death in Christ.
  - We should remind them that they are departing to be with Christ,
    - that their spirits will go to be with Christ and that their bodies will sleep in their graves in Him until His coming...His parousia.
  - And that in that day, they will rise again to meet Him in the air with those of us who are still alive.
    - The next time we see them it will be to share in the parousia of our Lord.
      - What a joyful thought that is!
- 2. And we should also comfort each other with these same words when we are facing bereavement—
  - either the prospect of the death of a beloved brother in Christ—or the actual loss of them through death.
  - They are with the Lord in spirit, waiting for His parousia just as we are, and soon we will be with them rejoicing in praise to our Lord.
- We have a glorious hope to share with each other, even in the face of death.
- 3. And let me add that even for those who have lost loved ones who are not in Christ, there is still comfort in these words...
  - Oh brothers and sisters, there is deep sorrow about those who die outside of Christ, for there is no hope for them...we can have no comfort about them...
    - We should not try to pretend about that.
    - But we can have comfort in our gracious Lord when we remember that it is only of His mercies that we are not all consumed.
  - It brings to us in a very real and vivid way to the fact that we are completely unworthy of even the least of His mercies...
    - And it brings to mind what our Lord Jesus had to endure for us in order that we might be saved.
  - Our sorrow for those who die without Christ is greater than those who entertain false hopes about them will ever imagine...
    - But at the same time, our trust in the goodness of our heavenly Father and our amazement at His grace to us in Christ overshadows our sorrows.



TRANS> Yes brothers and sisters, let us comfort one another with the hope that we have for those who die in the Lord and of their participation in the parousia.

- This is what we are called to do in 1 Thess 4.
- But there is another very important application for us to look in this passage—an indirect application as it were...

B. We should be encouraged to stir up our hope in the parousia of our Lord!

1. The excitement of the Thessalonians exposes our sinful indifference about it.

- It shows me what I am missing when I see how excited these Thessalonians were about the parousia!
  - So much so that it made them sorrow to think of those they loved missing out on it.
- As we have seen, they believed in the resurrection—it was not unbelief...
  - It was a concern that these departed loved ones would miss out on the parousia that moved these dear brothers and sisters to sorrow.

2. O that we might see the glory of the prospect of His coming like the Thessalonians did!

- There have been some very glorious parousias in the history of the world.
  - In our day, you see people flipping out at the appearing of a rock star or the pope or a president or something.
- But how pitiful these exhibitions are compared to the parousia of Christ!
  - Just imagine it—He comes from heaven in all of His glory as the Son of God with all the holy angels...
    - His powerful voice calls the dead from their graves and all who know Him rise into the skies to meet Him in the glory cloud!
    - There is the voice of the angel and the trumpet of God...
    - There is the terror of Satan and all the wicked as they bow before His marvellous glory and want the rocks to cover them.
    - And all who are in Christ will be with Him as He comes down, and we will be with Him forever!

3. How this glorious hope ought to shape our lives as it did the Thessalonians'!

- Let us live as those who are waiting for this day!
- May our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all...so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints!
- May we have we be numbered with those who wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

➤ And that is the last thing I want to say to you...there are still two more applications...

C. Look at the brotherly love in these Thessalonian believers...

1. Do you have that kind of love for one another—would it make you sorrowful if you thought your brothers and sisters might miss out on the parousia?
    - Let me ask you, do you grieve when they have to miss out on a worship service?
    - Do you care when they are drifting from the Lord and miss out?
    - Do you pray for them to see the glory of God?
      - Do you care that they are rejoicing in Christ?
      - Are you even that concerned about your own children—or only that they behave well enough?

➤ Perhaps you don't care because you are not really rejoicing in Christ.
  2. O that our love for each other might be like the Thessalonian church's love!
    - Ours is like a water gun, theirs was like a garden hose...
    - We need to abound and increase in our love for one another.

➤ And then there is one more application for you before the Lord...
- D. Be sure that you are among those who wait for His Son from heaven!
1. The parousia of Christ will be a terror to you unless you are found in Him,
    - not having your own righteousness which is dung...
      - but having the righteousness of Christ who delivers us from the wrath to come.
    - Understand that unless you are found in Christ, as one who has received Him and is resting upon Him alone for your salvation,
      - You have no covering for your sin—you are fully exposed.
      - He died on the cross to atone for His peoples' sins, and you must be in Him or you have no atonement and you will face Him as a judge when He comes.
  2. Just as His glory will elevate the hearts of all who have waited for Him,
    - so it will consume in flames of terror and wrath those who are not in Him.
    - You must come to Him for life if you want to be found in Him on that day.
      - There is nothing more dreadful to be outside of Him when He appears.
    - This is all by the Word of the Lord and you dare not ignore it.
      - It is not the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God!
      - Do not ignore it, embrace it!
        - You will never be ready to meet the glorious risen Lord until you come to Him!
  3. But what a splendid thing it is for all of you *are* trusting in Him!
    - What security you have in Him!
    - What hope!
    - What consolation!
    - What a glorious expectation!
- Conclusion: Abound in hope in the parousia of our Lord!**
- It will be the greatest worship service that has ever been!
  - Glory to God in the highest!