

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Saints Triumphant

November 15, 2020

Everyone likes to be triumphant, and it starts at a very early age. Young boys & girls dream about making a game-winning basket or hitting a home run. And of course, that desire doesn't disappear when we grow up. We still play cards to win the game. We still get invested in sports teams because their victory is our victory. Whether we are talking about an argument, a business deal, reaching a goal, or fantasy football - everyone likes to be triumphant. No one likes to be on the losing end. No one wants to be disappointed.

Yet, so often life can feel like it is full of disappointments. Have you ever had an experience where things didn't turn out as you had expected? Who hasn't had at least one experience like that? Maybe it was a restaurant that didn't live up to the hype. Maybe it was a vacation that turned out to be a bust. Maybe you took a job that was supposed to be fulfilling, but you dread going to work. Maybe retirement isn't exactly the way that you thought it would be. When life doesn't turn out the way we'd hoped, planned or expected, we feel tremendous disappointment and start doubting everything, including ourselves. Life doesn't seem very triumphant, doesn't it?

We've all experienced disappointment in one way or another. Some of those disappointments are small in comparison to other ones. This morning, in our text, we see the Thessalonians experiencing one of those huge disappointments. The apostle Paul had come to the city of Thessalonica on one of his missionary journeys. Luke tells us in the book of Acts: **"As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead."** (Acts 17:2-3) But the Jewish people who lived there, quickly turned the people against Paul. After only 3 weeks of teaching, Paul was driven out from the city. There was so much more that Paul wanted to teach the Thessalonians in person, but he couldn't because of the severe persecution that he and the new Christians felt in that city. So, Paul writes this letter to them.

It soon became clear to Paul that they did not understand what happens when a believer dies and what happens when Jesus will return to earth. They trusted Jesus. They looked forward with eager hearts to Jesus' return. However, they had taken a *"you snooze, you lose"* mentality toward death. They were afraid that if you didn't survive until the Last Day, you would miss out. Rather than feeling triumphant about their death and Jesus' return to this world, they were concerned, bothered and terrified. They were expecting Jesus' return coming any day that they were afraid that if their loved ones died before His return, they would be lost. This was leading to hopeless despair. Can you imagine how terrified they would be about death? They knew there was an end coming, they just didn't understand what that "end" meant.

So, Paul writes to them: **"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. 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. 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."**

When Paul talks about **"hope,"** he is talking about something that is more than just wishful thinking. Several men were in the locker room at a golf club. A cell phone on the bench rings and one of the men picks it up and puts it on speaker phone while he getting ready.

The man says, "Hello?" A woman's voice says, *"Honey, it's me. Are you at the club?"* "Yes." *"I'm at the store now and found this beautiful leather coat. It's only \$1,000. Can I buy it?"* The man says, *"Sure, go ahead if you like it that much."* Then the woman says, *"I also stopped by the Mercedes dealership and looked at the new 2021 models. I saw one I really liked."* *"How much?"* the man asks. *"60 grand,"* says the woman. *"Ok,"* the man says. *"But for that price I want all the options."* *"Great!"* says the woman. *"Oh, and one more thing...the house I wanted last year is back on the market. They're asking just under 2 million for it."* The man says, *"Make an offer of a million eight on it. They'll probably take it. If not, we can go the extra \$200,000, if the house really means that much to you."* *"Ok,"* says the woman. *"I'll see you later! I love you so much!"* *"I love you, too,"* the man says and hangs up.

The other men in the locker room are staring at him in astonishment, mouths hanging open. The man turns to them, smiles, and asks, *“Anyone know whose phone this is?”* That man just gave that woman a whole lot of false hope.

We might chuckle at that little story; however, for many today it may be hard to find hope. In addition to the Covid numbers that are arising at an alarming rate around us, it is also that time of year when many people are depressed. The long days of summer are gone. The sun sets about 4:30pm. The holidays are fast approaching. People are being encouraged to not come together for large family gatherings so that this virus doesn't spread faster and further. People are feeling more and more isolated. There doesn't seem to be much of an end in sight. I think it is fair to say that we all are getting tired of hearing so much negative news around us. We look around and wonder what there is to hope in. Many view the future with dread.

Yet, Paul wanted to share with the people of Thessalonica, and us, that there was plenty of hope. The Bible tells us that Jesus wanted so badly for every person in this world to enjoy heaven forever with him that He chose to come into this world and take on human flesh. Not only did he take on human flesh, he suffered more than anyone can ever imagine as he battled with himself on the cross. He suffered for all the sins that the human race had ever done. He did it all, so you wouldn't miss out on eternal life! Talk about HOPE!

We have Someone who completely changes our view of death. We have Jesus. When it comes to death, Jesus makes all the difference in the world. Because of Jesus and only because of Jesus can we call the Sunday we are celebrating what it is - *Saints Triumphant*. We celebrate that all, those who have died in saving faith in Jesus, now in the glories of heaven. Why can we have that kind of Hope? Paul says: **“For we believe that Jesus died and rose again!”** It's right there in those words. It's all in Jesus.

You and I are sinners. There is no doubt about that. The Thessalonians were sinners. There was no doubt about that. But that is not what God sees in us because of our faith in Jesus. God see all those sins taken away through Jesus. We are triumphant. It isn't not the world that determines whether we are blessed or not, it is our Heavenly Father. And we take Him at His Word. **“And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”**
Amen.