



5.

'The best is yet to come!'

1 Thessalonians 4.¹³-5.¹¹

Background

As we've seen, Paul highlighted in chapter 1 of the letter how the believers had 'turned to God from idols' (faith), 'to serve the living God' (love) and to 'wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath' (hope).

Having explained in the first part of chapter 4 what's involved in a life that's now lived *towards* God (living 'in order to please God' – v.1), and a life that's characterised by a desire to serve the living God, he now takes the time (really from here to the end of the letter) to work through what lies behind that 'waiting' for God's Son from heaven.

He starts by explaining (1) *the substance of our hope* as believers – what it is, in other words, that we are waiting for: and he then addresses the whole issue of (2) *the nature of our waiting*, that's to say how that 'waiting' is to find an appropriate expression – the perpetual balance between investing ourselves fully in the here and now of this world, while at the same not being pre-occupied with this world and simultaneously investing ourselves in the world to come (for some, at least, of the Thessalonian believers, that balance was significantly skewed and required to be corrected).

The passage on which this study concentrates focusses initially on the first part of Paul's exposition, namely the substance of our hope, pouring some content into Paul's summary line in 1 Thess.1.10.

Two great truths are set out for the believers. First, implicit in the words "*from heaven*" in that summary statement is the core truth of the return of the Lord Jesus: He will come again – a great affirmation, solemn and glorious, which rings consistently throughout the NT, right on through to virtually the last sentence of the Bible – '*Amen. Come Lord Jesus*' (Rev.22.20). And second, the repercussions of His coming again for believers.

Both these truths are set out in a simple clear way: concentrate on what Paul actually writes here rather than being distracted by the different understandings of when this will all take place.

Which really leads on to the second part of the passage, relating to the nature of our waiting; it's very practical, so try and think through how these practicalities apply to and challenge you. Start with '**days**' (1), (3) and (6).

1) Monday 6th November – a sure hope

Read [1 Thessalonians 4.13](#)

“so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope ..” (1 Thess.4.13)

Bereavement brings grief which is invariably real, deep and sore. *That* we will grieve is inevitable and should be neither minimised nor marginalised. *How* we will grieve is tied to our grasp of the gospel, and our hold on Jesus Christ. In Him alone is hope.

Many in our society cling to a sentimental ‘hope’ (variously expressed) that everyone goes to heaven when they die: how can you, with all due sensitivity, bring the challenge of the gospel to those who have such a ‘hope’?

Is there sufficient teaching given by the church on the details of what happens when we die, leaving believers sometimes ill-informed?

How does the hope of the gospel transform the grief of believers?

In what ways are you able to afford comfort and help to bereaved friends, when the one they mourn was not a believer?

Prayer: *Praise be to You, my God and Father, for the hope You have given us in the resurrection of Your Son. And thank You for the comfort You afford us in our sorrows.*

2) Tuesday 7th November – game-changer

Read [1 Thessalonians 4.14](#)

“.. we believe that Jesus died and rose again ..” (1 Thess.4.14)

The death and resurrection of Jesus are the centre-point of history: the ultimate game-changer. Death may be universal, but Jesus is unique. He rose from the dead: death couldn’t hold Him. If you’re in Him, you share what’s His. Death can’t hold you either!

How might you respond if someone suggested that it doesn’t matter whether you believe Jesus was raised from the dead – it’s His *teachings* that count?

What does Paul mean when he speaks, with reference to Jesus of a person being ‘in Him’?

Prayer: *How great it is, O Lord, to know that You have already demonstrated both your commitment, and your ability, to fulfil Your promise to resurrect Your people!*

3) Wednesday 8th November – together with the Lord

Read [1 Thessalonians 4.15-18](#)

“.. according to the Lord’s own word ..” (1 Thess.4.15)

The hope of resurrection isn't wishful thinking. It's rooted in both what God's done (raising Jesus) and in what God's said. God (who never lies) has given His word: and His word is full of power, accomplishing what He has purposed. Be encouraged!

God may have given His word, but how can you be sure that what's been promised will come to pass?

On the basis of these verses, how would you explain to a friend what is sometimes called the believer's 'blessed hope' ([Tit.2.13](#))?

What 3 distinct repercussions for believers of the coming of the Lord Jesus does Paul point to in these verses?

Does this hope fill your horizons, or are you overly pre-occupied with knowing God's blessing in the here and now?

Prayer: *You have set me on the path of life, O Lord, which is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter, with the best still to come! Keep me pressing on to that future!*

4) Thursday 9th November – a certain surprise

Read [1 Thessalonians 5.1-3](#)

".. the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night .." (1 Thess.5.2)

That Jesus will return is certain: *when* that will be no one knows. Hence the constant need for vigilance and readiness. The nocturnal thief doesn't ever intimate his visit, so don't be caught napping. A new day is soon to be birthed. Have your bag packed!

What contemporary illustrations do you see of "people (who) are saying 'Peace and security'"?

How can you ensure that it's love and trust, rather than *fear*, which prompts people to turn to Jesus when you speak to them about His return?

Prayer: *It's enough for me to know that You **are** indeed coming back, my Lord; help me to wait patiently and yet expectantly, in the confidence that that great day will come.*

5) Friday 10th November – working the 'day-shift'

Read [1 Thessalonians 5.4-7](#)

".. you are all children of the light and children of the day .." (1 Thess.5.5)

The night can be scary, confusing – and shameful. But in Christ believers are brought into a new realm – no longer night but day, no longer in the dark but enlightened. We're day-time people now – wide awake, clear-headed and alert to what's going on.

What does Paul mean by exhorting believers to 'be awake and sober'?

In what ways does the way you live as a child 'of the day' stand in contrast to those around you who 'belong to the night'?

Prayer: You have brought me out of the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of Your beloved Son, my Father: may my life be a constant expression of joyful thanks to You!

6) Saturday 11th November – faith, love and hope

Read [1 Thessalonians 5.8-10](#)

".. but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ .." (1 Thess.5.9)

By His death in their place, Jesus has secured for His people salvation. No longer the fear of the wrath of a holy God: instead, the joy of a life lived with Christ – in time and in eternity. That issues in an upward (faith), outward (love) and forward (hope) look.

In what ways do your faith and love provide (as a breastplate) protection for your heart, and the hope of the gospel (as a helmet) help you 'keep your head'?

In 1 Thess.1.10 the prospect of Jesus' coming again was related to His being the one who 'rescues us from the coming wrath': v.9 here points up the 'flip' side of that – rescued from wrath we 'receive salvation': what does that mean?

Read 2 Cor.5.13-15 where Paul writes in a similar vein explaining why believers are constrained to 'live **for** Him (Jesus)': in what ways can others see that you now live both **for** Jesus and **with** Jesus?

How can you best cultivate a pattern of living which ensures that at all times the heart of your experience is that you 'live together with Him'?

Prayer: Almighty God, You have opened my eyes to see in Jesus the One who is my only Saviour. Help me daily to live in that faith, to show that love and to embrace that hope.

7) Sunday 12th November – ministering encouragement

Read [1 Thessalonians 5.11](#)

".. encourage one another and build each other up .." (1 Thess.5.11)

Remembrance Sunday. We live in a fallen world, where sin leaves scars, and sorrows, and shame in its wake. What need so many have of comfort, forgiveness and strength. Recognise the varied needs of others and build them up in the hope of the gospel.

In what situations, and in what ways, have others in the past encouraged and built you up?

Whom might the Lord be laying on your heart today to encourage and build up?

Prayer: Lord, I'm grateful for those who have always been there for me at times when I've been discouraged and broken: help me to be an encourager of others myself.