

Living Above And Beyond The Present

(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

It is very important that we live in this world with an eternal perspective. In fact, we are really living in eternity, but the present is just a part of our eternity. When the Bible says that we have eternal life when we believed in Jesus, this eternal life does not start when we die, but it starts now. We have eternal life now and is living in eternity.

That is why the Bible time and again tells us to live today but to have our eyes fixed on the eternal.

Matthew 6:19-20 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."

Colossians 3:1-2 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

The Thessalonian Christians had a problem. Remember that they were only new Christians. They had some close relatives who had died and they were mourning for them like people who have not hope. Paul was teaching them epistle not to look only on the present, but to look at the "now" with "eternal" eyes.

The loss of a close relative or friend causes a profound emotional shock even to very strong Christians. To lose a loved one is to lose a part of oneself. Paul is not forbidding us to grieve altogether. Mourning is natural. It would be very unnatural and inhuman not to mourn when we lose somebody near and dear to us. Even Jesus wept at the grave side of His beloved friend Lazarus.

What Paul tells them not to do is to have hopeless grief. He is not against mourning, but mourning like the rest of men who have no hope.

That is why Paul refers to death as "sleep" 3 times (in verses 13, 14, 15). He describes people who have died as having fallen asleep." Why? Because to the Christian, death is only temporary. As sleep is followed by an awakening, so death will be followed by resurrection. Jesus has the same idea when He said, "*Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up*" (John 11:11).

A church that will make a difference is a church that lives in eternity. We are eternal people living in the present. That is why we are not so affected by what is happening to us in the present, because we are "living above and beyond the present." Wow! Imagine! It is normal Christian life to surpass the problems and difficulties of the

present world. The Christian is to live a supernatural life in the natural world – beyond the natural.

The problem with so many Christians is that they are still like the people of the world – deeply affected by what is happening around them.

- They are being influenced by their “successes” and “failures” in this world.
- The opinion of others can break their life.
- They are devastated when they lose the things of the world.
- The problems they are facing makes them have a breakdown or a burnout.
- Their own limitations affects them.
- They worry about what how they shall live in the present.

This passage gives us four great truths that will help us to live in the eternal.

THE RETURN

1 Thessalonians 4:16a For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God

The first truth is that Jesus is coming again. This is an important truth for the Christian. Someone counted that one verse out of seven in the Bible talks about the second coming of Jesus. In fact, more is said of the second coming than the first coming. Since the first coming is already true, then the second coming is even more true.

Christians live in hope and our hope is focused on “*the coming of the Lord*” (verse 15). The word is “*parousia*” and literally means a “*presence*.” There will be a personal and powerful visitation by Jesus. The word is used as the official word for a visit of a person of high rank, especially of kings and emperors visiting a province. Hence the indication is to the visitation of the King.

Whenever, King Jesus visits, things change. Christian hope is projecting the presence of King Jesus to the scene of despair.

Jesus never forsakes His own. He always return for His own.

John 14:1-3 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God ; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

“*I will come back*.” This is a powerful statement. He is not to leave us to ourselves. In the mean time, He has given to us the Holy Spirit as a proof that He Himself will come for us. That is why the Holy Spirit is called a deposit (Ephesians 1:13,14). He is the deposit guaranteeing that Jesus will come back for us. It is like a down payment we place when we buy a house – when the down payment is made, the house belongs to us even though it is not fully ours yet.

Jesus never leaves you to yourself. He always comes to you. Even though sometimes it seems that He has left you to face it alone, it is always only for a while. It is like Job – he has to face his suffering alone. But God always intervenes at the right time.

James 5:11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

God wants us to persevere at times, but He always rewards our faith in perseverance with the rightful result. What final result did God bring Job? God gave him back twice everything that he has lost in his suffering. The only thing that he did not seem to receive twice back is the amount of children. Seven children was taken away, but only seven was given back. However, if you think harder, he did receive twice, because his first children that was lost were not really lost – they are in heaven. So seven in heaven plus seven on earth means double.

Jesus always comes to you. Even in the present world, Jesus always comes to us in the person of the Holy Spirit. What situation are you facing? Picture Jesus coming to your situation. The Holy Spirit is always at your side to tell you, "I am here." Listen to Him. He is the guarantee that Jesus Himself will come for you. The final presence of Jesus will be when He comes for in His second coming.

Living today but above and beyond the present. What a wonderful way to live.

THE RESURRECTION

1 Thessalonians 4:16b ... and the dead in Christ will rise first.

The second truth we have here is the resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus is the greatest truth of the gospel. When we share the gospel, we often tell people how Jesus died for us. Whenever we have communion, many people talk about how Jesus died for us. The celebration of Easter is often concentrated on the Good Friday, where believer would remember the suffering of our Lord on the cross, however, the centrality of the gospel is really the resurrection. Paul said, "*And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith*" (1 Corinthians 15:14).

There is no glory in Jesus' death on the cross if He did not rise from the death. Jesus was not the only one who was crucified on the cross. Many people faced the same death. In fact, when He died, there were two other people – robbers – who died on a cross – one on His right and one on His left. The glory of the cross lies in the resurrection. Many people died on the cross, but only Jesus rose from the dead. It is His resurrection that gives credence to His crucifixion. His resurrection proves that His death was dying for our sins.

Why are we not afraid of death? We are not afraid, because death is not permanent. After death, there is resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:51-55). After Friday, there is

Sunday. After suffering there is victory. We are not afraid of problems and persecution, because after these things there is the triumph of God.

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

What a wonderful statement: *"I have overcome the world!"* This is our boast. This is our assurance.

The is why in Romans, Paul said, *"So, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).*

The truth of the resurrection is the final guarantee that we will win. Nothing will overcome us – not even death.

THE RAPTURE

1 Thessalonians 4:17a After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them ...

The third truth that will help us to live today, but above and beyond the present is what is called the "rapture ."

The word used to describe "will be caught up" means to be seized suddenly and violently. It is the same word used when the centurion ordered his troops to take Paul by force in order to rescue him from a possible lynching (Acts 23:10). It can be translated that we who are still alive will be snatched up.

The rapture is believed by most as to precede a great tribulation that will come to the world. The point here is that God will snatch us away from tribulation and take us to be with Himself. Although people do not all agree with the people of God being taken away before the great tribulation, the truth still remains that God has the ability to snatch us away.

The Lord at times lets us go through our difficulties and then brings resurrection at the end. However, the Lord at time also snatches us away from danger. These are the two ways that He deals with danger and problems faced by Christians. With this double assurance, we are even more enabled to face whatever may happen to us.

Isaiah 43:1-2 O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

What a wonderful assurance from God:

- pass through – I will be with you
- pass through – they will not sweep over you
- walk through – you will not be burned

There are times when God will let us go through the difficulties in our lives, but He goes through it with us.

However, there are times that God stops us from facing the danger altogether.

This is the third secret to living “above and beyond the present.” Whatever may happen to us, God has the ability to save us from it. Even if He does not, He will walk through it with us. This is our security in trials and tribulations.

THE REUNION

1 Thessalonians 4:17b ... to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

The fourth truth that helps us to live “above and beyond our present” is the reunion – we will be with the Lord forever.

The “togetherness with” the Lord is the most wonderful of all four truths. Not only will we be never separated from the Lord, but we will be forever united with Him. Wow! The togetherness with the Lord indicates wonderful relationship and all that relationship brings. No more fears but have the blessing of His life

Revelation 21:3-4 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

CONCLUSION

It is possible to live a life that is “above and beyond the present.” The Bible tells us to encourage one another with these truths.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Comfort is not just to empathize with the person – to weep with those who weep. Comfort is to lift up his eyes to see beyond the present to see hope in the future. Comfort is to help the person to say, “It is going to be all right.”

I want to encourage you today to let God help you to live “*above and beyond your present.*”