

Admiral Jim Stockdale was the highest-ranking United States military officer in the "Hanoi Hilton" prisoner-of-war camp during the height of the Vietnam War. Tortured over twenty times during his eight-year imprisonment from 1965 to 1973, Stockdale lived out the war without any prisoner's rights, no set release date, and no certainty as to whether he would even survive to see his family again.

He was asked after the war what separated him and the survivors from those who didn't make it. Who wasn't able to deal with their seemingly unending imprisonment. And he responded "Oh, that's easy," he said. "The optimists." "The optimists. Oh, they were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas.' And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart."

Because there is a vast difference between optimism and hope. Hope is never afraid to confront the brutal reality of life. And we and our world are in desperate need of hope. There is a vast epidemic of depression and suicide and self harm among young people. They are overwhelmed with their life with the world and have nowhere to turn. There is such a mental health crisis in our own state that if you really needed help, you would find it very hard time finding a place that you could go. There's a crisis among young men because they don't know what it means to be a man, and they don't know where to go and what that looks like. In a world filled with war with an economy that struggles with uncertainty in a political situation, people don't have much hope.

But the gospel of Jesus and the Bible provides hope. And the hope of the Christian faith is not a hope that is far off into the future. What I want us to see this morning is the hope that Jesus offers. You don't have to be a brave Admiral to have it, you just need Jesus. The hope that comes from the resurrection of Christ is not just a hope about what may happen after you die. The Hope that God offers in his word is a hope that can sustain us here and now even in the midst of horrific circumstances.

Turn to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

## I. There is hope even in grief (v. 13).

Many of you have probably heard me preach a little on these verses before.

This is one of my favorite passages.

And it is a passage that I often preach at funerals.

Or I will at least have to refer to it or read it once because it's so applicable to those situations.

This isn't a funeral message this morning, but this verse is telling us something important.

Verse 13, **"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope."**

This verse is trying to speak to us in our grief.

And it's talking about the grief that we feel in the lowest possible moment. Because the greatest grief that we feel is when we are facing the death of those that we love.

One of the hardest forms of grief is when you are facing the death of a child.

It is one of the worst things in the world no parents should have to bury their children.

No parent should have to lose a child in miscarriage, which is another forgotten and overlooked form of death where you lose the child you hoped for and you don't even get the chance to bury them.

And so if Jesus is saying that there is hope even in grief.

Even in the lowest moments of our grief and loss.

It also tells us it's OK to grieve.

OK Christian hope is not delusional.

There's this kind of ancient Near Eastern idea that the way to avoid suffering is to not feel it.

To rise above it so that it just washes off of you and you are unaffected by it.

So that you don't grieve at the loss of a loved one because it just doesn't hurt.

OK, that isn't a Christian grief or Christian hope.

Christians can have hope in their grief we probably still grief.

There's still moments of pain where it hurts.

So grief and hope are not mutually exclusive ideas.

But we shouldn't grieve like the world.

What I also want you to see is that if we can have hope even in the midst of that grief that means we can have hope in the midst of all grief.

OK, so while the immediate context of this passage is talking about the grief and the hope that we can have even as we face the death of those that we love.

It means and is teaching us a spiritual principle that hope is available even in the worst circumstances.

And if hope is available to us, even in the very worst circumstances, then surely it's available to us, even and then not so bad circumstances.

And that same hope is available to us in every circumstance.

So whatever kind of suffering it is that we face.

Whatever kind of difficulty that we fix.

All of those we as believers can still have hope.

And our hope is not based on circumstances.

That means that we can have hope even as we are unemployed again.

That means that we can have hope even if you aren't sure you will be able to retire.

It means we can have hope even when your children are walking far away from God and they're making a mess of their lives.

It means that you can have hope, even as your marriage is falling apart, despite every best effort that you were making.

It means that you can have hope, even if you are facing the future of loneliness and sickness.

It means that you can have hope even if you are facing a terrible diagnosis.

It means that you can have hope even as the doctors are giving you no answers and aren't even listening and nothing is getting better and it is only getting worse.

It means that you can have hope even as your kids are driving you insane and surviving. These young years can be brutal.

OK, it means that we can have hope whatever it is that we are grieving. Whatever pain it is that we are facing. Whatever discomfort we can face it.

The world's hope is based on circumstances.

Their hope is based on the idea that things will get better.

And that's one of the ways that they will come for each other at least those without any faith or without any religion saying oh don't worry you'll get better young child when you get older.

Even though we know it doesn't always get better sometimes it gets worse.

Their hope is that maybe the universe has a plan maybe everything works out for a reason if they just try hard enough and hustle hard enough and work hard enough things will improve.

And so finally, when people recognize that things aren't gonna get better and they are not gonna improve that is when they grieve because there is no hope.

But for the believer, we can have hope even as our circumstances are awful, and even as our circumstances fall apart, because our hope does not rest on something good that we hope happens our hope rest on the one who is good Jesus Christ.

Our hope is based on the resurrection of Christ.

On the Christ who faced the worst this world had to offer.

So that we could have hope.

## II. **There is hope even in death (v. 14).**

If our hope is outside of world circumstances, then there can be hope even as we face the absolute worst ones.

The worst thing that can happen to anyone is that they die.

That is the worst-case scenario.

OK, anyone who's afraid of like I'm afraid something bad is gonna happen.

You could just keep asking me what is the worst that could happen?

The worst-case scenario is death.

I worry about my kids and a lot of things absolute worst thing that could happen to them is that they die.

They are incredibly young if any of them died it would be deeply traumatic and painful and hard because all of us would recognize that's the worst thing that could happen.

This is the worst thing because it's the end.

There's no more second chance.

There's no more relationship relationships with those that we love that's our our life on this side of eternity is cut off.

You are a great fear of our world struggles and hates the idea of death.

That's why we like to change the name and get all sorts of different ideas for funerals.

Part of this has always bothered me that we do this because it seems kind of silly.

And I understand why we do it because we're grieving and it's hard and they were even trying to express some Christian hope.

But that's not a funeral its a memorial.

Or it's a celebration of life.

Cause we're trying to get around the fact that the funeral is old and dusty and reminds us that we're about to go somewhere where there is a dead body.

Because if we look at it and acknowledge it, we might have to own up to the fact that one of us one day that's gonna be all of us.

So why we use euphemisms for when people have died.

They have passed on or fallen asleep.

They are going to be with Jesus.

They are going to become like the angels.

We are deeply afraid of death, but the gospel reminds us, even in the worst thing that can happen to you, even at the very end of your life and even in death in the grave, there is hope.

There's hope because Jesus has already been there.

And He conquered death.

Verse 14, **"For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep."**

We believe as Christians that Jesus died and he rose again. That is what we celebrate and what we remember at Easter.

We are observing and recognizing the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That He has faced death and He came out on the other side, having defeated it.

This is our foundational belief.

This is the foundation of our hope.

That our God has conquered death and He offers us eternal life.

My sons are very different.

Calvin is very cautious and Grant is a little more adventurous.

And so often times when there's something that's nervous or there's something that they're unsure of how to do, Calvin sends Grant to try it first.

Grant does it and then if it's OK and he has fun then Calvin will do it.

Because Grant has been there already and it's OK.

And a much More Profound Way, Jesus has already been there.  
Jesus has already been to the place that we do not know what it's like.  
OK, we hope we dream we trust we believe that when we die, we get to be with Jesus and one of the reasons we can do that is because Jesus has already been there and He came back and He said it's fine.  
Trust in me when you die, you'll get to be with me.

And so our hope is in the resurrection of Jesus.  
It's so we can have hope even as you lie on the brink of death.  
You can have hope even your last moments of life.  
You can have hope even when you get a terminal diagnosis and the doctor says well can't do much for you because you're kind of close to death so this is just gonna be it.  
Facing that you can have hope.

And what is our hope?

Our hope and verse 14 is that we will get to be with Jesus.  
Our hope is that death is not the end.  
Death is a door that we pass through on our way to see the king.

We've been going through Revelation as a church and we are going to continue going through Revelation.  
After Easter, we are gonna get back into the book of Revelation. We're gonna continue hopefully till we get to the end.  
The main hope in the book of Revelation is that Jesus Christ is coming.  
And it is the coming of Jesus on the white horse to establish His kingdom on the Earth and to bring resurrection.

And the resurrection of Jesus brings is our hope after death.  
Our hope is that our story will get to go on.  
That this life is, but the prologue to an eternity spent with Jesus in the life to come.

And our hope is that when Jesus returns and when Jesus comes back, those who have died will be with Him.

Because they have been with Him since the moment that they left us. Death for them is not a curse, but the reward of faith.

I love verse 15, **"For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep."**

Because part of what tells us is that the resurrection that Jesus will bring gets to go first to those who are dead not to us.

OK, so whatever believers the sealed by the lamb that are alive that are left when Jesus returns on that day, they won't get resurrection first for somebody else's first in line.

And the people who are first in line are those who have already died.

Those who have been waiting for a much longer time to get their glorified bunnies.

They get to experience it first.

What a day that will be

Because of this, it reminds us and it tells us and it lets us know that the dead will rise first.

Yeah, we can have hope even in death because of the resurrection.

We know that Jesus was resurrected because He was resurrected.

It empowers us, and it gives us the ability to face our own death because we know that one day we will rise just as Jesus rose.

Look at the poetic and the beautiful description that it gives us.

Verse 16, **"For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."**

The dead will rise.

The stone will be rolled away.

The graves will be opened.



The ash will be restored.

Sometimes I have people wonder about cremation if it's OK for Christians to be cremated.

I do not believe that its sinful to be cremated. It is OK.

Now I think burial in the ground is the better Christian symbol of death.

It reminds us of our baptism and of waiting for resurrection, but it's insanely more expensive today to get buried than it used to be and so it's OK.

God Grace understands why that's not always a feasible option.

It is preferred if all things are equal, but we have freedom in Christ to do it differently.

But cremation or any other kind of death will not keep you from resurrection.

Listen on this resurrection day, the same God who gathered up some dust and breathed into it to create man will gather up our ashes that have been spread all over the world, and He will breathe into them again into our glorified bodies.

And He will open up our coffins, and those who have died will walk out and trust.

Listen, I think one of the main markers of believers in one of the main things that can separate us as Christians in the world is how do we approach death.

Your life is an incredible witness to Jesus and one of the best things that you can do to proclaim the gospel of God is to die well.

It is to face your death with faith and with hope.

It is the quintessential moment of faith.

Because we approach our deaths with nothing and know our only hope is Jesus.

We must do that well.

We have to finish the race.

We have to finish the race that is set before us and the way we get to the finish line of the race is death.

And when you come to the last leg,

and we don't always know when that is gonna be.

For some of us is very fast and we don't see it coming.

For others of us. It's a long road we knew is coming.

And maybe we wish we could get there faster.

But as you come to the end of your race, as you come to face death, we should hope to die well.

What does it say to the world if we do not die well?

I read a book studying pastor's who were dying and the affect it had on their churches.

As you can imagine it was difficult and heavy for the entire church.

But the pastors who did not die well.

Who refused to admit they were sick or close to death.

Or tried every last ditch effort at saving their lives and were afraid to talk of death.

It hurt their churches.

Because they came to the end of their race and their faith wavered.

But those who approach death in faith.

Like our Savior who died without complaint and offered forgiveness and salvation to the murderers and mockers around Him.

When we die with faith like Jesus, it is a witness to the world of our hope.

I think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The anniversary of his death was just four days ago.

He was a pastor and leader in the church in Nazi Germany.

He died for preaching against the Nazi's and for resisting them.

He was sentenced to death without any evidence present or witnesses.

On the day he died, he was stripped naked to be humiliated.

And as he was brought out into the yard of the concentration camp to hanged with others.

But before he climbed the gallows he knelt naked in the ground and prayed.

And stepped up brave and composed.

His last words before he died were, "this is the end - for me the beginning of life."

He faced his death with hope.

And we should do the same no matter how death finds us.

But the only way that we can do that as if we are filled supernaturally by the power of Jesus and his resurrection.

Our hope is in our circumstances if our hope is in Jesus, and if we know that hope God offers us doesn't just come after we take our last breath. It is here and available to us and all those labored breaths before.

### **III. There is hope even in life (v. 15-18).**

There's hope in life too.

OK, there is also hope that is available to us now

There is not just hope at the very end of our race.

There is also hope here today as we run our race.

Verse 17, **"Then we who are alive, who are left, 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."**

This is the reminder that when Jesus returns and the resurrection comes, all the dead who are in Jesus have been brought back to life.

And those who are still alive.

Those who have not died yet still receive a blessing.

We get to go up and meet Jesus in the air.

There is hope for us here too.

We who are still alive can have hope.

The verse 18, **"Therefore encourage one another with these words."**

The Scripture tells us to encourage one another with these words.

We as believers should encourage

That we should have help in our hope should encourage each other.

When I see you having hope even in your grief, it gives me strength.  
And when you see me having hope and trusting in God, it gives you strength to face tomorrow.

The Christian life is not meant to be lived alone.  
We together are the body of Christ.  
No one part of the body can face life alone.

And one of the things that you do when you start to lose hope and you start to despair is you start to isolate yourself and you start to cut yourself off from the body.

And you cut yourself off from the body then you were not gonna have any hope and then you're gonna fail.

And so our hope isn't just for us.  
Our hope also empower us to help each other hope.  
Our hope powers us to help each other have hope.  
We can encourage one another with the hope Jesus Christ offers to us.

Listen, your brothers and sisters and the faith need you to have hope.  
So we come together on Sunday when we stand and we worship we can look around and not just hear each other's voices and say hello,  
But we can see they are hoping and trusting in Jesus even though I know what they're struggling with, and they are hoping trust in Jesus, even in the monotony of their life and I can have hope too.

The hope that Jesus offers is available to us here and now

Now, if you are an unbeliever, if you do not know, Jesus, there is only one way to have true and lasting hope, and that is to trust in the resurrection of Jesus that has to put your faith in Jesus Christ, and to accept the gift of salvation that he has given you

That is to throw yourself at the mercy of Christ.

OK, sometimes we talk about the sinner's prayer.  
Which is a simple prayer of acknowledging our sin and asking for grace.  
Or we can talk about the things you need to believe in order to trust in Christ.

And that's true and that's good but I'll tell you when I came to faith in Jesus for the first time I was desperate.  
I had no hope and I just wanted to die.  
I was going to die and I just said Jesus I'll give you a chance just help me.  
It was a desperate prayer of just "Jesus help me."  
That's where my faith started, and that was enough.  
Because I went to Him looking for hope.  
Maybe that's where you are and if that's where you are at all you have to come to Jesus and say, "I have no hope, Jesus please"

Or you can talk to me or one of the elders, or one of the leaders in our women's ministry.  
And we will gladly tell you about the hope that Jesus brings  
We would love to talk to you more about it.  
You can find it.  
But you will only find it in Jesus Christ.

Those of us who are believers, we still need to remember the gospel of Jesus.  
We still need to throw ourselves in the feet of Jesus to beg and ask for Hope.

Because what can happen to us is that we start off desperate needing the hope of Jesus.  
And then our circumstances get better, so we start doing things on our own.  
We forget that the gospel means we cannot do life on our own.  
We cannot do things in our own strength.

We need still need Jesus.

We still need His hope.

And we need to understand that our hope is in the gospel and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Don't forget you need Jesus just as much today as you did the day before you became a believer.

And the hope that Jesus offers only comes through the power of Jesus it will not come through your own effort and strength.

You too, throw yourself at the cross throw yourself at the empty tomb and ask for the hope that Jesus offers.

This morning we have seen that Jesus offers us hope even in our grief, even in our death, and even in our life.

Jesus gives us incredible gift and that we can face everything in this world throws at us.

If we put our faith in him then we can have hope.

A hope that doesn't depend on the circumstances.

A hope that doesn't depend on even if you live or die,

But a hope that depends on the empty tomb in Jerusalem.

A hope that depends on Jesus Christ.

May we live with the hope of Jesus.