

SERMON PRACTICES

Houses of Hope: A Study of 1 Thessalonians Week Six: Future Hope that Bring Life Today

Welcome, we're delighted you've chosen to dig more deeply into the Scriptures and consider what God has for you through this sermon. These sermon practices are ideally intended to be discussed with others, so find a friend, family member, or roommate to join you. If you haven't yet joined a life group yet, check out our website at vchurch.org/groups or stop at the Welcome Center for more info.

Getting Started

Before you start today's study, be sure you take a moment to sit quietly before the Lord, then have one person pray, asking the Holy Spirit to give you all deep insight into the Scriptures and the ability to receive his teaching and direction in your time together.

Exploring Scripture: Thessalonica's Big Question

Read aloud 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

- Which words or phrases stood out to you?

The Thessalonians were carrying a big question for God: *what happens to believers who die?* This is a heavy question for anyone, but keep in mind they did not have access to the scriptures like we do today; they did not have the new testament scriptures, and most would've had very little exposure to the old testament scriptures. They were hanging on to the gospel of Jesus that Paul had spoken to them, and any other teachings he had given them.

This question weighed on them as they were coming under heavy persecution and experiencing tremendous loss. Perhaps, some of them had even been killed for their faith. However it happened, some of them had died, and the remaining believers were heavy hearted about their future. They understood that Jesus was going to come back someday, but they didn't understand how that would work for those who had already died.

- Take some time to discuss how Paul answered this question for them.
 - Do you think it brought them comfort? Why or why not?
 - What does "grieve with no hope " mean? What does it look like to grieve *with* hope?
- Discuss what happens to the followers of Jesus who are alive on Earth when he returns.
 - Have you heard of this idea? Is it new to you or did you hear it in a new way?

Read aloud 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6.

As these verses point out, for some people the return of Jesus is going to be not only unexpected but unwanted, like a "thief in the night." For others, it will be expected and hoped for. For one, it will be a long-awaited rescuer; and for the other, that same event will be a surprise invasion.

- Why do you think there is such a radical contrast between these two groups?

Reflection: Our Big Questions

The sermon on this passage also explored the question “How could God send anyone to hell?” There are a lot of students of the Bible, who believe that is a misguided question, suggesting instead that God does not need to send anyone to hell, because when we choose not to trust Jesus, we send ourselves to hell. The author and scholar CS Lewis puts it this way: *“There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says in the end, “Thy will be done.” All that are in hell, choose it. Without self-choice, there would be no hell.”*

- What is your initial reaction to this argument? Do you agree? Why or why not?

As was mentioned earlier, the Thessalonians had a heavy question for God. But more importantly, they asked their questions and discussed it with other believers. It is vital that we as followers of Christ learn to trust God enough to allow ourselves to be honest. God is not threatened by our questions, just as a good teacher or parent is not threatened by the questions of a child. He is big enough and good enough. Humbly asking God our big questions is an invitation into the deepest places of our being, an invitation that He treasures deeply and honors well. And in return, his answers help us to know Him better.

- Take a few minutes separately to write and reflect: What is your big question for God? Perhaps it’s one that you have been afraid to say out loud, or admit to yourself.
- After a few minutes, take some time to share your questions as a group. Be bold and know that it’s likely you’re not the only one asking that question. And take advantage of this opportunity! Often, God will use the people around you to help you explore answers.

Wrapping Up

Pray for each other that you might hear from God on this question. Remember, that, while sometimes we do not get answers from God, when we present our questions, he always is willing to give us more understanding. Be sure you leave some moments of silence, as you discern how the Holy Spirit might lead you in prayer