

One Another

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

1st Thessalonians 4-5 | Nov. 19, 2017

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our series engaging the “one anothers” found throughout the Christian Scriptures. We have seen the need to greet, love, teach, carry, forgive, confess to, and live in harmony with one another. Which of these has been the most challenging for you?

This week, we engage the call to Encourage One Another.

II. Connecting with One Another

Think of a time when someone encouraged you. How did it feel?

In the same way, recall a time you were discouraged by another. How did it affect you?

III. Study the Text

- a. Let’s begin our study in Acts 17. Read verses 1-15, which detail Paul’s first interaction with those living in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey.

What strikes you about Paul’s reception in Thessalonica?

- b. Paul engages this visit in the first chapters of 1st Thessalonians, writing “we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, did, again and again – but Satan blocked our way.” In Acts, however, it is both Jews and Gentiles who oppose Paul, accusing him of being a traitor to Caesar both politically (as the head of state) and religiously (as an object of their worship).

When have you experienced something but known there was a deeper spiritual reality behind it (like Paul receiving adversity from humans, but knowing Satan was at work)?

- c. Turn to 1st Thessalonians 4.13-18.

Theocritus, a 3rd century BC poet wrote, “Hopes are for the living, but the ones who die are without hope.” How is this perspective similar to that of wider American culture? How does it differ from Christian belief?

How does Paul counter Theocritus’ perspective?

- d. In verse 13, Paul gives specific instruction (we do not want you to be uninformed... do not grieve like the rest of mankind). Then, in verses 14 and 15, he gives offers two rationales.

What are they? How do you rely on these two foundational aspects of Christian faith?

- e. Throughout these verses, Paul uses sleep as a metaphor for death (which is common in the Scriptures). Apparently, some were concerned that Jesus had already returned in some invisible or spiritual manner – and that the resurrection had already taken place!

Meditate on “sleep” as a metaphor for death for a few moments. Why is sleep a good metaphor for a Christian understanding of death? What does it imply?

- f. In verses 16-18, Paul describes what some have called “the rapture.” Within Christian history, this is a relatively new idea, popularized in the 1830’s by John Nelson Darby, who taught that one day Christians will ascend into the sky to spend eternity in heaven. This has been further popularized by the Left Behind series.

The metaphors Paul uses here, however, point to a different interpretation altogether. First, there is an echo of Moses coming down the mountain with the Torah. Then, an echo of Daniel 7, where God’s people are vindicated over their enemy and raised up to sit with God in glory. Lastly, as N.T. Wright explains, “Paul conjures up images of an emperor visiting a colony or province. The citizens go out to meet him in open country and then escort him into the city. Paul’s image of the people ‘meeting the Lord in the air’ should be read with the assumption that the people will immediately turn around and lead the Lord back to the newly remade world.” Instead of leaving the troubled world behind, then, Jesus comes to sit on the throne of “a new heaven and a new earth.” (see Revelation 21)

In verse 18, Paul asserts, “Therefore encourage one another with these words.” How is Jesus’ return to a renewed heaven and earth *even better* than remaining “in the clouds”?

- g. It has been written, “Paul’s purpose in verses 13-18 is not speculation about the future but comfort in the present so that believers can be confident in God’s future purposes for all who have died. There will be grief, but there is also hope. There will come a day when God will put all wrongs to rights, when all grief will turn to joy. Jesus will be central to that day, which will end with the unveiling of God’s new world. There, those who have already died, and those who are still alive, will both alike be given renewed bodies to serve God joyfully in his new creation.”

What wrongs do you most look forward to being made right?

What grief do you look forward to becoming joy?

- h. Read 1st Thessalonians 5.1-3.

Church history is filled with those who believed they’d discovered the date of Jesus’ return. What do these verses tell us about such claims?

- i. Read 1st Thessalonians 5.4-11.

Paul continues his metaphor of a thief in the night. In effect, he’s saying, “Even though we can’t know when Jesus returns, we should always be ready.”

What pictures or images does Paul use to explain the relationship between Christians, the world, and the coming day of the Lord?

- j. What do you think Paul means when he calls us to be “awake and sober”? Of course, there is a literal meaning there, but what else could he have in mind?
How would you explain this verse to an adult who’s never heard of Jesus before?
How would you explain it to a child?
- k. What aspects of living as a “child of the light” are challenging for you?
- l. As in the previous section, Paul again calls Christians to “encourage one another” with this good news. What are some practical ways you could encourage a fellow Christian?

In other words, how is Jesus’ impending return a source of hope and encouragement?

How could you encourage others who do not have hope in Jesus’ return?

IV. Pray

- a. Pray for Good Shepherd, that we would be – and continue to become – a community whose hope is in Jesus, the Risen Lord, who will return to restore creation in a new heaven and new earth,
- b. Lift up any particular grief you have or wrongs you see, that God would be at work in those areas of your life,
- c. Ask God to prepare you to “give a reason for the hope you have” to others who would echo Theocritus’ thought, that those who die are without hope.