

# 1 Thessalonians 4

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Date: 19 November 2006

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I was sad to hear of Sandy Mayfair's death, because I knew Sandy when I was a student here, that must be over 25 years ago. But there is that comfort to know that Sandy, as someone who had his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, continues to live in heaven.

And we may often think about, or often speak about heaven, that those who die in the Lord, who fall asleep in Jesus, go to heaven.

But I wonder how clear in your mind is this concept of heaven. What is it that Christians look forward to beyond death?

Well, I want to spend a little time thinking about what is the future for God's people? What lies ahead for those who come to faith in Jesus Christ?

And to start off, I want to think about the Christian's hope. The Christian's hope. Now, the Bible uses the word hope in a very different sense than the way we normally use it.

[ 1 : 1 1 ] We hope to go bowling tomorrow, or we hope to go to the ice rink, something like that's an ice rink in Castleton. But we don't know. It may not be open at that time.

We may not be able to sit around our schedule. We just, that's just wishful thinking. Perhaps you may need hope. Those of you who perhaps have got things to do.

You hope that the weather will be suitable for what you want to do, or you students, you hope that your classes won't be too boring tomorrow. It's just a wishful thinking.

The Bible does not use hope in that sense. The Christian hope is something definite. It is based on the promises that God has made. And therefore, our hope is sure.

It is something guaranteed that we look forward to. What is that hope then? We may say, well, our hope is heaven. But that's not the hope that the Apostle Paul spoke about.

[ 2 : 1 7 ] Then he says here, We don't grieve like the rest of me. We're not so upset with those who, when our Christian brothers have died, and sisters have died. We're not upset like those who have no hope.

We have a hope. And then he goes on to describe how the Lord is coming back, and those who have already fallen asleep will rise. That, for Paul, is the Christian hope.

The resurrection. If you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, that is your hope. That there is one day to be a resurrection. You are going to be changed.

You are going to have a body like the Lord Jesus has. Jesus has been through death. He's risen again. He lives in a body, a physical body in heaven.

At this moment. That's the Christian hope. It comes through in Paul's preaching in the book of Acts.

[ 3 : 1 9 ] And perhaps I should add that the resurrection is not simply a Christian hope. This is the hope of Old Testament saints as well, of Jewish believers. This is Acts chapter 23.

Paul's got into trouble because of his preaching, and he's in front of the Sanhedrin. A mixture of Pharisees and Sadducees. And Paul knows that the Sanhedrin don't believe in the resurrection.

And so this is what Paul says. He's a Pharisee himself. He says, My brothers, I'm a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.

Paul said, That is what I am confident about. That there is to be this resurrection. That I'm going to be involved in the resurrection.

One day I'm going to have a glorious new body. It comes through further on in the book of Acts. Paul's speaking this line to Felix.

[ 4 : 23 ] I have the same hope in God as these men. That there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. Then before Agrippa.

Paul says this, And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised that I am on trial today. This is a promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night.

O King, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

For Paul, that was his hope. You see, if you're trusting in the Lord Jesus, the moment you come to faith in Jesus Christ, whether for you it was a dramatic experience that you couldn't put a date on, or something you've just grown up into, that I think should be the normal way in a Christian home.

That children grow up into the faith. If you have faith in Jesus Christ, you are immediately saved. You can say, I've been saved by Jesus.

[ 5 : 34 ] But Paul, when he speaks about salvation, he also speaks about being saved. It's an ongoing work. You're a work in progress. God is doing things in you, day by day, making you more like his son.

But that work is not going to be finished until Jesus Christ comes back. Then there's to be this resurrection. Then you will be not only born again in your spirit, but you're going to have a renewed body as well.

You're all familiar with the effects of age. You see others on the television for anti-wrinkle cream.

To get rid of those sagging wrinkles things in Alex. People have all kinds of cosmetic surgery to keep them young. But you cannot escape the fact that you're decaying.

We're getting older, and it shows. We're not as fit as we once were. We can't do the things that we could do once. And one day, this body is going to stop working completely.

[ 6 : 58 ] The gospel comes with this glorious message that one day, it's not going to be like that. One day, you're going to have this wonderful body that's been renewed, that's like the body of the Lord Jesus himself, and is never going to get old.

It's never going to feel pain. Never another wrinkle. Never going to get sick. Never going to die. Jesus Christ, in heaven at this moment, is precisely as he was when he ascended into heaven.

He's not a day older. The effects of sin have gone. And that is the great Christian hope. That's what I'm looking forward to.

Looking forward to seeing Jesus and being like him. That's what John was saying in that verse we read with the young people. We're looking forward to being like Jesus.

Not just in our Christian character, but physically as well. having that same glorious body that God has given our Lord Jesus. That's the Christian hope.

[ 8 : 14 ] That the effects of sin on our bodies will be gone. Jesus didn't come to save just your souls. He came to save the whole of you.

You are physical, as well as spiritual and emotional. God wants to save the whole person, not just your soul.

When you believe, that's a wonderful work of God. But he's not finished. His work of salvation will not be finished until Jesus returns and you rise from the dead with this new glorious one.

That's the Christian hope. That's when brothers and sisters in Christ, when they fall asleep, you have this hope that one day they're going to be raised to life again.

And we're going to be like them and we'll be with them and we'll be with the Lord. Friends, do you have that hope? Do you ever think about the resurrection?

[ 9 : 23 ] There's one of our members in the congregation, she's in her 80s now, and she has all kinds of physical problems.

She's been in hospital in and out quite a lot. But she herself has testified to this hope that she has of one day being free of all this trouble, free of the pain, free of the arthritis, free of the weakness, that one day she's going to have this glorious body.

This is the gift of God that comes to us by grace. You can't earn it. You can't work for it. Jesus Christ says, I've paid the price today for your sin already.

I've been through today. Believe in me. Trust me. Commit your life to me. Turn from your evil and I'll give you that hope.

That resurrection hope. But secondly, I want to think about the Christian's home. The Christian's home. If we're going to have these glorious new bodies, we're only going to live.

[ 10 : 41 ] Please turn to Romans chapter 8. Romans chapter 8, at verse 18.

Where Paul writes, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory which will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay, and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth, right up to the second time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved. With hope that is seen, there's no hope at all. who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

[ 12 : 20 ] See there again in verse 23, Paul speaks about this hope. The adoption of sons, the redemption not of our souls, but of our bodies.

Yes. Paul says, that's what we're looking forward to. We're already sons. Paul makes, often teaches about being children of God.

We have the spirit of adoption within us. But he says, we're waiting to be adopted as sons. There's another stage to our adoption, and that's the redemption of our bodies.

That's the resurrection. But as Paul's speaking here, he's saying there's more to it than just us. God has got great plans, not just for the people of God, but for the whole of creation.

The creation, he says, in verse 20 there, it was subject to frustration. The world in which we live is not the way it once was. When God created the heavens and the earth, it was perfect.

[ 13 : 39 ] There was nothing wrong with it. It was vengeance. There was nothing out of joint. It all worked perfectly. But then sin came.

Adam brought sin into the world, and God cursed the ground. God cursed the creation in a sense. And not only do we see decay in our own bodies, we see it everywhere.

The world is running down. We face the problems of global warming. Problems of our own country faced with pollution such like those have largely been dealt with in our society.

But in the developing economies of the east and India and China and such like, pollution is a major problem. It's the effects of sin. Man's sinful use of this world.

This whole creation is groaning and complaining because of the effects of wickedness. And it looks forward, the creation in the sense, looks forward to being set free.

[ 14 : 51 ] The creation is looking forward in a sense to be raised again from the debt. That's the parallel that Paul is drawing here. We're looking forward to the redemption of our bodies.

The creation is looking forward to being renamed. Perfect. Free from this frustration. Free from the decay. Free from the effects of sin.

That's the home that Christians are looking forward to. What's the point of having physical, redeemed, resurrected bodies if we're floating around on the clouds?

We need somewhere to live. We need somewhere to work. We need somewhere to explore. We need somewhere to enjoy. God is going to make a new heavens, a new sky, and a new earth.

God's plan of salvation is far bigger than just saving souls.

[ 15 : 55 ] You and I, as people have been made in the image of God, you are the most precious thing in this universe. I was reading something recently that suggested that if you scale down the Milky Way, the galaxy in which our solar system sits, if you scale down the Milky Way to the size of the continent of North America, then our solar system would be the size of a coffee cup.

And you are pretty small compared to our solar system. And I'm pretty small. Tiny, tiny specks in the vastness of this universe. and I think it's estimated there are 100,000 million galaxies like the Milky Way in the universe.

But friends, although you're so tiny, you are so precious to God. Because you're made in His image.

You are the most God-like thing on earth. But God's plan plan is not just to save precious human beings.

His plan is to save the whole of the universe. To remake this universe. To set it back the way it was in its perfection before sin enters. That's to be the home of God's people.

[ 17 : 23 ] You're familiar with the words of Revelation, I expect, in chapter 21, where God says in his vision, he saw a new heaven and a new earth. Then I saw a new heaven, a new sky, and a new earth.

For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any city. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

And this idea of a new heaven, new sky, and new earth, is not a New Testament idea. It's found in the Old Testament, first of all. God had always planned to make a new universe.

It appears, first of all, in Isaiah, where God says, Behold, I'm making a new heaven and a new earth. It's a perfect, it's going to be the perfect environment for perfect human beings.

men and women and young people who have been saved by trust in Jesus Christ, who have been raised from the dead with wonderful undying bodies, now to live in this undying universe.

[ 18 : 46 ] I still remember the night, the night was converses. It was at an OMF conference in Baroda, and I still remember full of joy that night.

But the thought did cross my mind, well, I'm so glad that I've been saved from hell, because God had convicted me that that's where I was headed. But I still remember thinking, floating around in a cloud with a harp doesn't fill me with a lot of enthusiasm.

Friends, if that's your image of heaven, forget it. That's not scriptural. There's a new world to enjoy. Friends, do you enjoy this world? Do you like eating and drinking?

Do you enjoy seeing the sunsets? Do you like seeing the trees as they change colours? Do you enjoy your family, your friends, the relationships with other people? Do you enjoy sports?

Friends, this is the world God made, exactly for human beings. It fitted human beings exactly. It's a perfect environment. Sin spoiled it, but God is going to set it all back again.

[ 20 : 04 ] This is the Christian's hope. This is what the Christian is looking forward to. A glorious resurrection, salvation, and a glorious new heaven and earth, where righteousness dwells.

And that will be the best bit, despite being in the presence of the Lord Jesus. That will be the best way of heaven, that we live perfectly righteous lives.

Friends, if you're trusting in Jesus today, you want to do what's right, don't you? But so often, you speak out of turn, you lose your temper, you have envious thoughts, you don't work as hard as you know you should, you waste your money and your time, and you think, I wish I wasn't like that.

You go back to the Lord and say, I'm sorry, Lord, please forgive me. Heaven won't be like that. You will always do the right thing. You will never have it in pure thoughts.

All those you're living with, they will be perfect too. They will be perfect joy and perfect love and perfect peace in this perfect new world. That's the Christian hope.

[ 21 : 26 ] That's what we're looking forward to. That's what Christ has achieved for us. It's all his doing. It's all a gift.

It's all his grace. He's done it by paying the price of self. Friends, do you have that hope?

Are you looking forward to that home? The creation is. Perhaps as you get towards the end of term, whether you're her students or your work's becoming a bit difficult and homegrown and you're looking forward to the holidays coming, a week off over Christmas, New Year perhaps.

You're looking forward to that release, a time of relaxation and refreshment. Paul says that's the way the creation feels. It's looking forward to being released from the effects of sin.

is waiting for the revelation, the revealing of God's Son, those who are raised to life. The creation, in a sense, is longing to be set free, to be re-read, to be perfect.

[ 22 : 48 ] And then finally, what's the Christians' response to all this? Well, could you turn to 2 Peter now please?

2 Peter, just a little in from the end of the New Testament. There's 1 and 2 Peter, then the epistles of John, Jude, and then Revelation.

2 Peter, chapter 3. If you read the other verse 10. 2 Peter 3, verse 10.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. This is the day of our Lord's return. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

[ 24 : 03 ] That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, brainless, and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him.

Amen. Here's Peter writing to his Christian friends and saying, we're looking forward to this new universe.

We're looking forward to the day of the Lord when Jesus comes back again. It's going to be a day of great joy and thrill and excitement for his people.

And it's going to be a day that ushers in this new world. But Peter says, as the Spirit says through Peter, if that's what you're looking forward to, what kind of people ought you to be now?

[ 25 : 18 ] What distance, what response do you make to these things? Is it something that you just say, oh that's the way of the future? That's going to come someday.

No, Peter, or the Spirit through Peter is saying, there's got to be a response. If that's your great Christian hope, if that's what Jesus has guaranteed to you, purely of his grace, it's got to make a difference to your life now.

He says, you ought to be living holy and godly lives. This new heaven and new earth, this new universe, is going to be a place where righteousness wells.

the citizens of that holy city will be holy, godly people. Friends, if that's what you're going to be like, you should be starting to be like that now.

Now, when Paul wrote to the Romans, it seems that some in the Roman church were saying, well, we've been converted, we've been forgiven, so it doesn't matter how we live.

[ 26 : 35 ] We can sin, and we can be guaranteed that I'll be forgiven as well. And it's woe to God's glory, because he's showing his grace, forgiving us time after time.

Paul's horrified by that sort of thinking, he says, no, that's not, you've died to sin. You're to be citizens of this place where righteousness rests.

So if that's the way you're going to be, you shouldn't start to be like that now. You should be different from the rest of the world. The word holy has that sense of being set apart for God's use.

You're not here simply to enjoy yourself. You're here for God's use. You're servants of the king. You're here to promote the kingdom of God.

You're here to live in the way that God requires you to live. To put more and more into practice his standards, his commands, his rules.

[ 27 : 52 ] I have opportunities recently to be with a five-year class in Churchill High School and the subject I was given was the role of the church.

And I was trying to point out to the young people that rules are actually good things. rules. It's an expression of our sinful nature that we think we're going to rebel against rules.

We think rules are bad. But if everyone in this world lived according to the rules of God, society would be a much more wonderful place.

I told them that one of God's commands is that you don't get drunk. there were a few wise smiles in the class as a result. But I said if there was no drunkenness, if people enjoyed alcohol as a gift from God but never got drunk, there would be far fewer fights, there would be far less violence.

Actually, the emergency departments of the hospital would have far less work to do. There would be people killed and not gained by drunk drivers, there would be far less domestic abuse, there would be fewer unwanted pregnancies, there would be fewer people in hospital with cirrhosis of the liver and all the other diseases that are associated with excessive drinking.

[ 29 : 20 ] God's rule is good. God brings us his rules and say this is the best way to live. He saves his people to serve him, to keep his rules, to live for him, to enjoy life the way he tells us it should be enjoyed.

And that's not a burden, it's to set you free. If you're looking forward to this glorious new world, you'll want to start living for Jesus now.

Jesus encouraged us to lay up treasure in heaven. heaven. If that is your home, if you're a citizen of that new world, then don't get taken up with the things of here or here on earth.

Something years ago, I remember showing a video of an American speaker, Tony Campolo, who was speaking to young people. And I was quite, when I hadn't reviewed the video, before we showed it, and I remember him saying to the young people, go to school and do the very best you can in school.

That was fine. Go to university, go to college, get the best qualification you can. That was fine. Go out and get the best job you can.

[ 30 : 51 ] And earn loads and loads and loads of money, as much money as you possibly can. And I was thinking, what's coming here? And he said, I'm giving it away. Don't set your hearts on the things of this world.

Use what you've got in this world for the benefit of other people. That's what the citizens of the kingdom will do. They recognise that this world is not for keeps.

You're not here for long. Lay up treasure in heaven. Use what you've got here for the benefit of other people. love. And finally, friends, if this is your hope, there are lots of people who don't have that hope.

Lots of people who have got no hope beyond death. love. I was very struck mutantly in my own devotions, reading Jesus' words about Judas' guys.

He said, war to him by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for him if he had never been born. Jesus knew that Judas was going to continue in his sin and repentance and be lost, be condemned to hell, to torment, to agony forever.

[ 32 : 28 ] And so he said right to Judas, it would be better if that man had never been born. things with people you go to school with, people you work with, people you share your flat or your house with, people you meet in the streets, who don't have the hope of the resurrection and of the new world.

It would be better if they'd never been born. It's an awful thought, isn't it? it would be better if they'd never been born than to reject Jesus Christ, or not to hear of Jesus Christ and spend eternity in the fire and in the darkness and in the torment.

If you have that hope today, today, surely you must share it with others. surely you're going to want these other people to share in this glorious hope.

I mentioned to the young people there that we had a meeting with Marvin Andrews and when our boys heard about it, they went to school and they told other people about it.

it was good news. Something that they knew others would be interested in, that they would want to come along to. And if you're looking forward to glory, if you're looking forward to being with Jesus Christ, if you're looking forward to this perfect world that's going to go on forever, you don't want other people to come along too.

[ 34 : 16 ] If you have this hope, if you're looking forward to this new hope, then surely your response is not only to live as citizens of the new universe, but to share this good news with others.

You got it for free. Jesus died for you, purely of his own grace, and his love for you. If hard, I know, I'm not pretending it is easy to go and speak to people about Jesus Christ.

But pray for opportunities and use those opportunities that God gives them to you, to tell people of the good news that Jesus died for them, to guarantee this glorious hope.

May God encourage us and equip us through these things. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.