

Comfort and edify

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- [0 : 00] I'd like then tonight to open the passage we read together in the first epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, chapter 5.
- And reading verse 11, which sums up Paul, he's saying in verse 11 of chapter 5, Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.
- Once or twice in this letter, verse 18 of chapter 14, chapter 4 again, he says, Therefore, encourage each other with these words.
- So this is repeated for us, this counsel of Paul to encourage each other, encourage one another and build each other up.
- And he says, just as in fact you are doing. In other words, as you come to the end of this first letter of Paul, he's very much saying to the believers here that this is something he wants them to do.
- [1 : 23] And so tonight I want to think about encouraging one another and building each other up. First of all, the meaning of the word encourage comes from the idea of getting along beside someone and speaking to them.
- That's literally what the word means. And what we're asked to do in these verses is to get along beside your brother and sister and to speak to them in an encouraging way and to build each other up.
- Recently, our own minister took a passage from the Old Testament. And one of the titles given to our Lord and Savior in Isaiah was that he was a wonderful counselor.
- And our minister pointed out at that time that this is the vocabulary of encourager or counselor.
- That we have here. It brings in that same concept. So we're encouraged to be like Jesus himself. Who was an encourager.
- [2 : 47] The one who in his whole life, if you look at the life of Jesus, you'll see that Jesus was one who was a great comforter to the people that were around him.
- Both practically and in teaching. He comforted them in times of bereavement. He encouraged them in times of sickness. Throughout his whole ministry, we see that Jesus was indeed a wonderful counselor.
- One who people could confide in and talk to. You know, a counselor is someone you go to see in confidence and you can speak to them and get along beside them.
- And that's the idea of that wonderful counselor. One Jesus Christ. The one who took time to listen to his people. And the one who took time to teach his people and meet their needs.
- So that is also, when we look at this word, we think of him who is a wonderful counselor. We think of Paul. Who experienced. You read this in 2 Corinthians chapter 1.
- [3 : 55] You can read about Paul there. And how he felt, he says, paraphrasing. He felt through all these troubles. That he was comforted and encouraged by God.

So much so that he then became a counselor himself, he says. He who received comfort from God says, I can now comfort others because of the experience that I have passed through my troubles.

And so Paul was a great comforter to those that he wrote to. Those that he ministered to. Because he could liken himself to many of them.

He could say, well I've been in prison. He could say, well I have been flogged. He could say, I was nearly killed by being stoned. But God delivered me from them all.

So Paul took up this role of being an encourager, a comforter. In this chapter, particularly from verse 13. In this edition here.

[5 : 02] You'll see it's headed up the coming of the Lord. And the section is sectioned off from 4.13 to 5.11. And it's that section I would like to focus on this evening.

In thinking about various ways this chapter teaches us as believers. That we can encourage one another. And there's three things I want to focus in on within this, as it were, this cutting off of these verses.

The first one. The first thing that we can encourage one another in the vocabulary of these verses. is encourage one another with Paul's vocabulary of lightning death to sleep.

This is one of the things that Paul is thinking of towards the end of this letter. He's making the people reflect on death.

And he's bringing them to think about how the time is going on. People are passing away and dying. And many of the believers perhaps were getting discouraged.

[6 : 19] Because the days were getting on where it was the promise of Jesus coming. So the first thing he wants to do is encourage them by saying, well those believers who you no longer see with you, they've fallen asleep.

And that first of all is one thing that we can encourage one another with this kind of vocabulary. I've now been worshipping in this church on and off.

Not consecutively. Because we were in Peru for a while. And in Butte. But I first came into this church towards the end of 1970. In the beginning of 1971.

And I myself, tonight, I can think of many, many people who have fallen asleep, as it were, in the Lord. Even within this congregation.

And many of you can go back, I know, before that. And many of you have many memories of those who have passed away. More recently we think of people who have passed away.

[7 : 18] Even since going from Butte the last five years. We know of many dear people who have passed away. But what we're encouraged at this particular time of year, I think, many of us find a time of reflection.

And I see in this chapter the reflection as perhaps we think about those tonight who no longer are with us worshipping the Lord because they've passed away. And the encouraging thing that Paul's saying is, well, remember those who are no longer with us tonight, who have passed away, they've fallen asleep.

And he wants us to encourage ourselves by thinking, enlightening, their death as a falling asleep. In other words, they're at rest, they're at peace. And many of us who have attended funerals will be used to that kind of vocabulary.

But it's encouraging to remember these things. Now, if someone's asleep, it means that they can be awakened from that sleep. And that's something we have to take encouragement at.

That those who have fallen asleep in the Lord will, one day, Paul says, will be awakened because they're asleep. Encourage one another with these words, says Paul. And this is something we have to encourage ourselves with, with this thought.

[8 : 38] We're told in Scripture that Jesus was the first fruits. We're told that when the woman found the tomb, the message was, Jesus isn't here. He is risen.

The tomb was empty. And he was the first fruits. And as you study the New Testament, there's this whole encouragement that those who have a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have this hope, that because they believe in him who has died and rose again, we believe that God will bring those with Jesus who have fallen asleep in him.

Our belief is based on the fact that Jesus has risen from the dead. And therefore, we take encouragement at this doctrine, at this teaching, because these scriptures say tonight that if we have faith that God did that, if we believe in Jesus Christ, we can take encouragement at this thought tonight, the fact that the dead in Christ will rise first.

Paul elsewhere, as we know, says, well, to me, to die is gain. Now, I wonder what he was thinking of when he wrote, to me, die is gain.

Was he thinking of the time where, for example, he would be without sin? Or was he looking forward to the time where he would see face to face? Because elsewhere, he says, now I see like darkly, but one day I'll see things more clearly, I'll see things face to face.

[10 : 14] For him, to die was gain, maybe for some of these reasons. So the first reason that we're to encourage one another is as we think of this teaching of scripture, where Jesus, for example, said to the thief on the cross, when he put his trust in him, he said, today, you shall be with me in paradise.

He said to the disciples, the great counselor, the wonderful comforter, said to them, in my father's house are many mentions. If it were not so, I would have told you.

So we're told to encourage and build each other up, firstly, because Paul here likens death to sleep. To something that people will be awakened from.

Those who have put their trust in God, says these people, God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. So the first encouraging thought is we think towards the end of the year, we think often of those who have passed away.

The encouraging thing is to remember our faith and to remember what the scriptures say about those who have fallen asleep and who have put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11 : 28] There's this picture in the scriptures as you turn to Revelation, especially towards the end of Revelation, the picture that we're given of the new city where there is no need for a sun because of the brightness and the glory of the Lord will be there.

Here we're taught in the scriptures the Shorter Catechism and its question, what benefits do believers receive from Christ at death, it asks.

Many of us will know the answer. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

That answer is based on various texts. And that's the answer the Catechism gives. And that sums up our hope tonight. That's the encouragement we take from the scriptures, particularly from this portion tonight, that there isn't a waiting, there is not a stage that people go to before they reach heaven, but immediately one passes into glory.

Those who have fallen asleep in Christ, it says, these people are immediately in the very presence of the Lord. Encourage each other, it says here, with these words.

[12 : 55] Build each other up with these kind of thoughts. There's no middle state because the scriptures say, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, they enjoy rest from their labours.

And we're encouraged with the thought that he is able to raise the dead. We see that in the person of Jesus. God was able to raise Jesus and he is able to raise the dead in Jesus.

So it's within the very power of God who created the world out of nothing. You know, the scripture says, do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear their voice and come out.

So that is an amazing thing that Paul is saying. Well, take encouragement from this thought tonight. As we reflect, as the year is gone, and as we see people passing on, just take encouragement and build each other up with this reflection that these people we think of, those who have died in the Lord, have this promise in scripture, that they immediately pass into his presence.

It says elsewhere as well in Romans, if the spirit of him that raised Jesus dwells in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead will also give life to you.

[14 : 21] This is the encouraging thing that we're to speak about. Our hope, what the scriptures teaches, and to ask particularly, have we got this hope? Have we got this trust?

So that the spirit of him that raises Jesus dwells in me. These are the kind of reflecting questions. Making sure that the hope that Paul talks about here is my hope.

And then, having this hope, sharing it with one another. This hope that we have as believers and comparing death to sleep, something that we'll be wakened up from, means that our grief as believers will be different from the unbeliever.

Do not grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. It's a sad time. Jesus recognised that himself in the death of Lazarus.

Jesus wept. It's sad. Someone passes away. There is grief. True grief. You know, Jesus says to his disciples, when he teaches them about his own death, he said, your grief will be turned to joy.

[15 : 30] And this is why, in a similar fashion, we do not grieve like the rest of men. Because our grief will also be turned, in a similar fashion, to joy.

Because, just as the disciples' grief was turned to joy when they saw Jesus risen, our grief will be, in a similar fashion, turned to joy when we know that these people are fallen asleep in Christ and that they too share in the same hope that they will be risen too.

So this is a promise we embrace as our own. It's something that we encourage one another with. that, yes, there is grief. But our grief, because these people have shared a faith in the living Lord, isn't like the rest of men who have no hope.

Our conviction is that they have got a hope. They have a faith. And therefore, our grief isn't like that. You know, there were people in the New Testament, so early in the times of the New Testament, and they were saying that there was no hope.

In 1 Corinthians 15, that well-known passage, it goes into a lot of detail about that kind of teaching. And Paul says, well, if Christ isn't risen, then your faith is in vain.

[16 : 53] And those who are fallen in Christ, he says, are lost. But we have got a hope. And we have a great hope. And Peter, he says, they have a living hope.

You see, our hope is a living hope. And Peter defines it as such. We haven't just got a hope, but we have a living hope. And our hope is for an inheritance that can't perish.

Paul says, encourage each other with these words. Encourage one another and build each other up. Because we have this living hope that we will have an inheritance that can't perish.

As Peter says, kept in heaven for you. In this you rejoice, even though you may pass through trials for a little time. So the first thing tonight, encourage one another in the context that we're looking in is the comparison then of death to sleep.

The second thing that we can encourage one another in the context that we're looking in tonight is the fact that he will come again in the mighty Lord.

[18 : 01] as we were singing in Psalm 50 shall surely come. That's the second thing that we have to encourage one another with. When Paul says, encourage each other with these words.

He's saying, encourage each other with these words that death is sleep. Encourage one another with the thought that he will come again. Encourage one another.

Build each other up. Now, as we were just talking there in the kitchen before we come in, we get the weekly Saturday is at the Daily Mail which has a weekend supplement with all wonderful television programs on it.

In the very beginning, as you open it, there's now a countdown in it. And the countdown is to the millennium. And there it is. Every week, it tells you now there's 370 days until the millennium.

And here, we're reminded that such countdown is nonsense. Because the teaching says, well, we have to remember, yes, he'll come again, but one day in God's sight is like a thousand years.

[19 : 13] And Peter, in his letter, teaches a similar doctrine. And he says, as a result of the seemingly delay as time goes on, you see, time is going on. We're getting towards another year.

We're getting near the millennium. Some say 370 odd days or whatever. And people are doing a countdown and begin to lose hope. And therefore, Paul says, encourage each one or another, remembering that Jesus will come again.

And there is no countdown to that day. We do not know when it will be. And we're to encourage one another with this thought. One time in history, there was also a countdown to the end of the world.

and people mocked Noah. And as Noah built his ark in the dryness, people mocked him and laughed. And such, says the New Testament, such will be in the days of Noah, both in corruption and mockery as in the days of the Lord.

And how true people, as the years go on, 1999, they begin to say, well, where's the promise of his coming? Peter, as I say, in a very parallel passage in 2 Peter 3, gives a reason why there is a seemingly delay in the coming of the Lord.

[20 : 29] And he says in 2 Peter 3, 9, that the reason why God is delaying his coming, the very reason that he is doing that, is to give you an opportunity to repent and to come to know him.

So to any who scoff where is the promise of your coming, the answer would be to turn round to them and say, you know, it's so that you can repent and know the Lord for yourself.

And so, there's no mistake about this second thing we're to encourage one another with, the fact that the Lord is coming again and the fact that when he does so, there'll be no mistake whatsoever about this day.

You know, once or twice even in my lifetime, there's been claims that people have said that they are the Jesus. that the New Testament teaches that when he comes again, there'll be such with the sound of a trumpet, there'll be an unmistakable day.

You know, when Jesus called to Lazarus, he did so in a loud voice, come out, and Lazarus came out, and such will be the day of the second coming.

[21 : 39] That same, with trump, with the trumpets, with the noise, with the certainty that it has happened. So there'll be no doubt about this day, and therefore, it'll be a day that all we'll know about.

Now, this day, although it's an uncertain day, we're told here in 5, verse 4, you brothers are not in darkness, and this day should surprise you like a thief.

For those of us who have come to trust in the Lord, it won't surprise us, because we'll be ready for that day. You remember the parable of the virgins? They were ready, they were watching and praying, and this has got to be our attitude as believers, encouraging one another as we think about the second thing, the promise of his coming.

It's to not take us by surprise. So that's the second thing tonight, that we can encourage one another with, with the thought of his promise, that Jesus Christ himself will come again, and when he comes, he'll bring with those who have fallen asleep in the Lord with him, and those who are still alive will be caught up to be with him also.

The third thing that we're to encourage ourselves with, I think, is in verse 9. It says, for God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 14] Encourage each one another, build each other up, one, with the fact death is like sleep, secondly, to think about the promises that's coming, and the third, to take in this fact, that God hasn't appointed us to suffer wrath, that God has appointed us to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Encourage each one another because of that doctrine, this doctrine of what we have obtained, or received, or possessed, due to God appointing us to this salvation.

So we're to encourage one another with that kind of doctrine, that, all that that verse says about the possession we have, the salvation, this kind of vocabulary is found in three other places, I've noted, I think I've noted three, this idea of possessing or obtaining salvation.

The first is in Hebrews, using the same kind of, I just looked at the Greek word and followed a concordance, and it was quite interesting about this word obtained or possession.

And Hebrews 10 says, we're called, he said, Hebrews 10, 35, we're called then to be encouraged to persevere. He who is coming will come and will not delay, but my righteous one will live by faith, and if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him, but we are not of those who shrink back, but of those who believe and keep their souls, as it says in the original.

[24 : 56] And that word keep their souls is the same word used in verse 9 here, those who receive salvation. So for those who receive salvation, in Hebrews it's encouraging you, you who have received your soul, as it were, who possess salvation, you're encouraged to persevere.

You're encouraged because he who is coming back will not delay, my righteous one will live by faith, we are not to shrink back, we are to persevere, so the first thing we're to encourage one another with, is that kind of thought, because of the possession of salvation, we are to persevere, and we're to encourage one another, this is a whole vocabulary, getting towards the end of the year, perhaps we're feeling a bit tired, we get discouraged, and these, both of these verses are saying encourage one another, build each one another, speak to one another, and help each one another, persevere in their faith, because there's so much to discourage us, in this current environment, so be encouraged, one to another, as we, as people who are called by God, are living out our faith in this difficult world, encourage one another to persevere, because he will come back, and then encourage one another with this thought, in Ephesians 1, the same word is used,

Ephesians 1, 13 and 14, it says, as a guarantee of this, he has given you, again the same word, you possess his Holy Spirit, you possess his Spirit, you have heard the gospel and believed in him, and so we're to encourage one another with this thought, that those who possess salvation, as it says here, possess the very Spirit, as a guarantee of all that we have been speaking about, as a guarantee that we'll fall asleep in the Lord, as a guarantee that he will come back for us, we possess the very Spirit of God in our lives, that we heard in the gospel, and as we believed in him, then we have this possession, and therefore we're to encourage one another with that thought, and build each other up, saying that we have the Spirit to help us overcome the temptations and difficulties of the days that we're living in, so this is why we're to encourage one another with that kind of thought, as it says in Ephesians,

Peter takes up the same kind of thought, and uses the same word, 1 Peter 2 9, you are now one of God's people, you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, again, that same word being used, you are possessed by God, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy, so encourage one another with this thought that you actually, you who have possessed salvation, possess God, you belong to God, as Peter teaches in his letter, so these are things we're to encourage one another, as you think of verse 9, God didn't appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive or possess or obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, encourage to persevere, encourage because you possess the spirit, encourage because you're very possessed by God, encourage, finally, by another thought that

Paul goes into in 2 Thessalonians 2, just over the page there in verse 14, it says, he called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, that word share is the same word possess or receive, and we're to encourage one another because, again, Paul says there in 2 Thessalonians 2, 14, it says, you are called you to this through our gospel, that you might share or possess, obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, so you're to encourage one another and build each other up, saying, that's what you possess, you possess the very glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, because you have been called to this through the very gospel, and therefore you'd encourage one another with these kind of thoughts.

[29 : 31] There is much more within this concept of encouraging that I would like to go into, but these are three things that indicate that we should encourage one another and build each other up while we are living and waiting for his coming.

We're to encourage each other, very briefly, to be alert. We encourage each other to be self-controlled. In the passages that I've touched upon in 2 Thessalonians 14, where we're talking about the encouragement of possessing the glory of the Lord, in the previous verse, Paul says that we are to stand firm.

So, in the following verse, so then brothers, stand firm and hold to the teaching. In the passage in Peter that we were thinking of, that we belong to God, and therefore Peter goes on to teach in that chapter because you're a people who belong to God.

Once you're a people, but now you're a people of God. Once you receive mercy, but now you have received mercy, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to attain from sinful desires which war against your soul.

And then he says, live such good lives among the pagans, that though they accuse you of doing wrong, may we see your good deeds and glorify God in the day he visits us.

[31 : 06] So, Peter takes the possession, takes encouragement about this possessing salvation as we've been looking at and says, because you have that possession, you have the Holy Spirit, you have that, that you belong to God, I now urge you, I encourage you to live like that.

Those of us who, in other words, are waiting for the promise of his coming, our very lives are to be shaped now as we wait for him, so that we may see your good deeds and glorify God in the day he visits us.

So, there Peter sums up what Paul is saying here, encouraging us, building each other up, so that when our Lord does come, we will be ready to receive him and be adopted into his very family.

And finally, in concluding, I would just conclude by reading in verse 10, of the chapter we're studying, 1 Thessalonians 5.10, he died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

And this is the final encouragement of us brothers and sisters, encourage one another, build each other up, encourage your fellow to live together with him, while whether they're awake or asleep, they're living together with him, those who have passed away, those who are awake tonight, those who are in the Lord tonight, you're encouraged to live together with him.

[32 : 48] Remember Don on the cloud when he was here, spoke in the song of Solomon, and he mentioned the kind of love that we should have for him, a kindling love, and this is what Paul finishes up saying in this letter, that we may live together in that relationship with the Lord who will come for us.

So brethren, make it an opportunity as you approach the new year to take Paul's advice and encourage one another and build each other up just as in fact you are doing.

Amen. Let us pray. Amen. Loving Father, we thank you for your own spirit of encouragement, we thank you for the person of the Holy Spirit who is a great comforter to us, and the person of the Lord Jesus as well, who even intercedes for us.

And Lord, we pray that you would enable us then to be encouraged and to be encouragers to one another. Continue to be with us, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.