

## And Now the End is Near

### Good Grief

Frankton – 5/29/16

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4.13                    grieving with hope

Proposition: Our grief is always in the context of God's ultimate love and hope, which keeps us together in the Body of Christ, even when we are separated from one another geographically.

So, today we start the last series of sermons that I'm going to give here at Frankton. We're going to be together for just two more Sundays after this one. So I want to wrap up our time together and leave you all by saying a "Good Good-Bye." So here we go.

So let's set-up this morning's scripture. This is one of, if not the earliest letter from Paul to one of the churches he founded. In about 48 AD, Paul went to the country of Macedonia (current day Greece), to the city of Thessalonica, and plopped down to start a church. He chose Thessalonica wisely. It was a thriving metropolis, perhaps as many as 200,000 residents – extremely large for the times. But also important to Paul was the fact that it was situated on the main road between the huge city of Rome and the other most populated city of the day, Constantinople, modern day Istanbul, in what is now Turkey. Paul thought that if he could start sharing the gospel and firmly plant a good church, then the gospel would have a good shot at being taken to the west to Rome and to the east to Constantinople. So he spent quite a little time there – until like so many other places, he was run out of town by an angry mob stirred up by the Jewish leaders. Later, maybe 50-51 AD, Paul wrote this letter to the church to help them resolve some issues in the church and to set aside some concerns.

One of the concerns that Paul addressed was the fact that some time has elapsed since Jesus had died and he had yet to come back. Practically all early Christians, including Paul himself, believed that Jesus was going to return in very short order, probably within a generation. Unfortunately, some of the folks that had become followers of Jesus had died waiting for his return. The church at Thessalonica was concerned about the eternal souls of those who had died. They didn't know if you still had to be alive when Christ returned to reap the benefits he had promised. Obviously, Paul communicates to them that they need not worry about those saints who have died; the promises of Christ were for the living and the dead.

This is the particular section of the letter that I read from this morning. Paul begins this section by stating: [SLIDE] *Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, [SLIDE] so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.* [13] I know that Paul is writing about a situation where people had died. Today, as I speak with you, I'm not talking about a situation where someone has died. I am talking about the situation where this church and I are going to experience a change in our relationship. Today, I'm your pastor. Pretty soon, I am going to become your former pastor. That's a big change in our relationship. And yes, just as in a death, there is grief.

Let me just say up front, I am grieving over this impending change. Jan is grieving over this impending change. Many of you are grieving over this impending change. I know some of you may be saying, "Good! We're finally getting rid of that guy!" and that's ok. But many of you are

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grieving this change just as you would a death. And that's ok, too. It's ok to grieve the change in our relationship. We have had a great run together. We've been together a long time. We spent 11 years in this relationship. That's longer than many marriages.

And we can celebrate a lot of good things happening while we were [SLIDE] together. **Together**, we've gone from about 56 on Sunday morning in one worship service to about 130 people worshipping in two worship services. We have way more than doubled our attendance. That's awesome! **Together** we expanded our facilities to meet our needs and the needs of the community. We now have two facilities where we worship – the main building and the Factory. And the Factory is used by the community a lot. That's awesome. **Together**, we have impacted the community of Frankton through our outreach. Not many other churches can say that the local school approached them about having the prom in the church building. Not many other churches prepare as many meals for school kids as we do. Not many churches can say they ministered to 600 kids and 200 adults last Halloween by providing a fun and safe place for kids to go Trick-or-Treating. Those are awesome things and there are so many more. **Together**, we have also increased our local mission giving, like to the food pantry, Self-Help and other local organizations, just as we have increased our non-local mission giving. Last year, according to the conference we gave away over \$40,000 in mission giving and tithe. That's a lot for 130 people. That's awesome. So we celebrate some of our accomplishments.

Yet we know that in a few weeks, our relationship will change, so we grieve. We are all going to go through the stages of grief that Elizabeth Keebler Ross outlined. I don't know if you remember them or not so here they are: [SLIDE] **denial, anger, bargaining, depression**, and finally, **acceptance**. Some of those stages you whipped right through. Some of those stages you spent some time in. You may or may not have gotten through all of them yet. Just to let you know, Jan and I are right there with you; going through the stages, grieving our loss.

I like what Charles Swindoll says about grief. [SLIDE] "Grief is the helpless wishing that things were different when you know they are not and never will be again."<sup>1</sup> Things will be different. I am never going to be your pastor again. Grief will come in our lives; no one is immune to it. But for the child of God we are not without hope! Paul says as much in our verses today - "*so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope*". Yes, this change in our relationship hurts, sadness and sorrow will come but Jesus will not forsake you in your time of grief.

I like what David said in Psalm 30: [SLIDE] *Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning*. In today's text the Apostle Paul attempts to comfort the Thessalonian believers. They were sorrowful and mourned the death of their loved ones. They were uncertain about their "present state". I know you are also concerned about your "present state." You folks don't know what it's going to be like when Pastor Nathan gets here. You don't know what changes he will make, what his leadership style is, or how his theology fits in with yours. Jan and I feel your pain. Jan and I don't know what it's going to be like when we move to Loogootee. We don't know if they are ready for my leadership style, or my theology or to have a pastor that's a Purdue grad. (I can't wait to fly my Purdue flag on the front porch of the parsonage – which faces the front doors

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Growing Strong*, p. 171

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of the church.) But God's promise in Psalm 30 – rejoicing comes in the morning – that's a promise I can hold on to right now, Jan can hold on to right now, and you can hold on to right now.

So let's talk about the last phrase of Paul's sentence: ...*who have no [SLIDE] hope*. Paul was writing about folks who had no hope of the resurrection – non-Christians. When they had family and friends die, there was no hope of an afterlife for them to lean on. So they grieved because there was just an end – and end of a life and an end of a relationship. Paul reminds us that our grief is different. We believe in the next life; a better life. So our grief is tempered by the temporary. We know we will see folks again in that next life. That's what he was writing about.

So how does that fit with our situation? We have that same hope upon our death that you and I will see each other again in the great beyond. However, I think there is more to it than that. **Our grief is always in the context of God's ultimate love and hope, which keeps us together in the Body of Christ, even when we are separated from one another geographically.** We will still be a part of the body of Christ, even when Jan and I are in Loogootee and you folks are still here in Frankton. We will still be brothers and sisters in Christ.

And yet, there is even more than that. I have hopes for the future of you folks and this church. (btw: I want you to have hopes for Jan and my future as well.) But, here's what I hope for your future. First and foremost, I hope you will continue *Building God's Community*. And I can base this hope in your past actions. You have done so many things to Build God's Community that I think it is now a part of the DNA of this church. I don't think you can help but to continue to Build God's Community. I hope you will continue to do the things that we did well in Building God's Community. I hope you tweak the things we did not so well in Building God's Community and add things we need to do to Build God's Community. I hope you throw out the things we didn't do well at all in Building God's Community. And here's a promise I make to you: if I hear that you have opted out of continuing to Build God's Community, I'm going to travel all the way back up here and kick some Frankton fannies. But I don't think I'll have to do that.

My other hope is that you welcome Pastor Nathan and Sarah and their four children into this family with open hearts and open arms just as you did for Jan and I when we came here 11 years ago. From the moment we got here, we felt welcome. Some churches have a reputation of not letting the pastoral family into the church's family circle. Not here. Thank you for allowing us into your family. Now do the same thing for Nathan and Sarah and those four children. My hope is that you open your hearts and your arms and welcome them to this church family. And I know you will.

Yes, right now we are all grieving. And as that move date approaches, our grief may increase. But remember, Christians are a people of hope – hope for a better today and hope for a better tomorrow. Remember, as Paul said: [SLIDE] *so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope*. We have hope. We have Christ.

