

**Hurst Green**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 20**  
**Eternal Life**  
**1 Thess 4**

Ah! 1 Thessalonians 4 – not the first choice chapter for a sermon as a quick Internet search reveals but that is why we preach through these books – to stop us glossing over the bits that we do not want to talk about.

So we have a chapter on sexual immorality and death!

But let us actually take a look at this.

If anyone does preach or talk about this first the focus is immediately on v 3-5

**1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 (ANIV)**

<sup>3</sup> *It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, <sup>5</sup> not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God;*

And while that must not be ignored look at verse 1

**1 Thessalonians 4:1 (ANIV)**

<sup>1</sup> *Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.*

Being the first verse that tells us what this is actually all about – Living to please God

Now in many of his Epistles Paul is urging the people he writes to to live Holy Lives and so he should. It should be the aim of each and every one of us. As we change from one degree of glory to another our lives should be more holy so that we can better reflect our saviour into this world that so desperately needs him.

And in each letter he tackles the problem that that particular Church was having. That is why we need to read our bible as a whole and not pick and choose!

And on this need for Holiness Peter tells us

**1 Peter 1:15-16 (ANIV)**

<sup>15</sup> *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; <sup>16</sup> for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

And that last bit is repeated several times in Leviticus.

And

**1 Corinthians 3:16 (ANIV)**

<sup>16</sup> *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*

And I could carry on quoting many scriptures but I hope you get the point – we are to live holy lives!

And our passage today is about living holy lives and obviously the Thessalonians were having trouble with sexual immorality.

It would seem this passage could be written to many churches in the western world, or indeed in the world as we struggle with how to live Holy lives in a society that seems obsessed with sex.

The Church in Thessalonica is complimented on how they are living

**1 Thessalonians 4:1 (ANIV)**

<sup>1</sup> *Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. ~~Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.~~*

Although they were new to this Christianity game they had taken on board the instructions they had been given and were living the life.

Living the life – there is a phrase that means almost total opposites for Christians and non-Christians. To the world out there it would mean living a life of hedonistic pleasure, having all you want and living to please yourself.

To Christians it means living a life in which you voluntarily do not do certain things so that you can live to what you see as a higher standard. You are living to please God and not yourself so of course life is different.

You know you are the temple of God and that God dwells in you. You know the Holy Spirit and you choose to let that define how you live.

But Paul includes something else in this first verse that we can learn from:

**1 Thessalonians 4:1 (ANIV)**

<sup>1</sup> *Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.*

And he emphasises this in verse 10

**1 Thessalonians 4:10 (ANIV)**

<sup>10</sup> *And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.*

Paul acknowledges they are living the life – the right life – but he wants them to do more.

That might remind you of something we touched on last week from Hebrews

**Hebrews 10:24 (ANIV)**

<sup>24</sup> *And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.*

And I encourage you, if you do not remember what I said, to go on the web site and have a read – it is on page four.

While we are living lives to please God we know we are imperfect and that we could do better.

If don't feel that then let me know because you have made it and can be up here next week and tell us all how to do it!

Thessalonica was a prosperous city sat on several trade routes and populated with different cultures out of which these new Christians had come. They had the pull of their old ways and the entire world around them.

They knew temptation and lived amongst it every day. The sexual standards were not very high among the pagan cultures and that was in their face every day – hence these words specifically on sexual purity.

This is a repeated theme in the Epistles because many of the Churches lived among these pagan cultures with their low sexual standards and need to be reminded of the higher standard we are called to.

And why is this so important? Think back to that verse in 1 Corinthians I quoted earlier.

**1 Corinthians 3:16 (ANIV)**

<sup>16</sup> *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*

Your body is God's temple and in your behaviour you can defile God's temple. As 1 Corinthians 3 goes on

**1 Corinthians 3:17 (ANIV)**

<sup>17</sup> *If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.*

I am not suggesting that sin will cause God to destroy you but always remember Sodom and Gomorrah where sin did lead to destruction. But defiling God's temple does lead to the need for repentance and forgiveness and the desire to live to the higher standard that you have been called to.

And it is possible – because we have the Holy Spirit in us. We have the power we just need to use it.

But note why we need to do it because that may give you the incentive to try for the higher standard.

**1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (ANIV)**

<sup>11</sup> *Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, <sup>12</sup> so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*

We need to be doing this so that our witness to the world may work.

This takes us back to the new Church in Acts where the way that they were living commanded such respect that new members were added daily – that's a challenge I would love us to have and, always remember, its one that you called us here for – you wanted a pastor to help YOU to evangelise the village and you got two!

But look at the advice in verse 11

- Lead a quiet life
- Mind your own business
- Work with your hands – this was a cultural thing because the Greek culture despised manual work which may explain some of the problems Derrick and Pam have had in building their new house!!

From that your life will win the respect – but do not use that as an excuse. We still need to proclaim the gospel so that all may know why we live the life we do.

Live life to the higher standards that we are called to!

And do it because we are the temple of God and also for that promise to be transformed to higher levels of glory - how good is that.

Be Holy because the Lord your God is Holy!

And so to the second section of this chapter and Verse 13, the first verse of the section tells us what this section is about.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13 (ANIV)**

<sup>13</sup> *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.*

Another subject we often avoid but one we must understand although we do not have the same problem that the early Churches had.

They expected Christ to return in the near future – an expectation that has dulled in us over the 2000 years since then.

Jesus had said of John

**John 21:22 (ANIV)**

<sup>22</sup> ~~Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."~~

And that had been turned from a command not to worry about the fate of others into an expectation that the followers of Christ would live to see him come again.

But now we had Christians dying and the problem was – what would happen to them?

But of course if they had thought about it they had the example of Jesus who had died and been resurrected but then I talk on the shoulders of 2000 years of great theologians who have thought about this!!

And this is what Paul was trying to cover in this second section but of course it has things to teach us about Christians dying and how we handle our grief.

And remember our grief is still real.

We are not saying that we have to put on a mask and say that all is well because it is not.

We have lost someone we love and there is a hole in our life and that is real.

Our faith does not try and paper over that and say that it does not matter because it jolly well does. Grief hurts and the pain keeps cropping up even after time has passed.

But the secret is in that first verse

**1 Thessalonians 4:13 (ANIV)**

<sup>13</sup> ~~Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.~~

Our grief is different because we have hope where the rest of the world does not.

For them death is final and while some hope for various things only we as Christians know the truth – we will be resurrected and live an eternal life with Jesus and each other.

We get a new body to replace this one that can fail and what that looks like I cannot teach you because I do not know.

We have a few clues in scripture from Jesus after his resurrection

- The body is recognisable – the disciples knew it was Jesus
- But Jesus could walk through walls
- He could disappear and appear seemingly at will – he was not with the disciples all the time as he had been when he was alive.
- He eats breakfast with them.

- Thomas is invited to touch him and various others also touch him

But I am not prepared to be dogmatic about this new body – we only have hints. In Revelation we have other descriptions which we could argue about for ever.

The truth is we do not have detailed enough description to say for certain so believe what you will the important thing is to believe that we will be resurrected to that eternal life when Christ comes as our reading says

***1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (ANIV)***

*<sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever.*

But knowing that and having that hope built deep in our lives notice how this chapter ends

***1 Thessalonians 4:18 (ANIV)***

*<sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

So we are back to that continuing theme from last week – we are here together, we have been put together in order to encourage one another so that we have that hope that is the difference between us and other men.

We have hope and we are to encourage one another and spur one another on to even greater things.

And as we discussed last week we are to do this deliberately –consider how we may spur one another on towards living more holy lives and knowing the eternal hope we have.

