

TITLE: Some Encouraging Words

TEXT: 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Jn. 14:19; 1Co. 15:50-57;
1 Co. 15:12-24

INTRODUCTION: Last week we talked about the signs of the times. The signs that Jesus said would come like birth pains, we would see them come in the same era and they would be an indicator to us that the time for His return and the end of the age are drawing nearer.

For the Christian, the born again believer, this is not something to be feared but it is something to be greatly anticipated and even looked forward to.

It is something that should motivate us to share our faith with others who are not saved as we see these signs coming to pass so that they won't have to fear the day that Scripture describes as the great and terrible Day of the Lord.

For those who know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior it will be a great day because it will be the day that we enter eternity with Him.

For those who do not know Christ it will be a terrible day because it will be the day that they enter eternal damnation separated from Him for all eternity.

This morning I want to talk about some encouraging words that Scripture has for us who anxiously await that day...

We all need words of encouragement from time to time don't we?

One of my favorite motivational speakers is Grant Taft.

Grant Taft was the head football coach of Bailer University back when Mike Singletary played college football there.

Grant Taft was probably one of the best motivators that have ever come down the pike.

Whether it was to the Football teams that he coached or to the many men's groups and Church's that he spoke to.

He was a great motivator.

Grant Taft—one day in a game tried to motivate his players to do what is necessary to be successful---

The team was behind by 14 points at the half and Taft knew he had to motivate his team so he remembered a story he heard a while back.

He sent his assistant out to the bait shop nearby to get a dozen night crawlers right before the half ended. When the team came in for half time looking defeated he told them the story.

Two Eskimo's were out ice fishing. Both using the same equipment and the same bait, Night crawlers. One was catching fish after fish through his hole in the ice and the other just a few feet away was not catching anything. They even switched holes and the one guy still caught nothing while the other was still catching fish after fish. Finally the man ask his fish catching friend what was his secret to success....I mean we are fishing the same holes, using the same equipment and even using the same bait. The man catching all the fish with a slight bulge in his mouth said: you got to keep the worms warm and them pulled one out of his mouth to bait his hook.

Grant Taft look at his team, grabbed the box of night crawlers his assistant had got from the bait shop. Pulled out the biggest one he could find and then said: I want you guys to know that while you are out there doing your best I am on the sidelines keeping the worms warm! And with that he dropped the worm in his mouth and chomped down a couple times.

Bailer went on to win that game in the second half by 3 touchdowns.

A defensive lineman being interviewed after the game was asked what had gotten into them the second half that they came out and played that well and he said it really got us riled up when coach ate that worm....

Another story Grant Taft tells is of a time he was asked to speak at a Church in eastern Texas. It was during football season and he really didn't feel like he could spare the time but he decided to go.

On that particular Sunday he got up early and headed out on the 4 hour drive to the small town to speak in the morning service.

He got there just as the service was starting and was ushered in by a deacon waiting outside the Church for him. When he was done they asked if he could hang around and speak to the youth group later that day.

He reluctantly agreed. He says no one asked him to come home with them for dinner but just left him to fend for his self. He killed the 3 hours or so in this one horse town and when he was done speaking that evening he said no one even offered to pay for his gas.

He left to go back home tired and pretty discouraged. Now it was starting to rain and about an hour down the road he had a flat tire. About an hour from home he ran across an all-night diner out in the middle of nowhere and pulled over. He went in and sat down and a typical Texas waitress, tall, blond hair pulled up in bun and chewing gum comes over and says: help ya?

He said ya—I want coffee, two eggs over easy, bacon, and some kind words. She says huh? So he repeats it-- I want coffee, two eggs over easy, bacon, and some kind words.

In a little bit she comes back and puts his food down and goes to leave and he says wait a minute, where is my kind words? She says, Huh? You know my kind words!

She bends down and whispers in his ear...don't eat them eggs

Let's go to some encouraging words from scripture this morning....

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 18 (NIV) ¹³Brothers, 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. ¹⁴We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

¹⁵According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

¹⁶For 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.

¹⁷After 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 forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Talk about words of encouragement!

I want to highlight some of the encouragement that these words have to offer us this morning...

¹³Brothers, 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.

Paul targets his audience here by the first word that he uses... Brothers! Brethren! He is talking specifically to the Church...

¹³Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep!

We do not want you to be ignorant about those who die!

Or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

Who are the rest of men who are described as those who have no hope that Paul is referring to here?

The lost, the unsaved, those who don't know Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

And then Paul tells us why we need not grieve the death of saved loved ones.....

¹⁴We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

All who have died with a saving faith in Christ will be raised from death, just as Jesus was raised from the dead, and Jesus will bring them with Him when He returns.

This speaks about the surety of a resurrection for everyone who has died "in Christ".

Jesus says in:

John 14:19 (NIV) ¹⁹Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

Loved ones and friends who have died with a saving faith in Christ we will one day see again..

And the next time that we see them they will be a lot different than the last time we saw them. They will be sick or crippled or hurting no longer. If the last time that we saw them was in a casket they will look a whole lot different to us for they will have been raised into the perfection of resurrection life. They will have a resurrected body that will no longer be subject to the fragilities that our earthly bodies are.

Their resurrected bodies will not be subject to sickness, sorrow, pain, deformity or even death....

Paul gives us some even more encouraging words as he speaks on.....

¹⁵According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

Those who don't die before the Lord returns but are here on planet earth when He returns will not precede those who have already died in being given a resurrection body..

¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷After 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.

When the Lord returns it says that the dead in Christ will rise first! That is only fair isn't it?

But then it says 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..

This is what we call the rapture of the Church.

And it will happen simultaneously when the dead in Christ are raised. This will all happen in a nanosecond!

Paul describes the event this way in....

1 Corinthians 15:50 - 57 (NIV) ⁵⁰I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

⁵¹**Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵²in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.**

⁵³**For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.**

⁵⁴**When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”**

⁵⁵ **“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”[£] ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Did you catch that...

⁵²**in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.**

And it will all happen in the time that it takes for an eye to twinkle!

I don't know how long it takes an eye to twinkle but I do know that it is fast..

In the time that it takes an eye to twinkle...

The dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Do you realize that if this is the generation that Jesus talked about that would not pass away until all the signs that we talked about last week took place—then there very well may be some here among us this morning that may never experience physical death.

⁵²in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye--the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Church, these are words of encouragement!

No wonder Scripture tells us that we can proclaim---
⁵⁵ **“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”**

When Jesus rose from the grave He literally took the sting out of death for us.

How? Because we have the same promise of a resurrection....

D.L. Moody said the following about death:

I like to think of the time when the dead shall rise from their graves. We read, at those last rites for the dead, what we call the burial service. It is an unfortunate expression. Paul never talked of burial. He said the body was sown -- sown in corruption, sown in weakness, sown in dishonor, sown a natural body. If I bury a bushel of wheat, I never expect to see it again; but if I sow it, I expect results. Thank God, our friends are not buried; they are only sown!

1 Corinthians 15:42 - 49 (NIV) ⁴²So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. ⁴⁸As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

What Moody was saying was that we don't really bury a deceased person but that their body is really just being sown...

Burial gives the impression of finality.

Being sown gives the impression of a planting that will once again spring forth to life.

³⁷When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed...

...The body sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

In a cemetery in Hanover, Germany, is a grave on which were placed huge slabs of granite and marble cemented together and fastened with heavy steel clasps. It belongs to a woman who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Yet strangely, she directed in her will that her grave be made so secure that if there were a resurrection, it could not reach her. On the marker were inscribed these words: "This burial place must never be opened."

In time, a seed, covered over by the stones, began to grow. Slowly it pushed its way through the soil and out from beneath them. As the trunk enlarged, the great slabs were gradually shifted so that the steel clasps were wrenched from their sockets. A tiny seed had become a tree that had pushed aside the stones.

The dynamic life force contained in that little seed is a faint reflection of the tremendous power of God's creative word that someday will call to life the bodies of all who are in their graves. He will also bring back every person drowned at sea, cremated, or destroyed in some other way.

This is no problem to the One who made something out of nothing when He spoke the universe into existence. Unbelief cannot deter the resurrection.

But faith in the risen Christ opens the door to blessings that His resurrection guarantees -- a glorious new spiritual body and a home in heaven.

In new bodies we will be reunited with saved loved ones to live with Jesus throughout all eternity.

Let me pose some questions to you this morning that all have the same answer....

What is it that gives a widow courage as she stands beside a fresh grave?

What is the ultimate hope of the cripple, the amputee, the abused, the burn victim?

How can the parents of brain-damaged or physically handicapped children keep from living their entire lives totally and completely depressed?

Why would anyone who is blind or deaf or paralyzed be encouraged when they think of the life beyond?

How can we see past the martyrdom of some helpless hostage or devoted missionary?

Where do the thoughts of a young couple go when they finally recover from the grief of losing their baby?

When a family receives the tragic news that a little daughter was found dead or their dad was killed in a plane crash or a son overdosed on drugs, what single truth becomes their whole focus?

What is the final answer to pain, mourning, senility, insanity, terminal diseases, sudden calamities, and fatal accidents?

It is the hope of bodily resurrection. The hope of a life beyond this one!

Leith Anderson shares about a man named Donald Barnhouse who was the pastor of Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church when his wife died and left him with young daughters to raise alone. He conducted his own wife's funeral.

While driving to that funeral, he realized that he had to say something to his little girls to somehow put in perspective for them something with which he himself was already struggling.

They stopped at a traffic light. It was a bright day, and the sun was streaming into the car. A truck pulled up next to them and its shadow darkened the inside of the car. Barnhouse turned to his daughters and asked, "Would you rather be hit by the shadow or by the truck?"

One of them responded, "Oh, Daddy, that's a silly question! The shadow can't hurt you. I'd rather be hit by a shadow than by a truck."

Then he explained that their mother had died and that it was as if she'd been hit by a shadow. It was as if Jesus had stepped in the way in her place, and it was He who'd been hit by the truck.

⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

Our resurrection is just as sure as Jesus resurrection!

Jesus is said to be the first fruit of the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:12 - 24 (NIV) ¹²But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. ²⁰But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

²¹For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²²For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

²³But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

²⁴Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.

²⁰But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Do you know what the term first fruits means?
It means the first with more to follow!

²²For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

²³But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

So Paul triumphantly says....
And so we will be with the Lord forever.
¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words.

What we need to understand is that all men will one day be raised from the dead.

The saved will be raised into the newness of resurrected life with Christ--the lost will be raised to endure the eternal damnation of hell.

Whether these words that Scripture speaks to us are words of encouragement or not will be determined by one thing and one thing alone....And this is if we have a personal saving relationship with Jesus Christ or not..

This morning, are these words, the promise of a resurrection, words of encouragement to you?

If you are saved then they should be and surely are!

If you are not saved and these words don't encourage your heart then just know that it is not too late to become saved and have these words become a great encouragement to you....