

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

Week beginning Sunday 19 November Going home – to God

Pray Thank God that through Jesus we have the assurance that his love for us will never give out and that his promise to be with us always goes beyond death. Thank God that Jesus died not only for his life only but to secure eternal fellowship with God. Ask for the encouragement of heaven to impact on our lives here and now so that the transforming love of Christ may be more apparent in the here and now.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

Background In the early years of the Church there was a huge expectation that Jesus would return soon and take believers with him to heaven. That belief was one of the real drivers to taking the good news to people far and near as a matter of great urgency. However, as the years went by and faithful believers died people became concerned that they might have missed out. Assurances are given that that was not the case. Another difficulty was whether people would be ready when Jesus returned – would they be caught out? There is therefore, an emphasis of being prepared. We need to note however that the ground of our acceptance is not fear but love and while we are called upon to live lives worthy of our Lord the fact remains that it is his love, forgiveness and acceptance of us that counts.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. Hundreds of years have gone past since these verses were written. Why is thoughts of heaven not usually uppermost in our minds these days? How should heaven affect how we live? We are encouraged to be ready – what do you think that means?
2. I remember seeing a very scary Christian film when I was much younger where people were taken up to heaven and there was real fear for those left behind. I was very uncomfortable – but sad too that fear was being used rather than love to draw people to Christ. How can we ensure that we encourage faithful Christian living while emphasising the grace and love of God rather than dread?
3. Our faith and the prospect of our being eternally in God's presence ought to make a difference to how we live. How much difference is there in the way believers and non believers live? What differences are there? What differences should there be?
4. Few people look forward to death though it comes to us all. Some people live in real fear of dying though many of us are probably more concerned a) about HOW we will die (and maybe when – not just yet!) and b) how our loved ones will get on without us. We're not very good about talking about it though we probably need to talk about these things without being morbid. Do these comments ring bells for you? Can you share just a little bit of your thinking?
5. We should take heaven into account in our thinking and our actions here and now. Christians have sometimes been accused of being too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. Some of the most wonderful faithful Christian people have been people who have made a real heavenly impact on the lives of people living in the "real" world. What heavenly impact might we make among our community that would make a difference?
6. Discuss anything else that comes out of the passage or the service.

Prayer Thank you Lord for the assurance that you will always be with us and that in you we will always be at home with the God. While most of us aren't just ready for heaven yet help us not to be afraid of the prospect of dying, nor of being left behind. Remind us of the promises that Jesus has made to be with us, to love us always, to forgive and accept – and help us to hold on to the fact that all that comes not through our deserving but through his grace. Amen.