

2 Thess 2:1-17 "The Day of the Lord"

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Preacher: Rev. Dr. Steven Griffin

[0 : 00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

We have the great privilege this morning that Steve will be opening the Word for us. Thank you, George. Always good to have the privilege of being prepared to speak. And I trust that what our reflections will encourage us and also by God's grace bring glory to Him only.

The focus of our reflections will be around the topic of the Day of the Lord, as I just read. But this verse in 1 John 2 will help us enter into that theme. 1 John 2.28 says, And now, dear children, continue in Jesus so that when He appears, we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming. So I invite you to pray with me.

Father, we ask that by Your Spirit You would come and soften our hearts to hear Your Word, to embrace the good news, to hold fast to it, that we may continue to hope and to pray that others will come to know You and that we will together look forward to Your appearing, to Jesus' appearing. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[2 : 43] How many of you watched King Charles' Christmas message? Wow. Okay. A couple. Right? Well, you might want to go have a listen to that after you hear what I say.

After watching that brief message, I thought I'd glance through the comments that had come in, both on this side of the pond as well as the other. And my eye picked up on these. Absolutely beautiful. Very thoughtful. Full of compassion. A message the world needs to hear. And even praise Jesus. Not a single negative comment, as far as I could tell in my scan. Only top marks for a king who's now coming into his own. Now, here in Canada, we honor the king. And if we're guided by the prayer book, we pray for him.

And so, I mean no dishonor whatsoever when I say that I'm troubled both by what he said and by what he didn't say. And here I'm appealing to the collect that we prayed more than once, I think.

[3 : 58] But starting with the first Sunday of Advent, which is a collect that we and the king are familiar with. Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armor of light.

Now, in the time of this mortal life, in which your son Jesus Christ to visit us in great humility, that in the last day when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal through him who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Now, what King Charles spoke of was the humility part, leaving aside the majesty, which meant, in effect, that the greatness of the humility was lost.

So we heard about the one who came to serve and who taught us to care for others. We heard that all religions teach that creation is a manifestation of the divine and that we're called to live a simple life and to care for the environment.

And we were reminded also that Jesus taught us to treat others as we would want to be treated and that this universal truth can lead us out of the present conflict in the Middle East.

[5 : 21] Now, the vague, lopsided Christmas message didn't just reduce the truth, giving us one part of it. Instead, I would suggest it distorted the truth because it left us putting our hope in ourselves.

The king didn't bear witness to the king who's coming over all the earth, to reign over all the earth, and who alone can bring peace and restore what's broken.

By looking within and not up, the message offers no cure to what we can call the disease of presentism. What do I mean?

Well, the disease of presentism trains us in the art of not waiting, of not longing for what God has promised. That's because we assume that in one way or another, perhaps we already have it, or that it's ours to make, to create.

And I think this is a great disease of our time, and to the extent that we've caught it, I believe we've given way to a pagan attitude.

[6 : 32] So what's the response to the disease? Well, of course, it's never wrong to serve others and to care for the environment, and it's true as long as we've trusted in Jesus that we can have assurance precisely in the now that we belong to him.

But this does not, for a second, remove the longing and the waiting that's part of life in these shadowlands, with a tip of the hat to C.S. Lewis, knowing that what awaits us is far more glorious than we could ever imagine.

But this brings us to a question that if you were here at the 8, I didn't get into. But 8 o'clock service, I kind of walk through this passage, but here I want to do something a little different.

I want to ask, well, I want to address that big question, where are we in history in relation to the great day of the Lord? You might want to answer with another question.

Is that something we can know? Is that something that we ought to try to know? Well, at least we can say that Christians have tried to know where we are in history and have come up with very different conclusions.

[7 : 49] Some would say something like, well, we're in the last act. The day of the Lord is happening very soon, quite likely in the next decade or so. Look at the signs, wars, disasters, and famine.

The fact that we can wipe ourselves off the map. Widespread lawlessness, selfishness, and a falling away within the church itself.

Others say, I disagree. I think we're in the first act. The day of the Lord can't happen until the world has experienced widespread peace and prosperity on account of the great success of the gospel. That's a Christian. Many Christians hold that view. What's behind that view is the idea that when Jesus speaks of the end of the age in Matthew 24, he was speaking only of events in the immediate future.

In other words, the lawlessness and tribulation, great tribulation and lawlessness that are now behind us. Others might say, I came up with this, and I don't know, maybe some would say, well, we're in the intermission.

[8 : 59] Somewhere in the middle. Well, it might feel like the end of history as we know it, but Christians of the past have felt the same way. Martin Luther and many of the reformers thought they were living in the very last act.

But likely it'll be in another millennium or two. Well, as I've said, the answers matter. Why? Well, because in one way or another, they impact the way we live our lives.

In the now. How so? Well, first act Christians can say, well, in spite of present troubles, we're learning to take the long view of history, to be hopeful about human flourishing precisely through the gospel, and to help put things in place so that our children's children's children can be part of that great flourishing.

Well, last act Christians can say, since Jesus is coming soon, thinking about the kind of world we're bringing children into, or caring for the world around us, is really pointless.

And intermission Christians, if they exist, might say, well, look, I'm not too concerned one way or the other. I've got plenty of other things to think about. So I think we need to turn to God's word and see what we can learn this morning.

[10:21] I think it might be helpful to start by backing up to the first letter that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, and think about the nature of the event itself.

The first thing to say about the day of the Lord is that it will be public and cataclysmic. I choose those words guided by Scripture.

Well, we see there in the first letter to the Thessalonians, you can follow with me if you flip back to 1 Thessalonians 4, starting at verse 13.

Bibles are up here and available if you don't have one of your own, and you're welcome to take one. If you read fine print or bring your glasses as I ought to.

But I'll read 1 Thessalonians 4, 13 to 18. But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

[11:18] For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep, for the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these words.

Well, what's Paul doing here? He's taking us right back to that Easter morning and telling us this. At a point in history that's coming, that original event, the resurrection, will be applied, literally applied to those living and dead who have been in this life included in Jesus' death.

It will be applied to those who have been in this life included in his death. Well, you might be wondering, since some will be alive when he returns, as the text says, in what sense are they going to be resurrected to?

Well, I think the answer comes in the nature of the event itself, and that's what I'm talking about, some of the cataclysmic part. The point is, the day of the Lord means the end of history as we know it, and therefore to our existence as we've known it up to that point.

[13:02] So cataclysmic because it will be an event like on the order of creation itself, when God spoke the universe into being.

And I've said it's public because it's not going to happen somehow behind history or somehow above it, but in human history for every eye to see.

So it will be an earth-shaking event when God issues a new command. Arise, and the dead in Christ will come out of their graves.

Now, when I was hanging around some Pentecostal friends, and I was still a Baptist, my Pentecostal friends, well, the dead in Christ, that must mean the Baptists, right?

But joking aside, Paul wants to make it clear that that fact, that these believers have been dead, doesn't mean they'll miss out, be left out when the whole church, since Adam, is raised up bodily and made fit for the new creation, transfigured, transformed.

[14:17] That's the moment when all those in Christ will be caught up together in the clouds to meet Jesus, to go out together, to welcome him as he comes, to take his rightful place as King and Lord of all creation, to welcome him as King and Lord.

Well, in a nutshell, that's the nature of the glorious appearing of Jesus that we long for, his gracious gathering of the saints. And I'm sure you know this basic biblical teaching has been challenged in a couple of ways.

In one case, the event is denied altogether. Many people throughout history have said, nothing of the sort is going to happen. For the Sadducees, the idea of future rewards in a life to come were just simply out of the question.

I'll leave aside the joke about the Sadducees. If you like, you can ask me later. Which grand ideas, though, were the Sadducees drawing from?

As early as the 6th century BC, Aeschylus had said that once a man dies, that's it. That's my paraphrase statement. And about 50 years before Jesus was born, the Latin poet Catullus had written, when once our brief light sets, there is one perpetual light through which we must sleep.

[15:46] How does Jesus handle the Sadducees' challenge? Well, you might recall from Matthew 22 or Luke 20, how the Sadducees had set up that question.

They said something like, well, take a woman who was widowed seven times by seven brothers. They said, in the resurrection, to whom will she be married?

Now, under the circumstances, they might just have wanted his thoughts or clarification about Moses' rule. The rule that stipulated that if a man died, having fathered no children, his brother was to marry the widow and to give him offspring that way.

But here the question just served as an excuse to make fun of the idea of resurrection. So what does Jesus do? Knowing their skepticism, he takes them right to the authority they themselves have named, Moses.

And there he asks them effectively, how can you dismiss the resurrection when Moses himself, that God is, and not just was, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

[17:06] The living God is even now their life. And so Jesus can say, on another occasion to his disciples, because I live, you too shall live.

John 14, 19. And there's a second point that Jesus picks up on, and it relates directly to their concern about offspring. He actually mentions it first.

For Sadducees, the idea that our life endures in a certain sense through our children would have been a strong idea. But Jesus takes up the question of offspring in order to point them to the kind of life that really endures.

What do I mean? Well, he explains that in the life to come, there is no marriage. Well, because the question of offspring has been addressed by the gift of adoption, by God's adoption of his children, as children of the resurrection.

That's in Luke 20, 36. So Jesus is here telling them, evidently, this passion you have to find personal significance through your offspring.

[18:17] Well, only God can satisfy it by making you a child who will never die. But let's move on. From it's not going to happen, we come to the other challenge, to the biblical teaching about resurrection.

And that's, it's already happened. And this claim brings us back, of course, to the question of where we are in relation to the great day. We haven't left the world of grand ideas, because in 2 Timothy 2, we read about a couple of teachers named Hymenaeus and Philetus who were pushing a doctrine they probably thought was quite exciting and ingenious.

The day of the Lord has already come. We can say that if their idea was to have any weight, they would have to persuade people not only that resurrection was something in the mind, that it didn't apply to physical things.

They would also have to convince them that the judgment and the new creation were collapsed into the now. Since these other ideas have a certain attraction, he no doubt had quite a decent following.

And we know what this teaching looks like today. It comes in this form. The resurrection, it's now, not future. And you can live in it by pursuing perhaps a higher consciousness.

[19:47] Of course, the Hymenaeus and Philetus's of our day will be quick to promote a new program or new experience or maybe new retreat or method that will just flood your soul with peace and joy as well as a sense of oneness with all that is.

And we shouldn't be too quick to say, look how silly of those Thessalonians to believe such a thing. The fact is the teaching came with authority. Apparently.

So turn back with me now, finally, here on page 10 of my notes to 2 Thessalonians 2. That's why Paul has to warn them in verse 2.

Not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed either by a spirit or a spoken word or a letter seeming to be from us to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

These teachers were claiming to speak or to write in the name of the apostles. And not only that, their words were persuasive as they claimed special knowledge or insight or even a revelation.

[21:00] And no doubt, their lifestyles appeared to be godly, even full of peace and serenity. So what does Paul say?

Well, with the authority he enjoys as an apostle, he says nothing doing. Something else has to happen before Jesus appears. The man of lawlessness has to come on the scene.

And what's all that about? Well, if you look with me at verse 7, the context is the mystery of lawlessness, which Paul says is already at work.

And he thinks, as he thinks of figures who have set themselves up in the temple, declaring themselves to be God, he no doubt had in mind men like the emperor Gaius, who ordered that a statue of himself be erected in the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 40.

In our own times, I'm thinking of at least two men who think of themselves as the Christ.

[22 : 09] There's a man, because of my interest in Russia, there's a man named Vissarion out in outer Siberia somewhere, who gives himself the title The Word of God.

And there's a man, because we spent time in the Philippines, Stella and I, a man in a place called Davao City, who claims to be the appointed son of God.

His name is Apolo Kiboloi. He decided that because Jesus ascended not to the Father, but as the Father, well, the Father needed a new son, and he happened to pick Pastor Kiboloi very conveniently.

Now, that sounds funny, but he's led a lot of people astray with that pure, plain and straightforward distortion of the scriptures.

But all the false Christs that come and go evidently point to the Antichrist, who will come on the wave of the apostasia, or rebellion, verse 3, which refers to a great, massive falling away from God and his ways.

[23 : 25] And the Antichrist is the son of destruction, meaning he is appointed for destruction, the text explains, because he's the one who Jesus will kill with the mere breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by his appearance, by the appearance of his coming, verse 8.

Now, for the son of destruction to pass himself off as the son of man, he'll, of course, have to present himself as a messenger of light and peace, with great signs and wonders that serve to camouflage his rejection of God and his word, and so to deceive those who, according to verse 10, refuse to love the truth and to be saved.

Now, we can't say much about the timing or the exact nature of this great falling away that will pave the way for the Antichrist.

But if the man himself is to take his seat in God's temple and proclaim himself to be God, there in verse 4, then it's not hard to imagine how one of the grand ideas of our day could actually herald that event.

Let me say that again. It's not hard to imagine how one of the grand ideas of our own times could herald that event. And what's that grand idea? Well, the grand idea is that we are all the Christ together.

[24 : 52] And on that basis, all of us could collectively take our seat in the great cosmic temple. I'm speculating, of course, but I'm trying to invite you to think of how, what it would mean for all of us to be together the Christ.

to take our place in the great cosmic temple and set ourselves up as God. To celebrate that fact liturgically, because we all love ceremony, we would let a man stand out among us as our representative in this great cosmic false Eucharist.

if our new high priest, that man would also be for us a prophet who teaches us, look here, don't be misled by mere words, mere words attributed to Jesus, who represents only one stage in the evolution of the Christ.

Christ. And he would present himself as our king, as the latest, fullest incarnation of the Christ who promises peace and prosperity with all kinds of amazing demonstrations of his power.

Now, I have to insist, this is speculating on the details as we try to understand the signs of our own times and what a great falling away might look like in practice.

[26 : 17] There's so much we don't know. Although we know who's in control, there is one, according to verse 7, who is restraining, even now, the man of lawlessness until the time that God has appointed.

This is consistent with what Jesus said to his disciples about what must happen before the end.

You'll have heard it many times. Matthew 24, 14 and this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come.

Well, this, of course, brings us back to the question of where we're situated in relation to the day of the Lord. I would invite you to get perhaps a fuller view of the great drama of redemption by widening the scope and think of the first act as the period that began when we left the Garden of Eden with the first Adam.

That moment we left the Garden with the first Adam. This is a great drama of God's redemption and it began there when we left. And think of the last act as the period that began with the coming of the last Adam.

the logic is there in Paul. In that sense, we've been in the last phase of human history ever since Jesus died and rose again. And that's why the writer to the Hebrews can begin his letter with these words.

[27 : 53] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, first act, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, maybe even second act. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son.

But whether Jesus will come back in our lifetime, in the lifetime of our grandchildren, or in some distant century, when our names, all of us here, are all but forgotten, we really can't say.

I think we need to consider the possibility that it could be any of those. what's important is that we're ready when he does come again. Ready along with others we've invited to come along with us to the banquet that's being prepared already.

And that brings us, as I bring things to a conclusion, to the practical implications of Paul's teachings. And I want to highlight just three points there in the verses that follow.

I'll just read verses 13 and 14 again. And here I do have the English Standard Version. But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

[29 : 15] To this he called you through our gospel so that you may obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, the message here is about confidence.

And in the light of what Paul has just taught us, it's this. God in his mercy has protected us against the great delusion of the Antichrist.

God in his great mercy has protected us from the grand delusion of the Antichrist. But if we're inclined to trust in our own strength to think that we deserve to be gathered together by Jesus when he comes or that by our own insights and powers we can avoid being deceived by Satan and his instruments, we have to remember that our confidence can only be in God.

He's the one who spoke to our hearts when the gospel was proclaimed to us. He's the one who by his Spirit made us aware of our need for him and enabled us to embrace his truth and promise.

This truth is the truth that set us free. Free to trust in Christ. Free to remain in him. Free to leave behind a life of sin and aimless wandering.

[30 : 31] And so our confidence is not in our obedience but it's in his faithfulness. Look there in verse 15 at the second practical lesson that comes in the form of a command.

So then brothers and sisters stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us either by spoken word or by our letter.

What's Paul urging his readers and you and me to do here? Well, I love that song written by Andrew Peterson called You'll Find Your Way.

One verse goes like this. Go back, go back to the ancient paths. Lash your heart to the ancient mast. And hold on, boy, whatever you do to the hope that's taken a hold of you.

Now, this song, I think, speaks very poignantly of our desperate need for a foundation for something that we don't readily admit in our day.

[31 : 44] a foundation as we make our way through life. Our intuitions are going to fail us. We can't just live in this eternal spontaneity where we just work it out, work it all out as we go along.

If God in Christ has taken a hold of us, then we desperately need that ancient mast of his word.

Well, it's himself, but it's the, known to us through his gospel that Paul preached wherever the spirit took him to preach it.

We're talking about the good news of our salvation accomplished through Jesus' death and resurrection. And the promise that awaits us, says Paul, is nothing less than a share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus gives us a picture of what it looks like to stand firm. He says this in Luke 12, be dressed, ready for service.

Keep your lamps burning like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him.

[33 : 00] And there at the end, there's a third lesson about comfort. In verses 16 and 17, Paul ends as he does, as he often incorporates into his teaching a prayer.

Sometimes his teachings are a prayer, a prolonged prayer, aren't they? But here he ends with this prayer. Now may our God, now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

And I think here Paul sums up the comforting work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. It's a double comfort. And I say that because in verses 13 and 14, he had said that God by his Spirit working in us sets us apart and makes us his own as we embrace the truth of the gospel.

And the comfort there is the comfort of hope because we're given the assurance of the future glory of the Son. It's the comfort of the living triune God whose life is ours by the grace of adoption that those Sadducees without knowing it yearn for, I suppose.

But notice the other comfort, the comfort that enables us to obey. May God comfort your hearts, says Paul, and establish them in every good work and word.

[34 : 34] So in conclusion, Christ is the King who will one day come enveloped in a glory that we cannot yet imagine.

But even now he's present to us through the Holy Spirit, the Comforter as he promised. And our comfort here lies in this. If the Spirit is at work in us, we don't just have a part of Jesus or an idea about Jesus or even the truth about Jesus.

That's because we have Jesus himself and his life and his power strengthens us for the work he's called us to do until the day he comes again.

So may we together as brothers and sisters at Church of the Messiah, may we look into 2024 with hope, with expectation, longing for the day of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.