

God Called You to Share in Christ's Glory

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 June 2025

Preacher: Roger Sparks

[0 : 00] A series of messages on the three chapters in the New Testament book of 2 Thessalonians. We talked about and studied chapter 1 last week, and so today we come to chapter 2.

And before we look to God's word, let us also pause and seek his guidance through prayer. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would guide us in our thoughts and our words, in our listening and in the living we do in the week before us in the light of your word.

O Holy Spirit, prepare our hearts even now to receive the good news of your holy word. We pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen. 2 Thessalonians 2, last time we noted that it was during the Apostle Paul's second missionary journey that a church was planted in a city called Thessalonica. When Paul and Silas and Timothy came to Thessalonica, they did what, this was their strategy in many places. They went to the synagogue where there was a Jewish community, God-fearing Gentiles, who were familiar with the scriptures.

And from the scriptures, they proved, they testified that Jesus is the Messiah, the one God promised to come and to save this fallen world.

[1 : 28] And so they taught, they shared, they announced the good news of Jesus, the Messiah. And some who heard this teaching, this preaching, believed so that a church was established and began to grow in that community.

Now, there was also opposition. Not everyone agreed with Paul's teaching. In fact, some were quite hostile to him and to the good news of Jesus. And so, after only three weeks' time, he was run out of town.

But the church was started, and God kept working among those believers. From Thessalonica, Paul traveled south, and after making stops in Berea and Athens, he came to a city called Corinth. And there he spent the next about year and a half teaching, also preaching in that larger city. And during that time, he heard reports from newly planted churches, like the one in Thessalonica. And he heard they needed some encouragement. Also, they needed some instruction to clarify some confusion, especially about our Savior's second coming.

[2 : 40] And so, in the first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul addressed that somewhat. Again, more in 2 Thessalonians, as we'll see, especially in the opening verses of 2 Thessalonians 2.

It's kind of a tongue twister, isn't it? Thessalonians. Well, let's go ahead and read these verses.

Again, notice there'll be an emphasis on what can we expect at Christ's second coming.

So, here's the topic, right? Verse 1.

Don't you remember that when I was with you, I used to tell you these things?

And now you know what is holding him back so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.

[4 : 20] And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan, displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.

They perish because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned to have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

He called you to this through our gospel that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

[5 : 38] May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God, our Father, who loved us and by his grace, gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

That's our reading from God's word here in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. It's pretty obvious, dear friends, isn't it, that someone had been giving the Thessalonian believers some bad information about Jesus' second coming?

Paul already addressed part of this issue in 1 Thessalonians. We should just take a moment and mention some of that. Paul there explained that you don't have to worry about believers who live but also die before Jesus comes again.

See, that was the cause of anxiety. If you're not alive when Jesus comes again, do you miss out on some of the blessings? No, said Paul. That's not how it is.

We don't have to grieve without hope for fellow believers who die before Jesus comes again. And if we're sort of at death's doorway, we don't have to be afraid either that we, if we die before Jesus, we're going to miss out on something.

[6 : 57] Oh, no. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 4. There the Bible says, Therefore, encourage each other with these words.

Oh, these are encouraging words, are they not? I make it a point to read these verses from 1 Thessalonians 4.

At every funeral, every funeral, we need to know this. That if we die before Christ comes, we don't miss out on anything. In fact, when he comes in glory, those who are dying will first, first be raised from the dead, caught up to meet him, and actually see Jesus face to face.

Before those who are still alive are caught up and join them, being caught up to be with our Savior forever. So don't worry. You're not going to miss out on something.

Or your loved one who died won't miss out on the blessings of eternal life. You see, we really do belong to Jesus in body and soul, in life and in death.

[8 : 24] And yes, when he comes, he will come for the living, but also for the dead. And by his supernatural power, he will raise, he will glorify all and bring us into his presence.

And so, Philippians 3 adds, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, the Lord Jesus Christ will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Last week was Father's Day. My dad passed away, I think it was 30 years ago. No worries.

Miss him, but no worries, right? My mom passed away seven years ago this month. No worries.

When Jesus comes again, by his almighty power, he's going to raise them from the dust of death and put them back together, body and soul, better than ever, with bodies made like his glorious body, Philippians 3.

This is God's promise. This is our hope. Well, Paul received another report from Thessalonica and he heard there were still some questions, actually some confusion about what's going to happen when Jesus comes again.

[9 : 53] And in this case, as we see in our passage, the congregation there was being unsettled by some who claimed that the day of the Lord, that is Christ's return, had already taken place.

Now, why would this have been upsetting? Well, we can think of a couple of reasons. First of all, if it was true that Jesus had returned, did it mean that the Thessalonians had missed out on it?

And if so, is it because they were in Thessalonica instead of by Jerusalem waiting for Jesus on the Mount of Oz? I mean, were they in the wrong place at the wrong time? Did this pass them by?

That would have been alarming, upsetting. Second, if Jesus had already returned and they hadn't missed out on it, why were things still so broken in this world, right?

Why were people still dying and getting sick? And why were thieves still stealing stuff? And why were liars still telling lies? And why were armies still marching across fields to attack each other?

[10 : 59] And did it mean that Jesus came and he wanted to fix things? He wanted to make things, but he actually couldn't quite do it. In fact, not even close. Well, that would be disappointing.

Clearly, the church needed some encouragement and instruction. And we see this right here in verse 2. There's a reference to prophecies, reports, or letters that had been disturbing the church.

These things that allegedly, supposedly, had come from apostles. The last few years, of course, we've heard quite a bit about what's called fake news.

And more recently, we've heard about AI generated deep fakes. That's a little disturbing, isn't it? Well, already in Bible times, at the time of the New Testament, there were also fakes and forgeries. There were some fake gospels and fake letters, supposedly, written by the apostles. Maybe you've heard of the so-called Gospel of Thomas. Well, Thomas, wait, wasn't he one of the apostles?

[12:08] Well, yes, he was. Well, should that book, the Gospel of Thomas, have been included in our Bibles? Well, not if it was written by someone who just pretended to be Thomas and who put Thomas's name at the heading to give his work more credibility, even though it was false.

Well, people back in the New Testament age, when they were collecting the letters and the books to put in our Bibles, they looked at books like the Gospel of Thomas.

And they said, no, that one, that's a forgery. That one's not real. It's a fake gospel. Well, apparently, in Thessalonica, someone had come along and said to the church, hey, here's a letter from the Apostle Paul.

Or maybe they said, hey, I have a message for you from one of the other apostles. And it wasn't true. But before the church figured out that it wasn't exactly true, the teaching sort of took root and really was upsetting the congregation.

And so in writing to them now, Paul says, don't let what you've heard disquiet you. Don't let it upset you. And in this passage, Paul explained that Jesus couldn't have come again yet at that time because there were some prophecies that still had to be fulfilled before Jesus would come again.

[13:34] And we'll say a little more about those prophecies in a moment. But first, we're going to skip down to verses 13 and 14. And notice this.

Paul said, dear friends, we know that from the beginning, God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. And he called you to this through our gospel that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And really what Paul was saying is, is don't let this or some other teaching you here upset you.

Remember this, God chose you to be his people.

God has called you to share in Christ's glory. And nothing that you hear, nothing that happens in the world around you is going to change that.

God chose you. And God called you to share in Christ's glory. Now, we know that from our part in our relationship with God, it's important that we would choose to follow Jesus.

[14:40] We hear many calls. Come, Jesus says, follow me. Come to me. All you who are weary and burdened, come. And it's important that we would do this, that we would put aside our pride and cry out to Jesus saying, oh, Jesus, save us.

We're sinners. We need you to save us. That's so important. And then to commit to following Jesus.

But when we do this, when we cry out to Jesus saying, please save us, and we look back on that, we discover that we called to him because already he was calling to our hearts.

We discover that we love him because he first already was loving us. And when we see this, that we are God's people because of God's work of grace in us, oh, we are so thankful.

We praise his holy name. We glorify the Holy Spirit who opened our hearts to receive the gospel.

We rejoice in God and what he did to both convict us, but also to comfort us.

And we rest in God's work of grace that has begun in our hearts. And then we take courage, too.

Because as verse 14 puts it, we know that God has called us to share in the glory of Jesus.

[16:11] This is God's plan for us. And it's his unshakable purpose. This is the good thing that God has in mind.

You know where Romans 8, 28 says, in all things God works for the good of those who love him.

This is it. This is the good thing for which God is working all things together in our lives.

Namely, that we will share in the glory of Christ. And yes, step by step in the many circumstances of our lives, God is at work so that we are getting closer and closer to the moment when we will see and share the glory of our coming Savior.

Don't worry that you might be in the wrong city or country or nation when Jesus comes again. Don't worry about that.

And don't worry that Jesus tried to make things new when he came and he couldn't do it. That's not it at all. False teachers, of course, would like to stir up anxiety and fear in us so they can manipulate us.

[17 : 23] But listen, take courage. God has called you in Christ to share the glory of Christ. He has called you. What about those prophecies that Paul said had yet to be fulfilled?

If we go back to verse 3 and following, we find a reference to that. And so Paul mentioned a great rebellion or apostasy that will happen.

And also he mentioned the rise to prominence or power of someone called the man of lawlessness, whom we also know in the Bible as the Antichrist or also the beast of Daniel.

I think it's chapter 12. And we do find such prophecies in the Bible, especially in the words of Jesus toward the end of his ministry, keying into on the words of Daniel, the prophet, also the book of Revelation.

And these prophecies hadn't yet been fulfilled when Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians 2. And so this was to assure the church they hadn't missed out on anything.

[18 : 42] Of course, for you and me, it's been another 1900 plus years since Paul wrote these things. And we might wonder, well, what about today? All these years later, have these prophecies been fulfilled by now?

And we would say no, at least not completely. We do know that during the past 2,000 years, some people have wondered if they were living in the generation that would see these prophecies come to pass.

And some people have studied and compared scriptures and they've come up with charts and so forth. And some have even tried to predict who's who and when all this has happened or will happen.

And, of course, there's a lot of interest in this also, even right now, because of things happening in our world, especially in the Middle East. We wonder, are we living in the generation that will see these things fulfilled?

Well, in God's plan, I think we can say this for sure, that when the time is right, these are things that could be fulfilled very quickly when the time is right.

[19 : 59] At the same time, we don't have to worry that when these things happen that we're going to miss out on the blessings that God has for us in Christ.

Rather, we can trust that God, again, is at work, working all things together for the good of his people that we would share in the glory of Christ.

So what we would try to do, hopefully, we're trying to do this, is not think about the passing of time, whether it's in the past, present, or future, as something that sort of creates distance between us and Christ.

Right? Don't think of the fact that because Jesus ascended into heaven almost 2,000 years ago, that doesn't really make any difference today. Oh, it does make a difference. And don't think that because Jesus hasn't come yet that that's somewhere in the future, that that's not really important either.

No, no. It's important. In fact, someone put it like this. If you can, try to live as if Jesus died for your sins yesterday, and he rose from the dead this morning, and he's coming for you tomorrow.

[21 : 18] Right? Don't let the passing of time create this illusion that Jesus is, oh, far removed from you, and that the gospel is just, oh, somewhere way off in the distance.

No. If you could think of it like that, like Jesus, he just died for your sins yesterday, so thank him. And it's like he rose from the dead today.

Think of that that way. Like you're sharing his victory today, and he's coming for you tomorrow. So don't give up. He's coming. He's coming for you soon. Well, again, we don't know exactly when all this will happen.

And we do know, too, that some who've studied these passages do have theories, and I'll just mention one. If you hold to it, sorry, but listen carefully.

They look especially at verses 6 and 7, and they say, oh, look at this. You know, the Bible talks about a great tribulation that's coming at the end in the book of Revelation.

[22 : 27] Well, we think God's going to take us, the church, out of the world before that horrible stuff happens. And they point to these verses, which say, you know what is holding him, the man of sin or lawlessness, back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time.

For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so until he's taken out of the way. Now, it's clear. Yes, someone or something is holding back, restraining the rise of the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist.

But that something or someone will be taken out of the way. That's what the passage says. But who or what is doing that? And some would say, well, that must be the Holy Spirit who's doing this. And it means that God at some point will take the Holy Spirit out of this world so that the man of lawlessness can rise to power. But since the Holy Spirit has been given to dwell in each and every believer, God won't take the Holy Spirit out of the world without taking every believer with him. And so they think the church will be caught up or raptured is the word they use to describe that. And yes, they think God will take the church out of the world along with the Holy Spirit before the man of lawlessness comes on the scene.

[23 : 50] And there is this great tribulation. But it sounds really good to me because I don't want to think about going through great suffering. But is that what this really teaches? Okay.

Again, here's the reasoning. God will remove that which restrains the man of lawlessness. That which restrains the man of lawlessness is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to dwell in every believer.

So when God removes the Holy Spirit from the world, he'll take all us believers with him. The challenge here, though, is that this interpretation assumes, doesn't prove, but assumes that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit.

And that for the restrainer to be taken out of the way, it means completely removed from the world. It doesn't actually say that. It doesn't say the Holy Spirit's going to be taken out of the world. Or that we will be taken with him. So it may be, again, it sounds really good to me to think the church would be taken. But it may be that in the last days, the church will have to trust God through the great calamities foretold in his word.

[25 : 07] But if that's the case, and I say if, we don't know exactly how this is all going to work. If that's the case, then we'll need to lean especially on Romans 8 and many who are already persecuted for the faith.

I'm sure they're leaning on scriptures like this day by day. Where the Bible says, who will separate us from the love of Christ? The idea is nothing.

Nothing can do that. Not from the love of Christ. Well, what about trouble or hardship? What about persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

No, is the answer. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Oh, you see, God is greater than any trial that comes upon this world.

He is infinitely greater, even than what's called the great tribulation that is yet to come. So we can stand firm.

[26 : 19] That's where the passage leaves us. With a call to stand firm and keep holding on to the inspired apostolic teaching that has been given to us.

And whether we hear someone reading it to us, whether we read it ourselves in the Bible, let's hold on to this teaching so that we might receive by faith the blessings God has promised.

And it is a blessing. This is a good place to end, actually. Verse 16 and 17, where it says, may our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a good prayer for the church, isn't it? Thessalonica, covenant church, the church around this world. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God the Father who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

May God encourage you. May the good news encourage you. And don't forget, whatever else happens, God has called you to share in Christ's glory.

[27 : 47] Amen. Shall we pray? Lord, we give thanks for your word. And we've talked about some verses that we do know there's some disagreement on in terms of how to interpret them.

But Lord, there is something that's very clear in all this. And that's your love for the church and your faithfulness to your people. And that the hope we have in Christ is a sure, certain, living hope.

O Lord, may these gospel teachings also encourage us. For we also live in a broken world where death is all around us.

But Lord, we look to you and we trust in the life that Christ has given us. O bless us as we go forward to serve you in his name, even as we pray this.

In Jesus' name, amen.