

Regarding the Day of the Lord

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[0 : 00] Please sit down, friends. It's a well-known incident in the Gospels.

Jesus walked out of the temple. It was a grand building. It was gloried in by God's people and it was testimony to them, their resilience and their religion.

And the disciples could not help but point to its grandeur. And Jesus burst their bubble. He said to them, Do you see these things? Well, I tell you the truth.

Not one stone will be left upon another. All will be thrown down. And the disciples heard this and they perceived that he spoke to them about the end time. So they quizzed him and Jesus responded with a long speech that went on a chapter and a half or so.

And in it, he warned that his coming would be filled with false messiahs and with false truth. It would be filled with signs in the heaven and signs on the earth and they will hear of wars and rumours of wars and nations will rise against nation and kingdom will rise against kingdom.

[1 : 06] There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. And he says, But this will be but the beginning of birth pains. Friends, in this last six months, our world has been inundated with the sorts of things that we, that Jesus has said we would see.

Increasingly, therefore, I've heard Christians ponder them and make connections between them and the return of Christ. And really, when you think about it, that's only natural, isn't it? The turmoil of the world and the words of Jesus naturally mix and match with each other and it's only natural.

The connection is only a natural one. And at such times, it's helpful, I think, to have such a passage as we have before us this morning. And, you see, this passage we have before us today speaks of the second coming of Jesus.

But rather than concentrating on the physical world, it concentrates rather on the spiritual world and some very significant things that will precede the coming of Jesus.

It tells us some spiritual realities. It speaks to the people who have the same sorts of wonders and concerns that we have. And it gives them a way to navigate through the issues.

[2 : 15] Before we start, though, today, I need to offer you a warning. Friends, this is a very hard and deep passage. In many ways, it's a passage that I thought, well, I'm glad I don't have to preach on that, but I couldn't dodge it today.

It happened. I came upon it and 2 Thessalonians 2 needs to be preached. But I want to urge you to stay with me this morning. You see, this passage is not just idle speculation.

It contains some wonderful truths. They are truths that will encourage and strengthen you for Christian living. So let's get underway and I need to remind you, as we do, about 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

You see, 1 and 2 Thessalonians have a very distinct focus. They just keep popping up to the surface. The Thessalonian Christians are people under persecution. But there apparently is a significant interest among them about the second coming of Christ.

Now, we don't know exactly why that is, but perhaps it's because of persecution. Anyway, Paul decides that he will address it front on. And the things that he says are some, or in what he says, are some things difficult to understand.

[3 : 26] Nevertheless, the main message, I think, of this passage is clear and I hope you'll see it with me this morning. So let's get underway. Let's see what we can find. And by the way, I should say that if you don't usually make use of the outline that I provide, today might be a good day to keep an eye on it.

Of course, if you miss picking it up as you came in, it can't really help you at this point. So, with that in mind, let's take a look at the first two verses of 2 Thessalonians 2.

So open your Bibles, please, have a look at it with me. And in the first verse, Paul tells us what matter he is going to address. He says to them, As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our being gathered together to Him.

In other words, can you see what Paul is saying? He has a dual focus in what he is about to do. He is specifically writing concerning two matters. The first matter is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the technical term he uses for coming in Greek is parousia. And the word literally means presence. It is a term used often to refer to when Christ returns.

[4 : 30] When He returns, He will be fully present to His world. His presence will be fully revealed in His coming. That's the first matter. The second matter you'll see in verse 1 there refers to the gathering of God's people to Christ.

In other words, it talks about this time when God will gather all His dispersed people from all around the world and perhaps even from all of time and He will gather them together in His presence.

And He will gather them in the presence of His Son. So that's the dual focus of this passage. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to Him.

But there's not only that in this passage, there's also a unifying and underlying pastoral concern that Paul has. Look at it in verse 2. Paul is worried that the Thessalonians will be shaken in their mind or alarmed.

That is, they will be shaken in mind or alarmed by the thought that, and it appears as though someone's been teaching this, that the coming of Jesus has already happened. That is, the day of the Lord is already here.

[5 : 35] And by the way, I want you to take a look at the source of this false teaching and where it's come from. Look at verse 2. Paul talks about spirit, word, and letter.

Spirit probably means some sort of prophetic utterance that has happened. Word refers to a spoken word of teaching or exhortation and letter refers to letters that appear to have been written by him but which apparently are not.

Friends, Paul's words here at this very early part of the chapter are salutary. You see, writers, radio preachers, television preachers, church figures, internet preachers, all of them use these devices.

Spirit, word, letter. But not every one of them is authoritative or true. You see, the devil is a very crafty person.

Just because a person occupies, very tentative at this moment, but just because a person occupies a pulpit or speaks or writes with authority does not mean that they are from God.

[6 : 42] Just because they have large congregations does not mean they are from God. Do not simply trust spirit, word, or letter that comes to you. Test it.

Test it according to the teaching of Jesus and his apostles. That is, test it according to scriptural truth. Do not let yourself be disturbed in your faith or deceived in your mind.

This is what Paul wants to say to his people. Test everything. He said it in 1 Thessalonians 5 explicitly, but it's inferred here. For these are dark days. Friends, the devil is at work in these days.

He is seeking to disturb the people of God. So there is Paul's dual focus. There's his pastoral concern. Now I want to show you the central element of this passage.

Come with me. Let me show you what's going on here. And in order to do this, I want you to notice that Paul uses the word coming in relation to two people in this passage. Did you see it? Did you hear it as we read through verse 1?

[7 : 40] It is used in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. But I want you to look down at verse 9. Paul uses the very same word parousia in relation to the second figure.

He talks about the coming, the parousia of the lawless one. And this contrast occurs throughout the passage. Paul is looking at two figures, two leaders, and he's comparing and contrasting them with each other.

And he's saying that each of them has an authority behind them. Each demands obedience. Each has followers. And he's urging us to see and understand and make wise choices concerning them.

And that's what I want to do now. I want to have a look at these two leaders here. I want to look at their names, their characters, their revealings, their followers, and their ends.

You see, these figures are real figures. They represent real choices for us, the people of God. And I want you as your pastor to be well informed about them.

[8 : 40] I want you to make wise choices. So let's get started. Let's have a look at each of these figures. And rather than starting with Jesus, I want to start with the other person mentioned in this text.

And he's introduced to us in verse 3. He has a name. Look at it in verse 3. He is called the lawless one. Now in the original language, he is literally the man of lawlessness.

In other words, he is a human being, a man. And he is what his name says he is. He is a person without law. He is a person who acts outside of God's law.

He's a self-made man who lives only with his own will and way. He is a man who chooses to live outside of any divine constraints. This is our first person, a man of lawlessness.

Now friends, this man of lawlessness, this strange figure, when you read one, two Thessalonians, he is a deliciously ambiguous figure. He is intriguing and we learn lots about him from this passage.

[9 : 43] But I want to stress something with you. I want you to look down at verse 5 and I want you to listen to what it says. Paul is speaking to the original readers and he says, remember some things that I told you when I was with you.

In other words, he talks about previous teaching that he has given. Now you know what?

Unfortunately, we don't have it. We don't have access to it. And so the original readers know something more than us.

That puts us at something of a disadvantage. We don't know. Now we could make educated guesses but in the end, let me stress, we don't know. And so although this man of lawlessness is an intriguing figure, let's not worry about what we don't know and can't know.

If God thought it was important for us to know what Paul had said to the Thessalonians, he would have made sure he incorporated it in Scripture but he hasn't. And we know Scripture is sufficient so we have in Scripture everything that we need.

So rather than speculating as many people do, let's see what it is that God needs us to know. Let's see what he's revealed to us. So we have a name for our alternate leader.

[10 : 52] He is the man of lawlessness. Next thing I want you to notice about him is that he has a revelation and a coming. Look at verse 3. He talks about the lawless one being revealed.

That is, he has a revelation, a revealing. Verses 6 to 8 say the same things. In verse 6, he's revealed when the time comes when that which is restraining him is withdrawn.

There's something that stops him. That's withdrawn and he appears. In verse 8, the lawless one is revealed. Now look at verse 9. Not only does this man of lawlessness have a revelation, but as I indicated before, he has a coming, a parousia, a presence.

And verse 9 says that it will be a coming apparent in the working of Satan who uses all sorts of dramatic events and actions to accompany that coming or power or signs or lying wonders, every kind of wicked deception.

We don't know exactly when this revealing and coming of this lawless one will be. However, verse 3 gives us some indication of the events that will immediately precede his coming. That is, when you see certain things happening, you know he's not far off.

[12 : 02] Look at verse 3. Paul talks about a rebellion coming first. Now the word rebellion here literally means apostasy. In other words, there will be a falling away from, a deserting of true faith.

Such apostasy is spoken about by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24 verses 11 to 13. It's spoken of by Paul in 1 Timothy 4 verse 1. It is a thing characteristic of the times of the end.

It is a time when people will abandon and renounce the faith. They will listen to deceitful spirits, says Paul in 1 Timothy, and the teaching of demons. They will apostatize, leave the faith.

That is, they will rebel against the true faith and abandon the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Now friends, we don't know when the Lord Jesus will return, but we do know what will precede his coming.

It will be preceded by a great apostasy, and this in itself will precede the revealing and the coming of the man of lawlessness. So, we now have his name, we have pinpointers of his revealing and his coming.

[13 : 11] Let's examine the character of this man. Look at verse 4. What is he like? Well, he opposes. He exalts himself above every so-called God or object of worship.

He takes his seat in the temple of God. He declares himself to be God. You see, he's not waiting around or seeking any endorsement. He acts proudly and unilaterally, implicit in his actions and explicitly in his words.

He claims divinity or divine status. He usurps God's place. He usurps God's rule and he does so in alliance with and with the support of Satan.

Friends, the actions of this man of lawlessness are anti-God in their nature. His character is anti-Christ. He is open, defiant, bold and aggressively counterfeit.

But let's look at his end. Look back at verse 3 because right from the beginning Paul has told us what his end will be. This man of lawlessness is one with a predetermined end.

[14 : 19] Paul says he's destined for destruction. And verse 8 gives us a picture of his end. The Lord Jesus will appear in his appearing and will destroy him with the breath of his mouth.

This epiphany or manifestation of Jesus in his coming will just annihilate this evil one. Friends, can you hear what's being said in this passage? This passage is saying that God has a future mapped out for his world and it is a future of destruction for the man of lawlessness.

Now at this point you're asking what I ask. At this point you're saying who exactly is this?

Who is this man? We don't really know. He could be one man. He could be a man from the first century. He could be one of the kings or emperors of that time.

He could even be a representative man since he has so many precursors in the Old Testament. My guess is that we find many humans like him in history. This one may be the climactic version at the end of time.

[15 : 28] He will have his precursors and cohorts though even in our day. And he will have parallels in every day until the final day. But more than that, he and his like will have followers in every age.

Their identity is spelled out in verses 9 and 10. They are those who refuse to love the truth and so be saved. That is, they are those who resist God's truth. They, like their leader, live independently and defiantly and God hands them over to their will.

He sends upon them this powerful delusion that leads them to believe what is false. Their leader was lawless and they themselves take pleasure in unrighteousness. Their fate will be like the fate of their leader.

Verse 10 indicates they are those who will perish. For you cannot, you see, you cannot line up with falsehood and lawlessness and remain in the presence of a true and righteous God.

As chapter 12 indicates, they will be condemned. As chapter 1 indicates, they will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might when He comes to be glorified by His saints and to be marveled at among those who have believed.

[16 : 46] So friends, there's our first leader and the next leader takes a little less time to get through. We know Him. This identity, this second, the second choice, our second leader is named in this passage as well.

Do you notice who He is? He is the Lord, Jesus, the Christ. In other words, He is a human, He is Jesus, but He's not a lawless man.

No, He's both Lord and Christ. And 1st and 2nd Thessalonians speak of Him in glorified terms. He's linked with God in action and in language.

He is the Lord, Jesus, the Christ, God's Messiah. The rest of the New Testament tells us of the first coming of the Lord Jesus.

This passage says He has a second coming and it will be a coming not for salvation, but for judgment. Chapter 1 has already told us this. Chapter 2 has made this clear.

[17 : 45] The coming of the Lord Jesus will be a coming associated with the destruction of falsehood and the annihilation of the man of lawlessness. Deception and false power and signs and lying wonders will be destroyed.

Now this passage doesn't really say much about the character of Jesus, but it does imply some things. Did you notice them? It implies that the character of Jesus will be that of righteous judgment. It will be true.

It will be the opposite of the pretentious falsehoods of the man of lawlessness. Where the rule of the man of lawlessness was false and arrogant, the rule of Christ will be true and just. Where the rule of the man of lawlessness will be without God's authority and usurping of God, the rule of Christ will be with God's authority and under it and with God's power.

God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ will be one in character and action. But now let's turn to his end. There's not much said directly in our passage about the end, but look at verse 14.

Verse 14 speaks about the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now friends, understand this, that is where God is headed. He is headed towards an end where the Lord Jesus Christ is glorified.

[19 : 05] This has been his goal from the very beginning, from before creation itself. Nothing will stop this end. That is where he is going. Finally, friends, I want to close our examination of this passage by looking at verses 13 to 17.

You see, these verses speak of the end of the followers of Jesus. They are those who have not apostatized. They have held fast.

And I want you to look at the language that is used of them. It's magnificent language. Look at verse 13. They are beloved by the Lord. Then he goes on, they are chosen by him.

And then he describes what it is to be chosen. Chosen as first fruits. Chosen for salvation. Chosen through the sanctification by the Spirit. Chosen through belief in the truth.

And all of this choosing, this election by God has a purpose. And the purpose is that through the proclamation of the Gospel they may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[20 : 09] Friends, those who line up with Satan and his cohorts will share his end. But those chosen by God and who line up with his word and purpose in Jesus Christ will share his end.

And so Paul urges and encourages the Thessalonians and he urges and encourages us and he says to us brothers and sisters stand firm. Hold fast to those traditions that you have been taught by Paul and the apostles and the Lord Jesus.

Hold fast to their writings. Hold fast to those who speak their words and be encouraged. You see, God has loved you. He has given you an eternal comfort.

He has laid before you a good and rich hope. May this comfort your hearts in these days of doubt and turmoil and may it fuel and strengthen your resolve.

May it direct you to every good work and encourage you into every good word. Friends, in the closing moments of this talk this morning I want to move to think more about what this means for us.

[21 : 16] I want to start by urging you to know and remember that we live in a world of information. There has never been a generation in this world that has had as much information as we have and this world of information has enormous opportunities for the gospel but it has enormous opportunities to be used by the evil one as well and it is being used by him.

He uses everything at his disposal. He uses all power all sign He uses wonders He uses technology He uses powerful and the eloquent and the technologically savvy but most of all He uses deception. Friends, our passage tells us that it tells us that the evil one deceives. He uses spiritual words. He uses church preachers.

He uses miraculous events, false apostles and lying teachers. Please understand your eternal destiny is bound up with matters of truth.

It is therefore inevitably bound up with the information you receive and reject. And the matters of truth are spelt out for us in God's word.

[22 : 35] And God's word requires diligent study and hard work. Friends, the danger for us as modern Christians is that we refuse to embrace this truth and instead embrace error.

And embracing error, let me tell you, is easy. Especially when it is plausible, powerful and attached to great signs and potent spokespeople.

A sign and a wonder does not guarantee truth. This passage contains a strong word to our age where truth is increasingly relative and personal.

It's what works for you. It is what you think and what you believe and everyone says that's okay, you believe that, you think that. Truth is not like this. Biblical truth is absolute and eternal.

And if we get it wrong, the results can and will be disastrous. The stakes are very high here. So keep your eyes open and your ears attuned.

[23 : 41] Keep your eyes fixed on apostolic truth. Keep your ears attached to those who preach it. Watch yourselves. Watch your preachers.

Be vigilant. And with this in mind, I want to see if I can summarize the message of this passage because, like I said, it is intriguing. But the core of what Paul says is, I think, very easy.

Let me go through it. I've got five points. First, the coming of Jesus is certain. The coming of Jesus is certain. Two, the time preceding his coming will be a tough time.

And these tough times will involve some powerful anti-Christian individuals and anti-God forces. So the coming of Jesus is certain. It will be preceded by tough times with powerful figures.

Third, if you are a Christian, then you are chosen, called, and destined for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 44] If you're a Christian, you are chosen, called, and destined for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Fourth, therefore stand firm in this.

And how do you do that? By holding fast to scriptural truth. And fifth, while you're standing firm, be encouraged by God's love for you, by his grace toward you, by the hope he lays out for you, by his purpose in Christ, and by the great comfort he has given us.

And be strengthened for every good work and word. In other words, let God's encouragement stir you to live good Christian lives. and let God's encouragement stir you to speak good Christian words into the world.

With that in mind, I just want to finish up by a word of encouragement. Friends in Christ, this passage is tantalizing and interesting and stimulating and has had lots of ink spilled over it.

Rejoice in it. However, I want to urge you today not to get too engrossed or too worried by it. Constantly remind yourself and others of the essentials.

[26 : 04] See, not even the Lord Jesus in his human existence knew the details of the end of time and you're not going to either. So let's get straight what is going to happen.

And let's get straight that the best place to be is believing in Jesus and lining up with him. And having decided that, let's get on with living the Christian life.

Do it in your families, in your workplace, in your clubs and societies. Do it in your illness and do it in your health. And get on with not just living the Christian life but hoping the Christian hope.

Don't be afraid to set your eyes on the glory that is to be revealed. That's what the Christian life is about. One Thessalonian said it's about waiting for God's Son from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

So live the Christian life, hope the Christian hope and speak Christian truth. Friends, our world needs people who stand firm and hold fast to the traditions outlined in scripture.

[27 : 11] But it also needs people who are willing to speak these truths into the world. So go into the world today doing these things. Live the Christian life.

hope the Christian hope and speak Christian truth. And may the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the God and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for that the future that you have mapped out for your world is secure in Christ.

Thank you that if we are believers in Jesus, then we are secure in him as well and therefore our future is mapped out. Help us in the world that we live in daily to live the Christian life, to do good works, to hope the Christian hope, to look forward to the coming of Jesus and to speak Christian truth.

Please help us in this, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.