

## “The Man of Lawlessness” – 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Jesus is coming again!

He came the first time as a suffering servant. He lived a perfect, sinless human life, then sacrificed His life on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He died, was buried, and rose on the third day. He sits now at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us. But He will return. And next time, it will be as a conquering King, exacting awful vengeance on His enemies but gathering His elect to Himself. We will be with Him forever. It is our blessed hope.

Christians have been looking forward to His return for 2,000 years. We should be looking forward to it. Peter, speaking of the Day of the Lord and the coming judgment writes:

*Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God**, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? (2 Peter 3:11-12)*

Yes, we should look forward to the coming of the Lord with anxious anticipation, but we should not obsess about it to the point that it distracts us from what Jesus left us here to do. That, my friends, has been a consistent problem over the entire history of Christianity. Evil people, under the enemy’s control, have used our desire for Jesus’ return to gain undue power and influence over Christians. Write a book that claims to have the Day of the Lord all figured out, and it is almost a guaranteed best seller. But perhaps the biggest problem is that people can be led so far astray by false-prophets who claim to have a special understanding of this. Jesus warned us!

*For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. (Matthew 24:24-25)*

It was a problem in Thessalonica, too and Paul wrote this second letter to correct the problem.

We need to make sure we are not so distracted. John wrote:

*Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)*

Let’s see what Paul has to say about the Man of Lawlessness. He begins by identifying the source of the problem.

*Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him (2 Thessalonians 2:1a)*

This refers back to something Paul wrote in his first letter.

*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)*

This has often been called the rapture of the Church. I prefer to call it the resurrection of the elect because if we are going to spend eternity with Jesus in the New Heaven and New Earth, we’re going to need new bodies. We’re going to need resurrected bodies,

bodies that are perfectly adapted to the eternal environment, bodies that won't be subject to disease, bodies that won't die. And best of all, bodies that will never sin.

So, for those who die in the Lord, they will be resurrected from the grave with these transformed bodies. For those who are still alive when Jesus returns, there will be an instant death and resurrection. But we will all meet the Lord in the air and we are to comfort one another with this awesome promise.

I'm sure this teaching comforted the Thessalonians, but it seems that they were losing their heads over it. They were shaken up. They were troubled. So, Paul exhorts them:

*... we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2)*

It seems that there were those among them who were teaching that the Day of the Lord had already arrived. In fact, there might even have been a forged letter, allegedly coming from Paul, that said the same. Paul didn't write anything like that, but false teachers are notorious for playing fast and loose with the facts. Repeat a lie often enough, it seems, and folks begin to believe it. In Thessalonica, it had gotten so bad that some people had stopped working all together. Later in the letter, Paul got really direct about these slackers:

*If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. (2 Thessalonians 3:10)*

There you go!

So, Paul sets out to correct the misunderstanding. The Day of the Lord had not yet arrived. And today, in our time, the Day of the Lord still hasn't arrived. Yes, we are in the end times, there are certain things that must happen first.

*Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4)*

Okay, two things have to happen before Jesus returns. First, there will be a great apostasy, a falling away. Secondly, the man of sin must be revealed. Let's first take a quick look at the Great Apostasy.

There are many people who claim to be Christians. Conduct a poll in the United States, and you will find somewhere around 68% of the respondents will identify as Christian. Of course, most of those never darken the doorway of a church. Most of them have no idea what the Bible really teaches. Most of them do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

But even among practicing Christians, there are tares among the wheat. Many call Jesus Lord, but refuse to do what He says. Don't misunderstand, you are not saved because of your obedience, but if you truly are saved, you will want to follow your Lord.

*My sheep hear My voice, [says Jesus] and I know them, **and they follow Me.** And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:27-28)*

So, if you truly belong to Jesus, you are absolutely secure. But sadly, there are a lot of fake Christians out there. They aren't secure at all. Listen to the word of the Lord:

*Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (Matthew 24:11-13)*

Apostasy! A great falling away! The Lord is shaking the fence, and many will fall off on the wrong side. You need to endure to the end, to cling to the truth.

But now, let's talk about this man of lawlessness; this man of sin. This movement of apostasy will coalesce around a leader. I strongly believe he will lead a false world religion that masquerades as true Christianity and this leader will oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped. He will sit in the Temple of God, showing himself that he is god.

Now, what does that mean? Some believe that the Jerusalem Temple must be rebuilt so the antichrist can reside there. However, in the New Testament, the Temple of God refers to the Church. It refers to believers.

*Or do you not know that **your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit** who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:19)*

My view is that this individual will be the head of a false Christian church and he will demand the sort of worship that must only be given to the one true God, the one true Christ.

This is nothing new. It wasn't even a new teaching for the First Century Thessalonians.

*Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? (2 Thessalonians 2:5)*

Many of the features in Paul's description of this great and final prince of wickedness come from the Book of Daniel. Jesus spoke of the abomination of desolation. And later, as we've already seen, John gives him the title of antichrist. Anti, here, means in place of. So, we are talking about a false Christ, one who pretends to be God the Son. It is so easy for us to get distracted!

*And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7)*

This is a difficult passage, especially since it begins with the words "and now you know". Apparently, this refers to something Paul already had taught the Thessalonians. They knew who or what this restrainer is. For us, it's not quite so clear. Some believe it is the Church, or the Holy Spirit operating through the Church. Some believe it is the rule of law, executed through secular government. The fact that Paul refers to the restrainer as a He, might indicate the Holy Spirit, but it could also refer to a secular king. Whoever the restrainer is, he is still doing his work, and as a result, the final Antichrist is still a mystery.

But even though the antichrist has not yet been revealed, notice that the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. John says exactly the same thing:

*Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)*

If you look into the Greek word translated Antichrist, you will find that it really means "a substitute Christ", someone who puts himself or his doctrine in the place of the real Messiah. And here's the shocker:

*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 John 2:19)*

John is saying that these antichrists came out of the visible Church. They had infiltrated the Church and were spreading a false gospel. I believe the final Antichrist will try to do the same thing. But he will not prevail against the true Church of Jesus Christ. The gates of hell can never prevail over Jesus or His Church.

*And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. (2 Thessalonians 2:8)*

It is not going to take long for Jesus to destroy the Antichrist after he has been revealed. The Lord will consume him with the breath of His mouth. The Lord will destroy Him with the brightness of His coming.

But what of the saints? Won't the Antichrist make war against those of us who cling to Jesus? Yes, he will and by the power of Satan. But don't worry about it.

*Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Revelation 12:10-11)*

Three things we need to overcome Satan and his counterfeit Christ. First, you need the blood of the Lamb. You need to be saved. Are you washed in His blood? Have you accepted His atoning sacrifice? Have you been redeemed?

Secondly, we need the word of our testimony. We must never deny our Savior!

*For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels. (Luke 9:26)*

Cling to your testimony: "Jesus is my Lord!" Remind yourself every day. Say it out loud: "Jesus is my Lord and my God!"

Finally, we must not love our lives to the death. We cannot place our hope in the life we live right now. The life you are living now will come to an end, sooner or later. It is appointed for a man to die once. Are you prepared for death? Are you ready to even face martyrdom if it is God's will? Our eternal life is found in Jesus, and that is the one that matters.

If you hear Jesus' voice and cling to His promise, you have nothing to worry about. It might get uncomfortable for a while, but nobody is able to snatch you out of Jesus' hand. But for those who reject the truth, the end will be absolutely, horrifically tragic.

*The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10)*

Whoever the final antichrist is, his message will be extremely seductive to those who did not receive the love of the truth. He will not appear as some malevolent dictator to those who refuse salvation by Jesus Christ alone. He is coming in the power of Satan. He will

produce signs and lying wonders. He will deceive those who are perishing. And all that would be bad enough, but look at verse 11:

*And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12)*

It's bad enough to have Satan and his minions lined up against you. What chance do you have against Almighty God?

Please do not reject the truth. The truth is, you are a sinner, guilty of treason against the Sovereign of the universe. The truth is, your sin has earned you a wage of eternal death, eternal suffering in the pit of hell. The truth is, God loves you anyway and provided an escape. The truth is, Jesus Christ came to earth and lived a perfect, sinless life. Then He sacrificed that life on the cross to pay for your sins. He was raised on the third day and ascended into heaven. And if you will only believe, trust Jesus alone for your salvation, you enter into His eternal kingdom. If you will call on the name of the Lord, you will not be deceived.

*... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)*

Trust Jesus. Cling to His promises, which are recorded in your Bible. Then the man of lawlessness will never be able to deceive you.

Finally, I want to exhort you to stay focused. For 2,000 years, Christians have speculated about who this man of sin, this antichrist is. For 2,000 years, Christians have been trying to puzzle out the details of when and how Jesus would return as our conquering King. The Apostles certainly wanted to know. Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, they asked Him a question:

*Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)*

Inquiring minds want to know! But what was Jesus' answer?

*And He said to them, "It is **not for you to know** times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:7-8)*

Don't worry about the Day of the Lord; Jesus has that all worked out. Stay focused. Until He comes, let us be His witnesses to this dark and darkening world. We live, after all, just about as far away from Jerusalem as you can get. We are to be His witnesses to the very end of the earth.