

Keeping Your Head in the Last Days

2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

“Now, dear brothers and sisters, let us clarify some things about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we will be gathered to meet him. ² Don’t be so easily shaken or alarmed by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Don’t believe them, even if they claim to have had a spiritual vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us. ³ Don’t be fooled by what they say. For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion against God and the man of lawlessness is revealed—the one who brings destruction.⁴ He will exalt himself and defy everything that people call god and every object of worship. He will even sit in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God. ⁵ Don’t you remember that I told you about all this when I was with you? ⁶ And you know what is holding him back, for he can be revealed only when his time comes. ⁷ For this lawlessness is already at work secretly, and it will remain secret until the one who is holding it back steps out of the way. ⁸ Then the man of lawlessness will be revealed, but the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by the splendor of his coming. ⁹ This man will come to do the work of Satan with counterfeit power and signs and miracles. ¹⁰ He will use every kind of evil deception to fool those on their way to destruction, because they refuse to love and accept the truth that would save them. ¹¹ So God will cause them to be greatly deceived, and they will believe these lies.¹² Then they will be condemned for enjoying evil rather than believing the truth. ¹³ As for us, we can’t help but thank God for you, dear brothers and sisters loved by the Lord. We are always thankful that God chose you to be

among the first to experience salvation—a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy and through your belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to salvation when we told you the Good News; now you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ With all these things in mind, dear brothers and sisters, stand firm and keep a strong grip on the teaching we passed on to you both in person and by letter. ¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope, ¹⁷ comfort you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say.”

After 14 years of studying the Bible, William Miller became convinced that Christ would return in 1843. When Miller announced April 3 as the day, some disciples went to mountaintops, hoping for a head start to heaven. Others were in graveyards, planning to ascend in reunion with their departed loved ones. **Philadelphia society ladies clustered together outside town to avoid entering God’s kingdom amid the common herd.** When April 4 dawned as usual the Millerites were disillusioned, but they took heart. Their leader had predicted a range of dates for Christ’s return. **They still had until March 21, 1844.** The devout continued to make ready, but again they were disappointed. **A third date - October 22, 1844 was set, but it also passed.** Many people were swayed and confused by these end time teachings, and ultimately many turned not only from faith in those predictions but also from faith in Jesus. This is a big part of the reason that we need to have a good foundation of what the Bible teaches about the end times and a firm grasp upon our faith.

In our text tonight's Paul writes to a church that has become confused once again about the end times and he writes to set them straight.

The question for us is "How do we avoid confusion in the midst of the last days?" In tonight's study, we are going to look at three simple, yet important, things to guard against.

The first thing that we need to guard against is, we must not be dismayed. Paul says this in verses 1-2, "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come."

Apparently the church at Thessalonica, or some members of it, has become dismayed because a rumor has circulated that the "Day of the Lord" has come and gone and they had missed it. Paul seems to suggest that a letter or a report has falsely been sent in Paul's name. Paul says, "Remain calm. That's not true."

The job of the enemy of our souls is to preserve disorder in the church; over the years one of his favorite methods is causing confusion about the end times.

Granted, because of all the preaching and teaching on this subject, the subject of the Second Coming of Christ can get a little confusing at times. For example, there are some bible teachers that believe in the Post-millennialism theory of the Second Coming of Christ. This theory holds that the

church will continue on the earth until the until the Return of Christ at the end of this present age, at which time the church will be caught up into the clouds to meet the Lord who has come into the air. That is, the Rapture of the church and the Return of Christ will take place at the very same time, and conversely, the church will go through the tribulation and then experience the millennial reign of Christ.

Then there are those bible preachers and teachers that hold to the theory of *A-millennialism*. This theory holds that there will be no millennial reign of Christ at all. That is, they believe that every one will be raptured at the same time and will all stand at a “General Judgment” before the Lord.

And then there are those bible preachers and teachers that hold to the theory of *Pre-millennialism*. This theory holds that Jesus will rapture the church; there will be a seven-year tribulation period, followed by the millennial reign of Christ on the earth, which will be followed by the Eternal State.

So here is the bottom line – regardless of the correct theological interpretation concerning the Second Coming of Christ, you are not going to “miss” the Lord’s return if you’re trusting in Jesus - you don’t have to wonder about that. Your salvation is based upon what Christ did and the fact that you are trusting in Him. The Day of the Lord isn’t going to come secretly and all of a sudden you realize that you have missed it.

So the first thing that I want to say to you is this - with regard to the Lords return and specifically with regard to teaching about it don't be dismayed.

The second thing that we need to guard against is, we need to be careful that we are not *deceived*. Paul put it this way in verses 3-12, “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. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 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. 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. 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. 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.” **In past studies, I have given you, who I believe will be the antichrist, but tonight, I really want to give you a different slant on this whole matter (as you have seen from the presentation of the three major views concerning the theological views of the Second Coming). There are some things that we simply do not have to wonder about.**

First of all, we know that the forces of evil are at work in our world today. Paul says in verses 6-7, “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...” The King James Version says, “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work...”

Now we need to be careful right here, because Paul is not saying that the Antichrist is already here, he is simply saying that the attitude of lawlessness and rebellion that marks the work of Antichrist is already at work in our world today. And I don't think there is a person on the face of this earth that can deny that fact.

Let me give you some of the latest statistics:

* More than 44 million Christians have been killed for their faith since the crucifixion of Jesus.

* It's been estimated that more Christians have been martyred in the 21st Century than in all the prior 1,900 years combined.

* There have been more than 26 million documented cases of martyrdom in this century alone.

* More than 200 million Christians in over 60 nations face persecution each day, 60% of these are children.

- 150,000 to 165,000 are martyred each year.

Christians today are the most persecuted group in the

world. Persecution is on the rise because of Communism, the expansion of Islamic and Hindu extremism, and because of the anti-Christ spirit that is prevalent throughout the world.

Of the world's over six billion people: 151 million claim to be atheists, 2 billion are Christians, 1.2 billion are Muslims, 786 million are Hindus and 362 million are Buddhists.

Literally hundreds of thousands of people today are being killed, brutalized, sold as slaves, imprisoned, tortured, threatened, discriminated against and arrested solely because they are Christians.

1 Peter 4:12-16 has given us this warning, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you, but rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. If any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.” **Jesus said this in John 15:20,** "Remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

The truth of the matter is that Christian persecution can be traced all the way back to Christianity's beginnings. **Jesus Christ himself was martyred on the cross.** **Eleven of the twelve apostles were martyred for their faith.** **John was the only**

apostle who died a natural death. The Early Church faced widespread persecution with Stephen being the first Christian martyr.

Therefore, it is a fact that the attitude of lawlessness and rebellion is at work in our world today.

Second, we know that the *restraining power* that is now hindering Satan from having his way in today's world is a "He." Look again at verse 7, "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." It is evident that whoever this person is, he must be stronger than the devil, for it is Satan that is being restrained.

With that thought in mind, look with me at 1 John 4:4 where we have been told, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." **In this present age, God in His sovereignty is holding back the power of the Satan, and restraining him from doing all that he wants to do.** As bad as the world is, it is not as bad as it could be. As evil as man is, he is not as evil as he could be. But one of these days, God is going to remove that *restraining power* and allow Satan to have the fullness of power and authority on this earth.

But when is this going to take place? The Holy Spirit was given to the Church on the day of Pentecost, and when the Church is translated, or Raptured, the Spirit's restraining ministry will be completed, and therefore will cease. Therefore, "the day of the Lord" will not fully come until

the church is taken out of this world, and the restraining power of the Holy Spirit is removed!

Now what does this mean about the man of lawlessness and a rebellion before the day of the Lord? In our last study we looked at “The Great Apostasy.” In that study we looked at the apostasy of belief and the apostasy of behavior. And we concluded that one’s behavior is directly related to their belief.

Last of all; look at the *man of sin*. In the past, I have taught from my personal perspective, but in this study I want to give you an opportunity to look in a couple of directions.

When it comes to the identity of “the man of sin, the son of perdition,” there is much controversy among theologians.

Some believe that the antichrist is an evil dictator that will rule the earth during the tribulation, which will occur before the Lord returns for His church.

Others believe the church will go through the first 3 1/2 years of the tribulation before it is raptured, and then the antichrist will be revealed and a time of great suffering and a time of rebellion will take place before the Lord return in the Second Advent (Second Coming).

Still others believe that the Lord is going to rapture His church immediately prior to the tribulation period; the antichrist will become a world leader, will sign a counterfeit *Peace Treaty* with Israel and operate under-cover for the

first 3 ½ years of the tribulation period. He will then reveal himself for who he really is, break his treaty with Israel and it is during this last 3 ½ years God will unleash the force of suffering referred in prophecy as “**the time of Jacob’s trouble**” or “**the great tribulation.**” After these seven years, Christ will then return to establish His millennial reign on the earth prior to establishing the *Eternal State*. Those who believe this distinguish between the rapture and the second coming (Day of the Lord).

And, as you might know, I am one who believes the latter.

And, very quickly, the last thing that we should guard against is that we must not be distracted. Paul says this in verses 13-15, “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.”

In other words, do not become so distracted by thinking, studying, waiting on, the return of Christ that you forget the purpose for which you were saved. There is a world of lost people just outside the walls of this church that need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.