

Studies in 2 Thessalonians-02 2 Thes 1:6-2:5

by William MacDonald

The sermon discusses the righteous judgment of God, the coming of Christ, and the apostasy that must occur before the day of the Lord.

Duration: 36:57

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 1:6

Topics: "Studies"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of living as children of God and being a witness to others. He shares a story about a man named Bert Graves who stood out to his friend because of his different character. This led to Bert sharing his faith and leading his friend to the Lord. The preacher also discusses the current state of weak governments in the world and how this sets the stage for the rise of a strong leader. He warns that apostasy is taking place and that people are becoming increasingly hostile towards Christianity. The sermon concludes with a prayer for compassion and a plea to share the life-giving word of God with others.

Transcript

Shall we turn in our Bibles once again to 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1? That's where we left off last week, 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1. And I think we'll begin reading at verse 6 and read on into chapter 2. 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1, verse 6. Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled, rest with us when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, because our testimony among you once believed, in that day. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is now at hand.

Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not that when I was yet with you, I told you these things." The Thessalonian believers had been going through persecution for the namesake of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in this chapter, Paul is showing that the courageous, brave way in which they endured persecution for Christ demonstrated their fitness to reign with Christ when he comes back again to the earth. Also, the persecutors will be punished.

It demonstrates their fitness for punishment. What was going on in Thessalonica demonstrated the fitness of the persecuted to reign with Christ, and of the persecutors to be punished, and that's what Paul is saying in verse 6. It's a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you that are troubled, rest, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angel in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice, first of all, here there are only two classes of people, the believers and the unbelievers, the saved and the lost.

It's like that in every age of the world's history. There are only two classes of people. Some people think they're too good for hell, and not quite good enough for heaven.

The Bible doesn't know anything of such a distinction. The Bible draws the picture in black and white that a man is either in Christ, out of his sin, and on the way to heaven, or he's out of Christ, in his sin, and on the way to hell. Now, for you who are serious students of the word of God, there's an interesting little problem in this chapter that I'd like to give to you today.

It says, in the verses I just read, that the persecuted Thessalonians will get rest when the Lord Jesus comes back again, and that their persecutors will suffer vengeance when the Lord Jesus comes back again. But, haven't the Thessalonians already entered into rest? Those people who were persecuted died many years ago, and when they died, they went home to be with the Lord, and they received their resting today, faced in the arms of Jesus. And, as for their persecutors, well, they passed off the scene, and we know from the word of God today that they are in Hades, with the rich man and all other unbelievers.

In Hades, it says, he lifts up his eyes, being informant. And yet, this passage of Scripture I read to you this morning seems to indicate that, in some way, the Thessalonians will get rest when Jesus comes back to reign, and those who persecuted them will suffer vengeance when Jesus comes back to reign. That would be something interesting for you to talk about over the dinner table today.

I would just like to suggest to you that the coming of Christ back to the earth is going to be a time of manifestation. If you look at the scene today, you'd think, well, Christians get the worst of it, and the ungodly get the best of it. It might seem that way today, but when the Lord Jesus comes back to the earth again, things are going to be shown in their true light.

And, at that time, it will be shown that the Thessalonians were right, and that those who persecuted them were wrong. That's what this passage of Scripture is really speaking. Now, we mentioned last time that these people who persecuted the Thessalonians will be punished away from the presence of the Lord with everlasting destruction when he comes to be glorified in his face.

And that's really where we take up today. I'd just like to say this before we go on to verse 10. We were thinking last Sunday about the coming of the Lord.

After I got home from the meeting Sunday night, I turned on KCBS, and there's a program. I forget the name of it. It's called something like Religion in America or something like that.

And it told a most interesting thing that some of the rabbis, at least two rabbis in Israel, have had dreams lately that the Messiah would come in 1980. If I get my facts right, I think one of them even pinpointed it at April 1980. And the son of one of the rabbis said that his father had put aside white garments to wear when the Messiah comes.

The same broadcast said that a rabbi in this country sent word to Israel that the Jews should gather there at the Western Wall and pray for peace because war was coming. And it said on the broadcast that the Jewish people don't particularly look forward to the coming of the Messiah because they believe before he comes, there has to be a great war known as Armageddon. And that an army will march down from the north, headed by a man named Gog from the land of Magog.

And, of course, they get this. It is Egypt. And they said, undoubtedly, the land of Magog is the land of Russia.

It was most interesting to me to hear on a secular news broadcast that Orthodox Jewish rabbis are thinking in terms of the near coming of the Messiah. What, of course, it really means is that Israel today is getting ready for the coming not of the Lord Jesus, but of the Antichrist. The Savior said when he was on earth, I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not.

Another will come in his own name, him ye will receive. And so we know that a great leader will arise upon the scene and claim to be God, as we see in chapter 2 of this epistle. And Israel, as a nation, will accept him as the Messiah, long coming in his own name.

In the meantime, the rabbis are having dreams the Messiah is about to come. For us, of course, it means that the rapture of the church is probably far closer than most of us realize. We believe that before the Lord Jesus comes in power and great glory back to the earth, the Savior will come and rapture his church home to be with himself.

Then we'll follow that period on earth known as the Tribulation Period. Now, if we could just go back to verse 10 in our chapter for this morning. It says, When he shall come to be glorified in his saints.

I'd like you to notice that, to be glorified in his saints. If you read that carefully, carelessly, you might read it glorified by his saints. That isn't what it says, it says glorified in his saints.

And that's a wonderful thing. The Lord Jesus Christ is going to come back to this earth in power and great glory, and he will be glorified in his saints. And that's very wonderful when you think of the raw materials which he had to work with, and to be admired in all them that believe.

And a wondering universe will look on and say, yeah, those despised Christians were right after all. They endured shame for the namesake of Christ, and it seemed that the waves were against them. But we see now that they were right after all.

Now, you'll notice in that verse there's a parenthesis there. It says, Because our testimony among you was believed. I'm ready to have to supply some words to complete the meaning here.

Let me read it to you, and perhaps give you the thought. It says, When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, and that includes you Thessalonian believers, because our testimony among you was believed. Do you get it? When he says, to be admired in all them that believe, he wants to include the Thessalonians.

That includes you, too, because our testimony among you was believed. In other words, Paul came in and preached the gospel of the grace of God to the Thessalonians, and they responded and were saved, and that secured their eternal destiny, and now Christ is going to be admired in all of them, including the Thessalonians, when he comes. The expression, in that day, refers back to when he shall come.

When he shall come in that day. So, Paul now says, Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness in the work of faith with power. Notice Paul's consistent prayer life.

I think if most of us who are Christians were honest, we'd have to admit that prayer is probably one of the weakest links in our chain, probably one of the most important things in the Christian life. But, so many people have said to me lately, Why is it so hard to pray? It's not hard to go to a basketball game, is it? It's not hard to watch the television, is it? Why is it so hard to pray? Of course, the answer is because prayer is a spiritual exercise, and the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. And, most of us would rather do almost anything than pray.

But, Paul had a consistent prayer life, and when he prayed, he prayed for the Thessalonians, his children in the faith, that God would count them worthy of their calling. By the grace of God, they had been called to be saints. And now, Paul says, I pray that you'll go out in an everyday life, live as those who are saints of God.

Live saintly lives, and thus be worthy of your calling. I say again what I said last Lord's Day. None of us is worthy in himself.

We have no worthiness in us. All our worthiness for heaven is in the Lord Jesus Christ. But, that's not the thought here.

The thought here is that we can walk worthy of our calling. We can walk as children of God, so that when men see us and come to know us, they say something different about that person. During the Second World War, when we were in Honolulu, some of the Christian fellows used to spend time playing basketball.

And, one of our friends, Burt Graves, was a very good basketeer. And, there was a fellow named Dick Kegler, who used to go out to shoot baskets with them. And, he watched those other fellows.

And, one day he came up to Burt Graves, and he said to him, Burt, you're different. You have something I don't have. I don't know what it is, but I want it.

That night, Burt led Dick to the Lord. I'm glad to say there are quotes going on for Christ today. Burt was walking worthy of his calling.

Dick took knowledge of it, and through it he came to know the Lord Jesus himself. It says that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him according to the grace of our God, the Lord Jesus Christ. It's an amazing thing that creatures like us should ever be able to bring glory to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, isn't it? You know, who are we, anyway? That's what this passage is saying, that the Lord Jesus can be glorified by lives of holiness, and separation, and purity.

In a world where all around we have degradation, and filth, and shame. Now, we'll just press on to the second chapter for a while this morning, and by way of introduction, I'd like to say this. The saints in Thessalonica were suffering persecution so severely that they thought they were in the tribulation period.

They had known that there was going to be a time, a seven-year period of time known as the tribulation period, when God would pour out his wrath upon the world. We believe that, too. But they were suffering so intensely that they thought they were already in it, and they were in that part of the day of the Lord known as the tribulation period.

But they weren't. Mind you, I often think that if I had been a Jew living during the second world war, I probably would have thought I was in the day of the Lord, too. But it wasn't.

This is a day of suffering and trial such as the world has never known, or ever will know thereafter. And it takes place right after the rapture. After the church is taken home to heaven, then follows this period on earth, the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy known as the tribulation period.

And Paul is going to correct their mistaken notion in this chapter. Now, I'd just like to say, too, by way of introduction, that there are two readings here that are more accurate in some of the newer versions of the Bible. Maybe you noticed that when I read, I read in verse 2, the day of the Lord, not the day of Christ.

The day of Christ refers more to the rapture and to the judgment seat of Christ, which follows it. The day of the Lord is a period of time characterized by judgment. When you think of the day of the Lord, do not think of a 24-hour period, because it's not that.

The day of the Lord is a period of time characterized by judgment on God's foes and by triumph for the Lord. And it begins with the tribulation period, seven years. It includes the second coming of Christ, his coming back to the earth.

It includes the millennial period that follows, Christ's thousand-year reign on earth, and it closes with the destruction of the heavens and earth by fire. So, it's quite an extended period of time. It lasts at least a thousand and seven years, the day of the Lord.

But when that expression, the day of the Lord, is used here in chapter 2, it's referring especially to that beginning of the day of the Lord, the tribulation period. Okay, that's the first thing to keep in mind. The second correction here is, it says here as if the day of the Lord is at hand.

Better, now, present. They didn't think that the day of the Lord was coming soon. They thought they were already in it.

That's what Paul is going to correct. Okay, he says, Now we beseech you, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him. And that's the rapture he's speaking of up there.

He says to them, Dear brothers, I appeal to you on the basis of the rapture that you shouldn't think that you're in the day of the Lord. You see, the believers wouldn't go through the day of the Lord, because before that event, Christ would come and take them out of the world. So, when Paul uses the expression in verse 1, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him, he's not referring to Christ coming to reign there, but he's referring to our going up to meet him in the air, and to be forever with the Lord.

That's what Paul elsewhere refers to. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep.

We shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the last trumpet. The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. He also refers to it in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 13 through 18, and John refers to it in his gospel, John 14, verses 1 through 6. The rapture by the young.

You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you.

I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself. So, what Paul is saying here in 2 Thessalonians 2, is don't think you're in the day of the Lord. Before that day comes, you'll be taken out and gathered home to be with the Lord.

So, that's what he goes on to say in verse 2, to the end, that you be not soon shaken from your mind, nor be troubled. Now, there were certain rumors going around, certain stories going around, attributing this false notion to Paul. He says, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle, as from some said, look, a spirit being appeared to Paul and gave him a special revelation.

Paul said, don't believe it. Others said, Paul got up and actually taught this. Those are the words of Paul.

Paul said, don't believe it. And, apparently, there was even a forged letter. It says, a letter as from us.

Apparently, there was a letter circulating, signed, presumably, by Paul, saying that this was true. Paul says, don't believe it. Don't believe what? That the day of the Lord is now present.

That they were already in the day of the Lord. That the tribulation period had started. Paul says, let no man deceive you by any means.

That is, in any way, don't let anyone deceive you. Now, what? Because before the day of the Lord begins, certain things are going to happen. And he specifies two things here that are going to happen God pours out the vials of his judgment upon this Christ-rejecting earth.

Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first. That's the first thing that has to happen. A falling away first.

The word there is the word that we get our word apostasy from. Apostasy. And what this teaches is that there is going to be a worldwide apostasy from the faith.

I couldn't help thinking of this verse the other night when we were in a prayer meeting, Friday night, a missionary prayer meeting, and we had a report from the land of Albania. Albania has proclaimed itself the first 100% atheistical country in the world. I can't say, standing here this morning, that there are no

believers in Albania, but I can say we don't know of any.

That's rather searching, isn't it? And, of course, the communist countries have done all in their power to drive out Christianity, although not successful. But you can see things happening in the world today. If you go to England, for instance, today, they have these great cathedrals all over the country, and you go there on a Sunday morning, don't be startled if you find 12 people, those are people.

The little man comes out with all his vestments, and all his ritual, and all his liturgy, and he goes through the motions as if there were 12,000 there. But there aren't. There are 12 or less people in the audience.

England, a country that years ago sent so many missionaries to the foreign fields, a citadel for the faith, but it isn't today, believe me. And it's happening in the United States, too. Let's not deceive ourselves.

And we can see the seeds of the apostasy taking place around us in the world today. And this has to take place before the day of the Lord begins. Actually, in our country, I see it in the sense that people are becoming increasingly violent against Christianity and against the mention of the name of the Lord.

Men in this country are no longer lovers of goodness. For instance, if you were to take the goat on the trail in behalf of righteousness and morality, you'd bring down a heap of abuse upon your head. Men are not lovers of goodness.

And although we do have a show of religion in this country, the fact of the matter is there's very little real Christianity. Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day will not come except there come a falling away first. That's the apostasy.

And that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. Before the day of the Lord comes, there's going to be the apostasy, and there's going to be the revelation of the Antichrist, the man of sin here, the son of perdition. The expression, the man of sin, describes his character.

The expression, the son of perdition, describes his destiny. As to his character, he's a man of sin. What does that mean? Well, to me it says that he's a very embodiment of sin.

The expression, man of sin, is the opposite of the expression, man of God. When you think of a man of God, you think of a man with God-like quality. When you think of a man of sin, you think of a man who is a very embodiment of sin, a very incarnation of sin, a man of extreme wickedness, iniquity, and all the rest.

That's what the Antichrist, of course, is going to be like. He comes with a religious flavor, as it were, but he is the man of sin. The man of sin be revealed.

Now, it's rather interesting. He could be in the world today, but he just hasn't been manifested. The man of sin could be a little boy, for instance, in Israel today, or somewhere else in the world.

But, before the day of the Lord comes, he will be manifested to the world as such. And, really, the world is getting ready for such a ruler. There's no question about it.

In most countries of the world today, we have very weak governments. You've noticed that, haven't you? Very weak governments. And the world is getting prepared more and more for the strong man who will take the reins of power and wield them with force.

Now, notice what it says about him. Or, I should say, the son of perdition. He's destined, of course, to destruction.

He's not going to be victorious in his plans, but he will be allowed to operate for a while. First of all, it says he opposes and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. Now, first of all, he opposes.

He opposes the true and living God. He's anti-God, and he's anti-Christ. And then it says he exalts himself over everything that's called God.

He not only attacks the truth of the true God, but he puts himself in the place of God, and demands worship as such, that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. And so we believe that in a coming day, and maybe very soon, a temple will be rebuilt in the city of Jerusalem, and that this man of sins will set up his feet in that temple in Jerusalem. Say, how soon could that take place? I don't know.

The Jewish people know that the site of the temple is now occupied by a Muslim shrine called the Dome of the Rock. It's the one part of the city of Jerusalem that the Jewish people want more than any other. The Dome of the Rock, but they can't get it.

And they know that if they were to seize it by power, they would start a holy war involving at least 60 million Muslims. That's quite a force against Israel's population. So, many Orthodox Jews in Israel today are praying for an earthquake that will destroy the site of the Dome of the Rock, so that the preparations for the temple can proceed.

And don't think they're not looking forward to that, because they certainly are the Orthodox Jews, not the Jewish people in general. So that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. I should just say there, the Lord Jesus could come for his church tonight, but there's no temple in Jerusalem.

So that means that the day of the Lord doesn't necessarily start with split-second precision right after the rapture. Oftentimes, we have transitional periods between dispensations, don't we? Things don't always happen in God's timetable with split-second accuracy, and so we believe that if the Lord Jesus comes today for the church, there'll be a period of time during which that temple will be rebuilt, and then the man of sin will be revealed. So, he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

And, of course, he'll be able to get people to believe this, because he's going to be able to perform miracles. He'll cause an image, for instance, an idolatrous image to speak. People will probably see it on their television.

They'll say, well, he must be of God, because we saw that miracle with our own eyes, which is a reminder to us that not all miracles are necessarily of God. The devil can perform miracles. That's why John reminds us to discern the spirits to see whether they're of God or not.

The miracles that the Lord Jesus performed were miracles that no other man ever performed, and they were the miracles that were prophesied of the Messiah in the Old Testament. That's why miracles were the credentials of the Lord Jesus, because they were the very miracles that were prophesied of the Messiah in the Old Testament. The Scripture says that in a coming day, men will come before the Lord and say, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name cast out demons, and in thy

name done many mighty works.

And then will I say to them, apart from being workers of iniquity, I never knew you. Here are men that will come before God and say, we perform miracles in your name, and he'll say, I never knew you. The miracles were no proof of their reality.

They were satanic miracles. They were demonic miracles. There are satanic and demonic miracles in the earth today, and we should not be deceived by them.

But this man will be able to hoodwink largely the world at that time into believing that he is God. One way people, of course, could prepare themselves against this is by studying the word of God and finding out these things in advance. Paul says, Remember ye not that when I was yet with you, I told you these things.

And so this is a great encouragement for the Thessalonian believers who thought that they were in the day of the Lord. They thought that they were in that period when God is going to punish the earth. And Paul says to them, Don't think that.

You'll be taken out of the scene before that ever happens. Then there's going to be a worldwide apostasy, and then this man of sin, this son of perdition, is going to be revealed in the world, and the world will flock to his banner and worship him as God there in the temple in Jerusalem. This is a message of comfort to believers today, but it's a message of warning, too, to those who do not know the Savior.

If I were a non-Christian today, reading what I read in the newspapers, and knowing anything at all about the scriptures, I'd really be in a hurry, would he say. And I hope that there's anybody here today who has never truly trusted the Lord Jesus, that you'll do so, that you'll flee from the wrath to come and find salvation through faith in him. Shall we pray? Father, we do thank you for your precious word.

We think how wonderful it is that we little nobodies can go to your word and see the future laid out for us with such precision. Lord, we thank you for the comfort that belongs to us as children of God. We hear the Savior say to us today, Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

And we realize as all these things are taking place in the world today, it means simply one thing for us, and that is that our redemption draws nigh. But we think of those, Lord, our relatives, our friends, our neighbors, who are really on the road to hell. And we pray that you'll give us hearts of compassion.

Let us look on the crowds as our Savior did, till our eyes with tears grow dim. Let us view with pity the wandering sheep and love them for love of him. Help us, Lord, to speak the life-giving word to men and women, boys and girls, that they might be delivered from this terrible time that we've been reading about today, and from the everlasting burning.

We ask it in Christ's name.

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