

Studies in 2 Thessalonians-03 2 Thes 2:6-17

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the restrainer, the Antichrist's power source, and the great deception that will sweep the world, as well as the church's role in hindering the Antichrist's manifestation.

Duration: 39:22

Topics: "Studies"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of living in accordance with God's will. He highlights the hope and consolation that believers have through God's grace. The preacher also warns about the seriousness of being left behind and the consequences of believing in false teachings. He encourages listeners to focus on eternal matters and to serve God's people. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the impending return of Jesus and the need to make necessary changes in one's life.

Transcript

We continue our study this morning in the second chapter of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. And I think I'll just begin at the beginning and read and then review what we've been over, and then go on with the new material for today. Second Thessalonians, chapter two and verse one.

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 at hand. That 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 exalted 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.

And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work, only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should

believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth, whereunto he called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God even our Father, which hath loved us and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work." Just by way of review, the Thessalonian believers were going through intense persecution and suffering, and they thought that they were in the day of the Lord. They thought that the tribulation period had already started on the earth.

They knew that God was going to send upon this world the seven-year period of distress and trial and affliction known as the tribulation, the worst period of trouble that the world would ever know. And they, Thessalonians, thought they were already in that period. Paul is writing them in this chapter to assure them that they were not in the tribulation, that certain things had to happen before that day of the Lord took place.

He urges them, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him, not to think that they were in the day of the Lord. Before the day of the Lord ever came, the saints of God would be gathered together to Christ in glory. In other words, the rapture would take place.

And in the following verses that we read, he pointed out that before the day of the Lord takes place, two things have to happen. First of all, there's going to be a great worldwide apostasy, a worldwide falling away from faith and turning to the devil and lawlessness. And then there's going to be the revelation of the man of sin.

This man is called the man of sin, the man of lawlessness in some versions of the Bible, the son of perdition, and he's also known as the Antichrist, although that expression is not used in this chapter. John uses that expression in his first epistle. Now this is a great world leader, the Antichrist, who is against Christ and puts himself in the place of Christ.

He seats himself in the temple in Jerusalem, that's the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, and poses as God and demands worship as God. He's a person of utter lawlessness, and he's also called the son of perdition, and we saw last week that that refers to his destiny. He's one destined to be punished with everlasting perdition.

Now that expression, son of perdition, is also used of Judas, the betrayer of our Lord Jesus. And because of that, some people think that the Antichrist will be Judas come back to life. What do you think of that? Do you think he's going to be Judas? Well, I think we can rest assured this morning that he will not be Judas.

Just because both these men are given the title son of perdition does not mean that they're the same person. The Bible does not teach reincarnation. You don't get that teaching anywhere in the word of truth, and there's no idea in the word of God that Judas will ever come back as the man of sin.

Certainly the man of sin will have some of the characteristics of Judas. Judas was an apostate. Judas accompanied with the Lord.

Judas heard his incomparable words. Judas saw the mighty miracles that he did. And Judas betrayed Jesus Christ for 30 pieces of silver.

He was an apostate. He was one who professed to be a disciple of Jesus and then showed that he was not genuine and maliciously turned against the Lord. And that's what apostasy is.

Now, in the sixth verse of the chapter that we have this morning, you'll find that there's something in the world right now that hinders the development of everything that we've been talking about. It says in verse 6, Paul is saying here that there is something in the world today that is restraining the manifestation of the man of sin. As we mentioned last week, the man of sin could be in the world today.

He could be a six-year-old boy or a 16-year-old young man. We don't know. But there's something in the world today that hinders his manifestation, hinders his taking the reins of power in the world.

And Paul says to the Thessalonians, You know what the restrainer is, what restraineth. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work, only he who now restraineth will until he be taken out of the way. And this is an interesting thing.

The restrainer is spoken of as a that which, and it's spoken of as a he who. In other words, the restrainer is spoken of in the neuter, and the restrainer is spoken of in the masculine. I might say as a thing and as a person.

And you probably know through your study of the word of God that there's considerable disagreement as to what or who the restrainer is. Some think that the restrainer is human government, and that human government is hindering the manifestation of the Antichrist. Well, there's a weakness to that view.

This Antichrist is in opposition to God, and human government does not hinder opposition to God. If anything, human government encourages opposition to God, as you look around the world today. But there is one solution to the problem as to the identity of the restrainer, and that is this.

I would suggest to you that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit indwelling the church and the individual believer. The Holy Spirit is going to be taken out of the world in that sense when the church goes home to heaven. The church today, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, exercises a restraining influence in the world that you or I probably don't realize.

Jesus said to his disciples, you are the salt of the earth. Salt hinders the spread of corruption. Jesus didn't say to the disciples, I want you to be the salt of the earth.

He didn't say that. He said you are the salt of the earth. Your very presence in the world hinders the spread of moral corruption in the world.

But there's a day coming when the Lord Jesus is going to appear in the clouds and call his blood-bought church home to be with himself. And when that takes place, the restraint is going to go out of this world. Now I should pause here to explain something.

The Holy Spirit is omnipresent. That means the Holy Spirit is everywhere at one and the same time. In one sense, the Holy Spirit has always been in the world, is in the world now, and will always be in the world, in one sense.

For instance, during the tribulation period, people will be saved, and they will be saved through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. So there's a sense in which the Holy Spirit will always be in the world. But there's another sense in which he'll be taken out.

How? Well, in the same sense that he came at Pentecost. You see, the Holy Spirit was in the world all during the Old Testament period, wasn't he? And yet Jesus said, the promise of the Father, he's going to send the Comforter to you. Well, how could he send the Comforter if the Holy Spirit had always been in the world? Well, he sends him in a special way.

He sends the Holy Spirit to permanently indwell the church and the individual believer. This had never happened before in the history of the world. The Holy Spirit had never permanently indwelt believers in the Old Testament.

He came upon believers, and he left believers. But a new thing happened at the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came in a new way in which he had never been before.

He came as the permanent indweller of the church and of the individual believer. And when the church goes home to heaven, the Holy Spirit will leave in that sense. In the meantime, the Holy Spirit indwelling the church in the world today is hindering the manifestation of the Antichrist.

We probably don't realize how true this is, but some of you have heard, for instance, of spiritistic fiances where a spirit tries to make contact with the spirit world and is not able because of the presence of a Christian in the room. The Christian hasn't said a word. But his very presence in the room... Incidentally, he shouldn't be there in the room.

Please don't go from the meeting and say that I said Christians should attend spiritistic fiances. They shouldn't. But I've heard of them where they did.

And the very presence of the Christian in the room hindered contact with the spirit world. So the Christian does exercise a restraining influence when it comes to the powers of Satan and of evil. And here we learn in this chapter that the Antichrist can't be revealed as long as the church is in the world.

But the Lord's going to take care of that. He's going to take the church home to be with himself at the rapture, and then he will be revealed. It says that in verse 8, "...and then shall be revealed the lawless one." This man is a very embodiment of lawlessness.

Now, verse 8 skips over his whole career. It begins with his manifestation and skips right over to his destruction. "...then shall be revealed that lawless one whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth." No war, no ammunition, no weapons.

Just the Lord destroys him with the breath of his mouth and brings him to naught by the manifestation of his coming. When does this take place? This takes place at the second coming of Christ when he comes back to the world to reign. That is known in 2 Thessalonians 2 as the manifestation of his coming.

The rapture is not the manifestation of his coming. The rapture, when he takes the church home to be with himself, takes place in a moment in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump. The world won't see the rapture.

The world will know it takes place because millions of people will be missing. The world won't see the Lord in his glory at that time. It will be all over before the world can blink.

But the manifestation of his coming is when the Lord Jesus comes back in the clouds of heaven in power and great glory. And it says, "...every eye shall see him. Those who pierce him will see him.

And men shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only son." And when he comes back to take the reins of universal empire in his nail-scarred hands, he's going to destroy the Antichrist with the breath of his mouth and bring him to naught with the manifestation of his coming. Notice what it says about the Antichrist in verse 9, "...and even him whose coming is after the working of Satan." Now, that's very good because that tells you where he gets his power. It's not human power, it's satanic power.

His coming is after the working of Satan. This man is demon-possessed. He's Satan-inspired and devil-empowered.

His coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders. And this means that he will be able to perform all kinds of miracles in order to deceive people. It's interesting to me that in Acts chapter 2 and verse 22, those same words are used of the Lord Jesus.

Power, signs, and wonders. Not lying wonders, but wonders. Maybe you'd like to turn back to Acts chapter 2 and verse 22.

I'll just read it to you. It says, "...Ye men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." What does it mean? It means that Satan imitates everything that's of God.

Satan has a counterfeit for everything that is of God. You know, some people think that Satan is at his best when he gets a man stupefied by liquor and rolling down in the gutter on Skid Row. They say, ah, Satan at his very best.

That's not Satan at his best. Satan is at his best when he's transformed as an angel of light. When he's standing, for instance, in the pulpit of a church with a Bible in his hand and sowing doubts and denials concerning the word of God.

And when he's performing miracles and people say, well, it must be good. I saw the miracle with my own eyes. Well, this verse of Scripture tells us that the Antichrist will be able to perform all kinds of miracles.

He can even cause a great idolatrous image in Jerusalem to speak. A dead, lifeless image. And it will speak miraculously.

How will that be? The power of Satan. Satan is not omnipotent, but he does have tremendous power. And he will be able to perform these powers and signs and lying wonders.

And it says, with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that are perishing, because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. This means that there's a terrible deception going to sweep the world and it's going to engulf people who heard the gospel and didn't receive it. You know, it's a serious thing to trifle with the gospel.

Every time a person hears the gospel and rejects it, it becomes harder for him to accept the Lord. Did you know that? It's a serious thing to reject the Christ of God. Light rejected is light denied.

The same sun that bleaches linen tans the skin. And the same sun that melts wax hardens clay. And the gospel heard and rejected actually hardens a man and steals him against accepting the Lord.

So that ultimately, after the church is taken out, this great wave of deception is going to flood the world and men who heard the gospel and rejected it will fall for the lie. It says that, verse 10, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. It says, and for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, a working of error, that they might believe a lie.

I think I mentioned last week that the lie in this verse is the idea that this man seated in the temple in Jerusalem is God. That the Antichrist is God. That is the lie.

And people will follow it and say, I never would. But they will. I would just remind you briefly of Jonestown.

Can you imagine 900 people so deluded by a false messiah that they would drink poison and commit suicide? But it happened. It happened in your lifetime. And coming events cast their shadows before them.

And it's going to happen again. God is going to send them strong delusions. Say, does God really send strong delusions? Can anything evil come from God? Well, here's a little key to the understanding of the Bible, and it's this.

What God permits, He is often said to do in the Bible. It's a figurative way of speaking. What God permits, He is often said to do.

It says, for instance, in the Old Testament, an evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul. Now, God cannot originate evil, and no evil can come from God. And yet the Bible says an evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul.

All it means is that in His wisdom, He allowed this to happen. And when He allowed it to happen, He is said to do it. And that's what you have here.

What God permits, He is often said to do. For this God, God shall send them a strong delusion that they should believe a lie. Notice verse 12, that they all might be judged, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

A person might think, well, I'm not saved today. I want to live my own life the way I want to live it. If Christ comes today, then when I see the church go, I'll have a change of heart and I'll trust the Lord.

And this verse says you won't. This verse says that for those people who heard the gospel during this day of grace and rejected it, there will be no second chance after the Lord comes. Notice that they all might be judged.

That word all takes in everybody. There's going to be no excuse. Any man or woman, young man or young woman, who has a bona fide presentation of the gospel today and rejects it, will not have the opportunity to be saved after the Lord returns.

That they all might be judged. Who? It says, who believed not the truth. You say, but people will be saved during the tribulation.

Yes, there are millions of people in the world today who've never heard the gospel. Millions of people who've never had a face-to-face encounter with the Lord Jesus. And it's possible that they will be saved during the tribulation.

But we're speaking about people in Hayward today who hear the gospel. They can go down to Long's Drugstore and buy a Bible. They can switch on their radio or their television and hear the gospel over.

And they know the gospel and they've chosen not to accept the gospel. And this verse of Scripture says, If Christ came tonight, that's it friends, no more opportunity. You say, well why won't they believe? It's just because they're going to believe the lie.

If you reject Christ today, you'll accept the Antichrist then. And again I quote what the Lord Jesus himself said, I am come in my Father's name and ye receive me not. Another will come in his own name, him ye will receive.

The Lord Jesus came attested by God the Father as the true Messiah and only Savior of the world. And Israel said, we don't want him. Jesus said, another will come in his own name.

He won't have any credentials at all. All he'll come with is his own boast. I'm the one you've been waiting for.

And they'll say, thank you very much, you're the one we've been waiting for. And they'll bow at his feet and worship him. Who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

So what it really means is it's a serious thing to tamper with the gospel, isn't it? It's a serious thing. It's a serious thing to hear the gospel. Because a man's eternal destiny hangs upon what he does with it.

Now if you'll notice in verse 13 there's kind of a change of pace. Paul has been speaking a lot about judgment, about the terrible judgment that's going to come upon the world in the day of the Lord, upon the Antichrist and his revelation, and upon his destruction, and upon the destruction of those who follow the Antichrist, who wouldn't have the gospel today and who can't have it then. But then he says in verse 13, but we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning unto salvation, in sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth.

I think what it's saying is, when I think of you Thessalonians and think of how you have responded to the gospel and how I came and preached the gospel and you were saved, I praise God that it's not for you a case of judgment at all, but salvation. God chose you from the beginning unto salvation. Now, what is the beginning in that verse? It says, from the beginning.

Was that from the beginning of their life? Or was that from the time when Jesus came to the earth? Or was that from the beginning of the world? Genesis 1.1? Well, actually, it goes further back than that. It goes back to eternity. Oftentimes, the word beginning is used in the Bible to denote a beginningless beginning.

For instance, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. That's a beginningless beginning. It's a beginning without a beginning, if I can use such double thought.

That's what's referred to here. It means from a bygone eternity, God chose you to salvation. Now, there were certain means that he brought into bear in the salvation of a soul, the salvation of their souls.

God chose you from the beginning, notice, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. And so what it's saying is, way back in eternity, God chose you. Then, in time, the Spirit of God came and began to work in your life.

That's called sanctification of the Spirit. Here, it is a pre-conversion sanctification. If you're here this morning and you're saved by the grace of God, the Spirit of God didn't begin to work in your life the day you were saved.

Oh, no. The Spirit of God began to work in your life long before you were saved. What was he doing? Well, he was trying to create in your life an awareness of your terrible sinfulness.

Have you ever had that experience? Have you ever known the experience of the conviction of sin? For God revealed you to yourself as what you really were, showed you in all your nakedness before God, and made you realize that if you died, you'd spend eternity in the everlasting burning. Well, that's called here sanctification of the Spirit. It's the Spirit of God in a pre-conversion day, working in your life to set you apart to God from the world.

It's wonderful. Paul could speak of being separated unto God from his mother's womb. Now, he wasn't saved from his mother's womb, but he realized that the Spirit of God had performed that wonderful work.

I can think back in my own life. I can think of going to gospel meetings in a church building in Central Square, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and I sat up on the balcony, and the Spirit of God worked in such power in my life, I got up and walked out. I was afraid the place was going to collapse on me.

I couldn't stand it anymore. I got up and walked out. It wasn't long after that that I bowed the knee and received Jesus Christ by a definite act of faith.

So there it is, chosen in a by God eternity, sanctified by the Spirit, and then it's his belief of the truth. This is our part. The Spirit of God works upon us, shows us the Lord Jesus dying as our substitute and salvation, and we come and make a definite commitment to him.

That's what salvation is, belief of the truth. Whereunto he called you by our gospel. Here is what we call the effective call.

That's when it takes place, when you believe the truth. That's when the Apostle Paul was called, when he believed on the road to Damascus. Notice the expression through our gospel.

Now when Paul says our gospel, he didn't mean that his gospel was any different from any other gospel, but simply it was the gospel that had been committed to him, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's a wonderful passage of Scripture. It reaches back into a bygone eternity and reaches forward into eternity as well when the saints of God will share the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I wish I had the tongue of an angel today to describe to you what it must mean to share the glory of Jesus in heaven throughout all eternity. Imagine worms linked with Christ in everlasting glory. I guess that's what the Bible teaches.

Enough to make angels gasp. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle. So here's an encouragement to the saints to stand fast.

You know, one of the characteristics of true faith is it's permanent. You know, a person can be very zealous. The flesh in man can be very zealous for a while, but it doesn't persevere.

True faith always has the quality of permanence. And that means a lot to me today. You see, a lot of people that start off apparently in the Christian life and they're great bright lights in the stellar universe and all of a sudden they sizzle out like a Roman candle.

What was the matter? They never really were saved at all. It was just the enthusiasm of the flesh. That's all it was.

But where there is true faith, there is permanence. And Paul is exhorting the people here. Stand fast and hold the tradition.

Now just a word about that tradition. When you think of traditions in the New Testament sense, remember traditions in the New Testament mean the inspired teachings of the word of God. Because we use the word in a different way today.

Well, we say this church has its traditions and this church has its traditions that have evolved down through the centuries. That's not what's mysterious. In fact, the verse goes on to say, whether by word or by our epistle, the traditions that they were to hold fast were the inspired teachings of the apostles as they're found in the New Testament.

Watch out for any other traditions. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God even our Father. Did you notice something there? Did you notice something unusual when I read those words? Well, the unusual thing is that the Lord Jesus Christ comes first and God the Father comes second.

Usually the order is reversed. Usually it's God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. But in this verse, Paul puts the Lord Jesus Christ first and then God the Father.

Why? Because they're equal. That's why. Two persons of the eternal Godhead equal in all respect.

And Paul does not hesitate to honor the Lord Jesus even as he honors God the Father. Two of the three persons of the Trinity. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God even our Father, which hath loved us.

Well, that's a marvel in itself, isn't it? That God would have ever loved us. He didn't have to. It was all his grace.

And has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. This is the marvel of our salvation. We can see the world crumbling about us.

We can see the scaffolding. We have ever lost, we know, glory by and by. That's why.

We know that these things are not the important things. These are the things that are perishing around us. But the things that cannot be moved are ours.

An inheritance in the heavens. Incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. And so Paul prays that God might comfort your hearts and establish you in every good work and word.

He wants the lives of the Christians to match up to their professions. And that's a nice way in which the chapter closes. It reminds us that the study of prophecy is always intended to have a practical effect in our lives.

God never gave us prophecy in his word to tickle our imaginations or make us spend fruitless hours trying to guess who the Antichrist is. Whether it's Hitler or Mussolini or Napoleon or someone else. The word of prophecy is always intended to exert a practical influence in our lives.

For the unsaved, well I think the message is very clear in a passage like this. Reject Christ today, you won't be able to accept him then. There is such a thing as the passing of religious opportunity.

Jerusalem had a visitation of the Son of God and rejected him. And he wept over it and he said you would, I would, but you would not. And so prophecy has a very powerful effect in speaking to the unsaved.

But in speaking to Christians too. Urging us to walk in moral purity. What would you like to be doing when Jesus comes back again? Would you like to be found in that particular place that you have been frequenting lately? Don't go anywhere where you wouldn't want to be when Jesus comes back again.

The coming of the Lord teaches us to stay disentangled from the affairs of this world. It's all going to be left behind when we go. Only that which is eternal really counts.

Set your affections on things above where Christ is seated, at the right hand of God. The coming of Christ tells us we ought to serve God's people now. If you knew the Lord Jesus was coming back next Sunday, how would you spend this week? Seriously, how would you spend this week? Would there be any changes? Would you write a letter to that unsaved loved one? Would you go and make an apology to that person whom you've been wronging? The way you spend it is the way you should be spending it.

Shall we pray? Father, once again we thank you that we can come to your word and see the future unrolled before us like a panorama. Father, we thank you for the hope that is ours that you have given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. We know that you're working all things to the conclusion that your son will be honored and glorified on this earth where once he was spit upon and crucified.

We pray that this truth might speak to our hearts, that we might be the men and women of God you would have us to be. And for those who are unsaved, Lord, we realize how unspeakably solemn it is to be left behind. To be in such a position where they cannot be saved, where they will believe a lie, that this man of sin is actually God.

So we pray, Lord, that you speak during these crucial days in which we live and bring men and women, boys and girls, to their knees, receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as only Lord and Savior. We ask it in his name and for his sake. Amen.

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