

July 26, 2026 - 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 - "One Last Breath"

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[0:00] Please turn with me to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. We're going to begin in verse 1 and read through verse 12.

Let no one deceive you in any way, for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now, so that he may be revealed in his time, for the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.

Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way, and then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan, with all the power and false signs and wonders, and with all the wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

[1:43] Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

This is God's word. Thanks be to God. Well, it's good to be back with you all, and we're just cruising right through 2 Thessalonians.

You probably got scared last week with half of a verse, but I thank you so much, Carmen, for really teasing out the reality and the glory and the certainty of Christ's return.

It's essential to our faith that Jesus will return, and it's an object upon the horizon, an event upon the horizon that keeps us going.

It's the hope of what's laying ahead. And reading this passage, maybe depending on what church you maybe have come from in the past, you're probably like, oh boy, here we go.

[2:47] Signs of the times, you know, doomsday, the Antichrist and everything, right? Well, for nearly 2,000 years, the Christians have looked upon the turmoil that's going on in their lives throughout history.

They've turned on CNN or Fox News, whichever one you pick, or none of them, hopefully, and you wonder, with all of the turmoil, with everyone else over the course of 2,000 years, has the Antichrist finally come?

Is this the guy? Right? The Antichrist. It's a name of somebody who's referred to in Scripture as the enemy of God, the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, whatever, take that and plug it in.

Think about under Rome. Believers associated the enemy of Christ with persecuting emperors like Nero. Things looked pretty bad back then.

And they thought Nero was this Antichrist, this man of lawlessness. Well, history continued, right? During the Middle Ages, Christians saw the advance of Islam and identified Muhammad, or Muslim rulers, with the man of lawlessness.

[4:12] Well, history continued on even further. Then came the Reformation. And critics of corruption within the church called the Pope the Antichrist.

And even the Roman Catholic opponents answered back to it, applying that same logic and that same tone to Martin Luther, that Martin Luther was the Antichrist.

And in more recent centuries, the list goes on from Napoleon, from Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and a long succession of presidents, of dictators, and public figures.

Boy, there's one thing certain, church, and that's history should humble us. Christians have repeatedly found a candidate among the people that they feared most, all throughout history. Some predictions have confused the church, made us run away from the church, were embarrassed for pastors to stand in a pulpit and associate with those believers, and even damaged our witness as a church.

[5 : 25] But our failed guesses must not cause us to ignore Paul's warning that we have in the passage today. I mean, Satan is perfectly content for the church to be consumed in these secret calculations and these unknowns and these sensational predictions, supposed insider information, secret revelations, things like that, and one candidate after another.

Right? And that is why Paul redirects our attention from identifying the man to recognizing the lawlessness that this man will embody.

And so our first question in 2 Thessalonians must not be, who is the Antichrist? But it must be, what has God revealed and how should that revelation steady the church?

Paul answers that question with two commands. He says, do not be shaken and do not be deluded. The sermon title today for any Creed fans is One Last Breath.

And the main point I want to argue for you today is that Satan will not have the last word and that is our hope today. Satan will not have the last word and that is our hope today.

[6 : 58] I'm going to break this into two separate sections. I was on the borderline of doing three, but I don't feel like being Baptist today. So I did two points today and I'd like to argue that main point throughout these points.

And before we dive in any further, I want us to take a moment to pause and to pray for our time as we dive into God's word. So will you do that with me?

Let's pray. Father, we come to you today needing to hear from you, desperately needing truth, needing your revelation, nothing new, but help us to recover what is the old profound truth that saves souls from hell.

Help us, Lord, to turn to Paul's word to understand hope and the object of our hope in a world of chaos, in a world of confusion, in history that seems to always mark the next guy as being the lawless one.

Help us to refocus our hope, not in what we know, but what we have known all along, that Christ is King. Allow us to rest in that today.

[8 : 19] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The first point that I want to reinforce in this text, and we see this from verse 1 to 5, is to stand firm in what God has revealed.

to stand firm in what God has revealed. Last week, Pastor Carmen reinforced the essential truth that Jesus Christ will return personally, visibly, and gloriously.

Thank you, brother. But although Christ's return is essential to our faith, many of the details concerning that timeline and the specifics of that timeline are less essential.

Throughout history, there's always been confusion about the details, and that's often left the church unsettled. And wouldn't it be fancy that this is exactly what's going on in the church of Thessalonica?

They're trying to figure out the details. Paul tells this church, now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him.

[9 : 34] Paul continues from what we preached on last week. Paul brings about pastoral comfort and correction. He says, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word or a letter seeming to be from us to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

quickly shaken and alarmed. This is language that's used all the way back in our series in Acts, Acts 16, 26.

The word shaken describes an earthquake-like disturbance. If you remember, Paul and Silas locked up in prison at midnight. They were praying and singing hymns, and then all of a sudden, the scripture says, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so the foundations of the prison were shaken.

The same word here is used by Paul to say, do not be shaken. The word describes an earthquake-like disturbance. disturbance. He's saying to this church, don't pretend like this is an

earthquake-like situation.

Don't be shaken. Their minds had been spiritually knocked off balance here, it seems, like a ship losing its anchor in a storm. The word alarm describes the state of agitation that's gripping this church back then.

[11:11] You see, they've been led to believe that the day of the Lord had already come. That claim caused them to fear that somehow they'd miss their allegiance, right?

They missed their gathering to Christ, just like Carmen ran to hear his mom's voice on the phone, like he said last week. The source of deception varied here.

Some say a spirit, you know, whether by a spirit, a spoken word, a spirit, or a letter. So the source of deception varied, but every version claimed spiritual or apostolic authority one way or another. But Paul's response is unambiguous. It's not to be confused. He says in verse 3, let no one deceive you in any way.

How many of us find ourselves captivated and drawn into the depths of conspiracies? I love a good conspiracy theory. I really do. But for entertainment's sake, I'm not going to cash out my 401 or things like that, you know, based on the conspiracy.

[12:23] How many find ourselves captivated and drawn into the depths of these conspiracies and predictions that often leave us in this childishness, like childlike awe or childlike fear?

I hate to say it, there's a lot, tons of Christians that I've known that seem more familiar with theories of the Antichrist in the end times than they are seemingly familiar with Christ's commands.

And the fruit in their lives really do show it. They're experts in eschatology and all these end times stuff and theories and conspiracies, but they can't love their wives.

They can't love their kids, but they can out-debate you in eschatology. It's garbage. The exhortation for this first century church is to remember that no one deceive you in any way.

Paul continues, for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction. who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called God or object of worship so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

[13:44] Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things? The answer to not being shaken, to not being alarmed, to not allow an earthquake to rattle the foundations of your faith is not secret information, but it's remembering revelation, remembering what has been revealed.

What a pastoral tone that Paul has for this church. What then were they supposed to remember? Remember, as glorious as the return of Jesus Christ will be, remember that no glory can be known apart from gloom.

Verse 3, what precedes the glory of Christ's return? Well, rebellion, which word literally meaning falling away or apostasy. It's like having faith and then all of a sudden losing it.

Or, it will also, in verse 3, it will also be known as revealing of a man of lawlessness, the Antichrist. the son of destruction. What precedes the glory of Christ's return? Rebellion and revealing. This language shouldn't seem new to us either.

[15:13] I mean, if you go through the patterns of history, we've been in our institutes in the morning, we've been going through the Old Testament sort of survey, understanding like, why these authors, why God inspired these authors to write these books, the points to them, right?

And this language shouldn't be new to us, even in our institute today, going through another time of 1 and 2 Chronicles. History has been priming us, it seems, because rebellion begins in Eden, doesn't it?

Where Satan tempts humanity to distrust God's word and to seize God's place. And that same pattern runs throughout Scripture. You go to Isaiah 14, you see Babylon's king boast that he will be like the Most High.

Ezekiel 28, Tyre's ruler claims to be a god. Daniel 4, can't forget Nebuchadnezzar, exalts his own glory.

And then Antichus, he desecrates God's temple. This is spoken about in Daniel 8 and Daniel 11, but even if you want to go in Apocrypha, it's historically recorded in 1 Maccabees 1, historically detailed, that that actually did happen.

[16:37] And what we see as we unfold Scripture, we see this thread of different rulers, different centuries, and the same impulse that we see in verse 4, to exalt the creature, to oppose God, and

claim what only belongs to Him.

In other words, Antichrist rebellion, as we see in verse 4, is the ancient human desire to dethrone God, reject truth, and enthrone ourselves in His place.

It's like Ecclesiastes, the writer of Ecclesiastes, was right. There's nothing new under the sun, right? In the Thessalonians' day, nothing new.

In our day, nothing new. I mean, consider even 40 years later, this book was written somewhere around 50 A.D.

Think about when 1 John was written, sometime around like 85 or 90 A.D. So like 35, 40 years later, John would write, he says, even now, many Antichrists have come.

[17:47] Like even 35, 40 years from Paul writing this, John reinforces the same thing. The thread is continuing, and it will continue.

It's important to stop and look around, and we must apply this text to ourselves. When we see what Paul is saying here, we have to really look in the mirror, don't we?

Because every time we say, well, God may have spoken, but I don't know, I'm going to decide what's true from how I feel about the matter.

I'm going to decide what is good. I'm going to decide how I will live. Every time we say something like that, we participate in the functional rebellion that started in the Garden of Eden.

When we are shaken, when we are alarmed, church, maybe the safest church is not the one that correctly guesses the Antichrist identity, but the church that knows Christ's voice, the church that loves His truth, the church that stands firm on the gospel.

[19:13] Therefore, church, we have to test every sensational claim according to Scripture.

Church, do not give a prophecy teacher, whatever their title might be, or political commentator, or God forbid, any online video.

Just stop the online video stuff. Just because somebody has a white coat with a green screen doesn't mean they're a doctor. All right? Amen. All right, get it off my soapbox.

Don't give any prophecy teacher, political commentator, online video, or forwarded message that you have to forward to 20 friends or else something bad is going to happen to you.

Don't give a breaking news alert more authority over your peace than the apostolic word gives. Our modern age makes this very complicated.

Praise the Lord that the Thessalonians did not have social media. They would be up in a tizzy seeing those reels pop up about the end and they're left behind. So I want to actually unpack this in three various things that I think are helpful for us to consider.

[20:29] because when we hear these claims just as Paul is pastorally instructing his church I feel pastorally responsible to instruct us and guide us before repeating claims or hitting that share button or buying into a lie church we have to first ask ourselves three things.

First of them is is it clearly biblical? Is it biblical? Satan's pretty good a quote in scripture too.

So you have to kind of go a little bit deeper. You have to ask yourself then number two is it actually true? That's a big one. We have to research and be responsible to research as Christians.

Christians can be the dumbest folks around. Right? The most gullible around. It sounds good.

It feels good. It lines up with scripture and share. Right? The third question is does it produce sober faithfulness in your life or just merely fascination or fear?

[21:42] I hate to say it. Breaking news is often not breaking news. It's often clickbait. If you don't know what that is, Google it. People know that people are doing it.

Paul is calling upon their memory to cut through the garbage of their day and so too the same is true for us church. A church anchored in remembering revelation will not quickly be shaken by every new claim that appears under our sun or the sun that shines upon my kids or their kids or their kids kids.

There's nothing new and we cannot be quickly shaken. We cannot be earthquakeed by every new claim. Stand firm in what God has revealed.

The second point that I want us to see here is from verse 6 to 12. Now this points us quite a bit forward.

Paul has reminded them of what God has revealed. Now he turns to what God is restraining. This is where it gets dicey. Paul now reminds them that the lawless one is presently restrained.

[22:58] Remember lawless one antichrist. And we see here and you know he calls upon their memory in verse 6. And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his

time.

And now Paul's original readers, his audience, knew the identity of the restrainer because Paul had taught them obviously personally. We don't possess what they necessarily know or that entire conversation, but this was written personally to this church.

And faithful Christians have, I've read them all, faithful Christians have offered their various interpretations of that. Maybe after church at Bob Evans you can dive into a nice discussion of what they might know about this restraining.

But although the identity of the restrainer may be debated, the reality of restraint is not. Do you see what he's saying here?

Don't get lost. He says, and you know what is restraining him so that he may be revealed in his time. You see, the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist, simply a puppet of Satan, he will not arrive one second before God's appointed time.

[24:24] Satan may use the puppeteer, he's the puppeteer that will use an Antichrist, a deceiver, to draw people away from God, to scheme, to destroy, but he remains a creature beneath the sovereign authority of God.

That is an absolute truth, church. Paul continues, for the mystery, in verse seven, of lawlessness is already at work.

Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. We may recall our Revelation Bible study, and there was a point where we kind of stepped back from the book, and you know how Orthodox Christianity upholds the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Father sends the Son, the Son sends the Holy Spirit, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. When we were in the Revelation Bible study, I don't know how long ago that was, I don't even know how long it's been since I've had a day off, or was working, but we were able to analyze this counterfeit Trinity within the book of Revelation.

I don't know if you remember that, but I'll give you some insight. You had the dragon, the beast, and the false prophets. The dragon sends the beast, the beast sends the false prophet, and it's sort of like this counterfeit Trinity that takes place.

[25:56] And so, what we see here is that the final man of lawlessness has not yet been revealed, but the satanic principle behind him is already operating.

And we've seen this all throughout Scripture operating. We see that principle whenever tyrants, whenever false teachers, whenever counterfeit messiahs rise up and self exalting rulers, suppress God's truth, and exalt themselves in the place of God.

We see that. We see it a lot with the prosperity gospel. It's very popular in the prosperity gospel, very popular within Pentecostalism and such.

For Paul comforting this church, though, his intent, I don't believe he's saying, I want to teach you about eschatology. I believe his intent is much more pastoral for them. You have some eschatology, you have some end times, but the point, his intent is clearly pastoral because God still restrains evil and continues gathering his people.

His work isn't going to stop in the Thessalonians church. The day of the Lord hasn't come because the man of lawlessness hasn't come. There's no rebellion that has come.

[27:16] And it still, through the early church to the middle ages to the reformation until today, it still has not come. And so because God still restrains evil and continues gathering his people, the church's mission is never futile nor abandoned.

The presence of lawlessness around, and we might attribute that to the false prophets in Revelation, salvation. Right? Even though there's a presence of lawlessness, it does not mean that evangelism is useless, that we should give up, that discipleship is pointless, or that Christ has abandoned his church.

In fact, in verse 8, Paul shows us what John wrote in Revelation. He says, look at the victory. The victory's coming. And Paul says in verse 8, the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

Paul wants us to see the terror of the lawless one from the vantage point of Christ's victory here.

Now, that's pastoral. Right?

Jesus is not narrowly defeating Satan, or defeating the beast, essentially, at this point, the Antichrist. Jesus is not narrowly defeating him after some exhaustive struggle.

[28:46] Christ will not need to strategize against any evil powers or forces. He won't have to strain. He won't have to summon reinforcements of angels.

No. Paul says Jesus will destroy him with a breath, effortlessly, a breath, meaning the enemy's greatest display of power will be met and answered by Christ's effortless command.

We see the end of this occur in Revelation. Just to close your curiosity, the beast and the false prophet, they are thrown in Revelation 19, by Christ into the lake of fire.

Now, the dragon who sent the beast and the beast who sent the false prophets, the dragon is restrained for a period of time, we'll say. We can debate that at Bob Evans too. The dragon meaning Satan will be restrained for a period of time, but ultimately will meet the beast and false prophet in the lake of fire as well.

Christ will have the victory. That makes everything that the church is doing in Thessalonica and Steel Valley today worth it.

[30:15] Absolutely worth it. If Christ's victory is the big picture to stand back, Paul gets back to the present. He says, now, the coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders and with all wicked deception, for those who are perishing.

I want you to see that this means that the danger is not that his works will be unimpressive. The works of the Antichrist are going to dupe a lot of us.

It will be fascinating whenever that happens, whoever that might be, and be very convincing. missing. But Paul reveals an even greater danger at work.

For those who fall hook, line, and singer to the deception, their deception will be so powerful that they refuse to love the truth and so be saved.

And we have to notice that Paul does not merely say that they did not know the truth. He says that they refused to love it.

[31:37] The problem was not moral, or the problem was moral, it was not intellectual at all. And he concludes, therefore, God sends them a strong delusion so that they may believe what is false in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Maybe the deepest danger is not merely being fooled by a lie, but wanting a lie to be true.

That's deception. God responds to that. if you walk through your life wanting a lie to be true, God will respond.

And Paul says that God will send a strong delusion. God's strong delusion isn't a random judgment against innocent people who were just confused.

No, that's not what's going on here. God gives persistent rebels over to the falsehood that they embraced and that they would never repent of.

[33:01] I mean, this makes us think of Pharaoh back in Exodus. Pharaoh hardened his heart and God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Right? Pharaoh was already against God's people, would never change, given a millisecond to repent.

And what did God do? He responded. He sent a delusion, hardened his heart. Romans 1 tells us that sinners rejected the knowledge of God and therefore God gave them over to their desires.

You see, God's judgment sometimes begins by allowing sinners to have what they continually insist upon. That's really hard to grasp when we think about some family members and unbelieving folks in our lives, doesn't that?

That's hard to grasp. The final punishment for rejecting truth is losing the ability to recognize the lie that you have chosen.

There's three phases that I think that are important to really ask ourselves. Maybe you're kind of coming back to church right now and just checking out Steel Valley.

[34:18] We're wonderful folk, I promise you. Yeah. But there's three things that we need to all, even if you've been at Steel Valley for a number of years, if you're our elder church attendee, three things that we need to wonder and ask ourselves if we're falling for a delusion.

Because the first phase of falling for a delusion is resistance, isn't it? Like what truth might we be resisting in our lives?

Which of Christ's commands do we resist obeying? Because the next phase of after resistance is rationalization, isn't it?

Not seeking repentance and sort of just reinterpreting things and making it sound good and smell good, but it's just perfume on a rotten corpse, horrible theology. But then after rationalization, doesn't it get into progression?

All of a sudden it changes everything in your life. Maybe there's a sin that you once resisted, but now you actually defend and it just has progressed.

[35 : 34] It all became, it became known through merely the first phase of resistance. That's how delusion progresses. sin resisted becomes sin tolerated and sin tolerated becomes sin defended.

So do not delay repentance or mistake God's patience of just figuring out your truth. I'm sick of that phase. No, there is truth and you need to find it.

It's not figuring out truth, it's discovering the truth. drop the delusion today and turn to Christ. And you can say that Brent called you delusional on this Sunday.

That'll fit on a coffee mug. Turn to Christ today. The truth Paul describes is not merely doctrine. The truth has a name and that truth is Jesus Christ.

His name is Jesus Christ who entered this rebellious world. He bore the judgment that rebels deserved, rose from the grave, and offers salvation to everyone who repents and believes.

[36 : 50] I know people are dropping things left and right. I know this truth is fascinating, isn't it? The baby's fallen. But listen to me.

Today, drop the delusion, turn to Christ. Stop searching for voices in your life or in your social media following that excuse your sin.

Lay down your rebellion and believe in the gospel. Repent of the lie and cling to the truth. Jesus Christ will have the one final breath.

That's our hope. Church, the signs of the times are not given to make us fanatic detectives. I've known people that search through the Bible and try to figure out Bible code.

If you haven't heard of that, consider yourself blessed. It's weird. People can fall into weird things that make us fanatics over this stuff.

[37 : 56] And Paul would have sharp words for them. These signs of the times Paul's writing to the Thessalonians is not to make them fanatic detectives, but to make them faithful disciples.

And the same is true today. Yes, lawlessness, look around the world today. Lawlessness is working. Yes, deception is powerful. Yes, rebellion will deepen and it will continue on.

Yet none of them, none of that is sovereign. Satan moves only by God's leash upon him. The lawless one appears only at God's appointed time and Christ will end his rebellion with just a breath.

Therefore, do not be shaken by predictions. Do not be seductively deluded by lies that make sin attractive.

Love the truth, remember the gospel, and stand firm in Christ. Satan will not have the last word and that is our hope today. Let's pray.