

## Mid Week • 2 Thessalonians 1-3

### INTRODUCTION

Let's do a little background on 2 Thess.

Thessalonica was a large & influential city in the region of Macedonia; the same place Alexander the Great was from.

It was an important center of Greco-Roman culture & lay on one of the main East-West trade routes.

Paul went there on his second missionary journey.

He was a strategic thinker & wanted to plant churches at key centers where the Gospel could take root, then spread from there to the surrounding regions.

Thessalonica was the key for reaching all of both East & West.

But only a month after arriving there & planting a church, persecution by officials required that he & his little team of Silas & Timothy had to leave.

They appointed some elders, then went to Athens where Paul spent a little while, then moved on to the major commercial center of Corinth where he spent several months.

Once Paul was established in Corinth, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the church was doing.

While they were doing really well, they had some questions Timothy carried back to Paul.

So just a few months after having left Thessalonica, Paul wrote his first letter back to them, commending them for their faithfulness & answering their questions.

A couple more months went by, then word reached Paul the persecution that had started when he was there, had gotten much worse & the believers were having a rough go.

Their suffering had moved some to draw an unwarranted conclusion about where they were in terms of the end times.

So Paul wrote 2 Thess to both encourage them, and to address their errant ideas.

1 & 2 Thess are Paul's earliest letters in the NT.

### CHAPTER 1

<sup>1</sup>Paul, Silvanus [Silas], and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

<sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Though Paul was the primary author, he includes Silas & Tim in the greeting because they'd constituted the team that had originally planted the church there in Thessalonica less than a year before.

Paul begins with his typical greeting "Grace and Peace" – uniting the common Greek & Hebrews greetings of **charis & shalom**.

Beginning with v. 3, Paul launches into a long sentence that goes all the way to the end of v. 8 & covers a lot of ground.

<sup>3</sup>We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, <sup>4</sup>so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, <sup>5</sup>which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; <sup>6</sup>since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, <sup>7</sup>and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, <sup>8</sup>in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul begins by commending the Thessalonians for the loyalty to the Lord, then comforts them with the assurance God would **both**

1) deliver them from the persecution they endured &

2) would punish their tormentors if they failed to repent.

I mentioned this Sunday but want to reiterate it tonight -

Paul says the fact they were being persecuted was **evidence** of their faith in Christ.

He knew well that taking a stand for Christ results in hostility.

Jesus said following Him would lead to the world's hatred & that persecution was **an evidence** of faith in Him.

**Matt. 5:11-12** • “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

**John 15:18-20** • “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 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. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. Paul encouraged the believers at Thessalonica, telling them their faithfulness in persecution was an example to many others.

Of course, they didn’t see themselves that way.

Being in the teeth of hostility, they saw themselves as weak & feeble.

**Far from victorious**, they deemed themselves pathetic & despised.

Say you work at a large company & have taken a **lonely** stand for Christ.

The other employees & management **both** have made it clear they’re not thrilled by your faith.

Your boss has told you to keep silent & threatened to fire you if you share your faith.

Your peers mock & make fun of you.

But you remain faithful to the Lord & do nothing to hide the fact that you’re a believer, knowing they legally can’t do anything about it.

You **refuse** to deny Jesus and His lordship over your life.

And every so often, when someone is going through a hard time, they come to you on the sly to ask for prayer or advice.

When those same people aren’t in trouble, many of them go right back to mocking you.

When you look at yourself **against** the backdrop of that kind of opposition, you’re feel weak & ineffective because you don’t **see** results from your life and witness.

The TRUTH is, your lonely stand, **itself** is a **powerful testimony** to your faith & the reality of the Gospel.

Heroes rarely feel like heroes **at the moment** of their heroism.

What they feel is **fear**.

But they press on in the face of that fear because they know it’s the **right thing to do**.

**That’s why they’re heroes!**

Like the Thessalonians, the church of Smyrna was getting hammered by intense persecution. In Rev, we find a letter Jesus wrote them -

“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)”

See? The Smyrnan believers saw themselves as troubled & poor.

Jesus tells them they were **in fact** rich; in reward in heaven because of their faithfulness to Him.

The Thessalonians were likewise blessed, because persecution had proven the quality of their faith & loyalty to God.

Then he comforts them with a reminder that the world doesn’t get the last word – God does!

The world may be oppressing them now, but in the end, it is **they** who will be **vindicated** & the world will be **punished**.

Persecution marks the Thessalonians as genuine believers.

Because they were, God will **punish** those who’ve oppressed them.

<sup>9</sup>These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, <sup>10</sup>when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

Since we looked at vs. 9-10 Sunday, will leave off tonight.

Want to **pray** for those who received & rededicated Sunday, now. Pray

Good for us to do that because that is precisely what Paul did – Look . . .

<sup>11</sup>Therefore we also 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, <sup>12</sup>that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be

glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Paul's constant prayer was that his converts would continue to grow & become more like Christ.

## CHAPTER 2

<sup>1</sup>Now, brethren,

Paul turns a corner here to deal with an issue that had brought some distress to the church at Thessalonica.

It had to do with their confusion about the timing of the Lord's return.

concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, <sup>2</sup>not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

The **severity** of their persecution led some to conclude that the **Tribulation** had **begun**.

Now – here's what so disturbed them:

Because Paul had taught them the Rapture occurs BEFORE the Tribulation, if the Tribulation had begun as some of them thought, that meant they'd missed the Rapture!

That's why they were "**shaken**" as it says in v. 2.

Listen – this helps cinch the idea that Paul taught a pre-trib rapture of the church.

If he taught the Rapture comes in the middle of or at the end of the Tribulation, instead of the Thessalonians being shaken, they would have been **stoked**!

Because if they thought they were IN THE TRIB already, then it meant the Rapture was that much closer!

The only thing that can account for their being freaked out by the idea they were already in the Tribulation, is that they'd been taught the Rapture comes before it!

Notice the first phrase of v. 1 . . .

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him

That's a reference to the **Rapture**; what the Thessalonians were concerned they'd missed.

It appears from v. 2 that there were false prophecies, false teachings & even **forged letters**, claiming the **Day of Christ** had come.

Paul **vehemently** refutes that & says, "I sent no such message or letter!"

There's a subtle change in terminology between v. 1 & 2 that's added much confusion to the whole "When does the Rapture take place?" issue.

In v. 1, Paul refers to the Rapture with the phrase –

the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him

In v. 2 he speaks of a different event when he writes of –

the day of Christ

These are **2 different events!**

While v. 1 refers to the Rapture,

V.2 & **The Day of Christ** is **The Day of the Lord** that we talked about a couple Sundays ago.

The Day of the Lord is a period of time when **God intervenes directly in history**.

In the Psalms & Prophets The Day of the Lord is the End Times when God ends man's rebellion against His rule & establishes His kingdom in glory on Earth.

The Day of the Lord begins with a period of judgment known as the **Tribulation**, sees the Second Coming of Christ, the re-gathering of Israel to her homeland, the judgment of the nations, & the Thousand Year reign of Christ.

It's called **The Day of the Lord** because it is, in every way – **HIS Day!**

He takes possession of that which rightly belongs to Him.

In the NT, the Day of the Lord is called **the Day of Christ**, the Day of Jesus the Christ, the Day of wrath, the Day of Judgment, and simply, The Day.

The problem in Thessalonica was this –

Some were saying Paul taught the Day of the Lord **had already begun**, evidenced by the persecution they endured.

But if they were **in** the Day of the Lord, that meant they'd missed the Rapture.

They were understandably upset.

Paul writes to correct them.

<sup>3</sup>Let no one deceive you by any means [by some false prophecy, false teaching, or some forged letter]; for *that Day [meaning the Day of the Lord he'd just referred to]* will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, <sup>4</sup>who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Notice that the phrase in v. 3 "*that Day will not come*" is in italics.

The means it's NOT IN THE ORIGINAL GREEK TEXT - it's supplied by the translators.

V. 3 flows from v. 2 & what Paul has just said about the Day of Christ.

He says the Day of Christ CANNOT HAVE COME because certain things were not occurred!

And people will KNOW they've occurred **because they will be SEEN!**

They won't just be discerned spiritually, or understood allegorically, as so many Preterists would have us believe. No – when these things takes place they will **obvious**, clear signs the Day of the Lord has commenced.

What are the things that mark the arrival of the Day of the Lord?

### 1) **The falling away,**

The Greek word is **apostasy**; a **deliberate abandonment** of a once held-belief.

The crucial issue here is how the word is preceded by the definite article "**the**."

The Day of the Lord commences with **The Apostasy**.

Now, of course, this has to be an apostasy from the Gospel; you can't fall away from a false religion; it's already false.

There have been many movements & factions that have broken away from the orthodox Christian faith. // There have been tens of thousands of apostates.

What Paul describes here is something different.

This is a **general departure** from the Faith. / It's deliberate and intentional.

It's a decided break with biblical Christianity & the embracing of something other than Apostolic doctrine.

Once again we see a hint at why the Rapture comes before all this.

With the departure of the true church, all that will be left are the fakes & frauds.

If the visible organized church is in sad shape now, imagine what it will be like after the Rapture.

In the *Left Behind* series, while there were many unsaved church members left behind who came to faith, **many more** didn't, & ended up comprising a false church that came up with what seemed like plausible explanations for the disappearance of true believers.

Something like that will surely happen.

Entire churches & denominations will carry on after the Rapture.

Of course, they'll be void of the Truth.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing that precedes or attends the onset of the Day of the Lord is . . .

### 2) **<sup>3</sup>and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, <sup>4</sup>who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.**

It's no secret who **this** is – this is the antichrist! / He's called "the man of sin."

While all human beings are sinners, this guy is the **consummate Sinner**.

He isn't **a** man, he is **THE** man of sin. / He's the ultimate expression of human rebellion.

Sin will find it's most complete & extensive expression in his career & lifestyle.

He'll commit & participate in acts of evil beyond imagination.

He's also called the "**son of perdition**." / Perdition means **ruin / destruction**.

He's the son of destruction because that's his **nature**.

He not only ends in ruin, on his way there he wreaks havoc & brings desolations to Earth thru his evil plans.

V. 4 says he will rebel against all that's considered divine & worshipped, exalting himself in its place.

He won't just **deny** God; he'll claim sole right to **all humanity's** worship & religious devotion.

Hindus, Muslims, & Buddhists will be called on to pay homage to him as divine.

In the consummate act of blasphemy, he'll enter the newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, proceed into the Holiest Place, & there declare himself to be God.

Note carefully the words Paul uses to describe this blasphemous act.

so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Once the antichrist takes his seat in the temple, claiming deity, he does something that seems to prove the boast.

Paul refers to this in v. 9 as “lying signs & wonders.”

But in v. 5 he says . . .

<sup>5</sup>Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

This was not **new** to them. Paul had already told them these things when he’d been with them.

But as we all know, when it comes to understanding the sequence of the last days, it can get a confusing.

Add some false teaching to that, as was happening in Thessalonica, & you have a problem.

Because Paul had taught them, he could now remind them, & says . . .

<sup>6</sup>And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.

That **who** may be revealed? The Antichrist!

Greek grammar demands that the pronoun “he” in v. 6 refers back to the last person described; in this case, the antichrist of vs. 3-4.

Something was standing in the way of the antichrist’s revelation when Paul wrote.

That restraining principle would stay in place until time came for it to be removed.

This is Paul’s way of **proving** to the Thessalonians that **they can’t be in the Day of the Lord** – because something is holding back the antichrist’s revelation, which is a part of the Day of the Lord.

That restraining influence will **not be present** in the Day of the Lord so the antichrist’s revelation becomes possible.

Just what it is that restrains the antichrist, we’ll discover in a moment.

First Paul says . . .

<sup>7</sup>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.

The **mystery of lawlessness** is the conspiracy of rebellion fallen man in league with the devil has declared against God.

Paul saw that conspiracy of evil already at work in his time.

He knew how it had flared up at various times in the past, specifically, in the history of his people, the Jews.

But Paul could also see the seeds of it at work in the Roman Empire.

We don’t have time to go into now, but there’s an eerie parallel between the development of the Early Church & the reaction of the Roman Emperors to what the Bible says about the End Times.

Paul seems to hint at that here.

In 1 John 4:3 John says,

This is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

So John **also** identifies that the antichrist is coming in the future, but even in his day, he could see the spirit or principle of the antichrist at work.

Both Paul & John lived during the reign of Nero who was a type of the antichrist.

Paul says **THE** antichrist could not be revealed because something was holding him back.

But the spiritual, religious, political & economic platform the antichrist will come to preside over was already under constructed.

There has been a long and sometimes fierce debate over just who or what Paul means by the restraining force holding back the emergence of the antichrist.

It ought not be that difficult to sort out since Paul **repeats** something Jesus said.

In John 14, 15, & 16, Jesus spoke of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of His followers.

He alternated between **neuter & masculine** pronouns when speaking of the Spirit.

He did so because the word **spirit** is neuter in Greek.

But the Holy Spirit is a **person**, so Jesus occasionally used the **masculine** personal pronoun to make sure the disciples understood that He’s not just an impersonal force.

Paul does the same thing here.

In v. 6 he refers to the Holy Spirit by the neuter “**what**” is restraining; then switches to the masculine “**he**” in v.

7.

The Holy Spirit prohibits the emergence of the antichrist.

Because the main objective of the Spirit is to **glorify Christ**, as Jesus makes crystal in John 16.

The **antichrist** is just that – “the against-Christ” or “instead-of-Christ one”.

Now, think about it In Matthew 5, Jesus said His followers are the salt & light of the world.

**Salt** was primarily used as a **preservative** against decay.

**Light** is idiomatic of **truth & good** which dispels the darkness of evil.

Genuine Christians are the primary force in this world that resists decay & the moral pollution of sin.

What happens when believers, men and women indwelt by the Spirit of God, are suddenly raked off the planet in the Rapture?

What of the world when the spiritual salt & the light are gone?

The first thing, v. 3, is **The Apostasy!** The second is the **emergence of the antichrist**.

<sup>8</sup>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.

We'll pick it up here in our study next week.