

Study 11: Hope in the Day of the Lord

Introduction:

We cannot be a hope-filled church if we aren't a future-focused church. Be careful not to think that this just means we want to be good strategic planners. Even though being a hope-filled church includes things like strategic planning, prayer, and spiritual discipline, it also includes knowing our theology of the "end." Consider this: if we don't have a crystal clear picture of our future, we are bound to make mistakes in getting there. An illustration is in order here: Imagine you are on a battleship, if you can. Between the swaying of the ship, the loud clamour of metal and water, and the incessant orders and rapid movement of your crewmates, you've been given the task of aiming the ship's weapons to fire on target. You don't have to have any experience in this area whatsoever to visualize the difficulty of this task even without all the distractions listed above! When your target is in the distance, you will miss dramatically if your aim is even a fraction of an angle off the mark. And in a high pressure situation, this tiny miscalculation can be the difference between life and death. Of course, most people understand this concept just as well when they try golf.

Our theology of the "end" is not so different: Precision is key, but not in the way you might think. We aren't seeking precision when it comes to understanding every symbol in Revelation perfectly in all of its forms or to know the very second that all these apocalyptic events are supposed to take place. Instead, our job is to point ourselves exactly right as the Lord works redemption in us and in the world. Today's study can be simplified into one, crucial question: How do we remain faithful to God from now until the end?

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

The Man of Lawlessness

[1] Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, [2] 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. [3] 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, [4] 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. [5] Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? [6] And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. [7] 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. [8] 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. [9] The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, [10] and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. [11] Therefore God sends them a strong

delusion, so that they may believe what is false, [12] in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Discussion:

1. With a text like this, it's best to take it in pieces and start at the beginning, rather than try and read everything as a whole straight away. First, let's notice the mood. Here, Paul is imploring his hearers to do something. Specifically, he is asking them "not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed" by any false news that the day of the Lord has already come. Paul has a history of being pastorally protective of those who he has ministered to in order to keep false doctrine away from them, and this is a perfect example of this. Next, let's quickly analyze what exactly Paul says the Thessalonians need to watch out for, which was the heresy that the day of the Lord had *already* come as opposed to what the truth was, which was that the day of the Lord is still coming. **What do you think believing that the day of the Lord had already come would do to the theology of the Thessalonians? Would they still be hopeful?**
 - Leader's Notes: The belief that the day of the Lord had already come was a heresy focused on removing the hope of total redemption from the Early Church. One great hope of the church was that Christ's return would mean freedom from oppression. No, they would likely not be hopeful, as the coming of Christ is the central point of hope for us as Christians.
2. Moving on from the general description of the heresy the Thessalonians need to avoid, Paul gets into the specifics of this type of false teaching. Here are the basics: before Christ comes, Satan will be revealed in his lawlessness trying to lead all mankind astray. In fact, in the fall, most of humanity has already followed this path. The premise of this is that Satan, our great enemy, will lead people away from God by trying to resemble, or counterfeit God. Because our created meaning is to worship God, the "deception" that must take place in a person is to make them believe that our purpose is fulfilled in something besides being the image of God. Revelation details this much further, but the information we have here is much to the same effect as the book of Revelation: In this cosmic battle between Christ and Satan, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Genesis 3:15), Christ will win and redeem His people, His bride. The nuance that this text provides lends to the original purpose of this portion of Scripture which is Paul commanding the Thessalonians to not be deceived, for those who are deceived will face destruction. The difference between the two groups is not their identity, but who they are led by: Christ or the deceiver. **How do you see unbelief in our world as people being deceived? What are people being led to believe besides the Gospel? Why do we still need to be wary of being deceived, even as Christians?**
 - Leader's Notes: We can understand all unbelief in our world as deception. Because we know that there is no "neutral" ground between following the Lord and not following the Lord, we know that anyone who has not put faith in Christ has been led away from the truth in some sense, which is to say they have been deceived. Most often people are led

to believe that there is no real way to understand the truth, because we just can't be sure. Yes, we still need to be wary because even though we believe the truth, we can still be deceived to combine the truth with falsehood.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

[13] But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. [14] To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [15] So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. [16] Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, [17] comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

Discussion

1. The grand object of our salvation and relationship to the Lord, and by extension the purpose of our entire life, is that we might obtain the glory of Christ. This, as Paul shows here, is done by the work of God in us of sanctification and belief. If we put this into language we might be more accustomed to using on a daily basis, it would be accurate to say that the Lord is working in our mind and in our heart, in both our thought and character. And all this is not an impromptu, day by day, whatever-may-come type of redemption. This was planned and predestined as we have been chosen as the firstfruits. A theologian named Geerhardus Vos once wrote some beautiful words about this concept: "The best proof that He will never cease to love us lies in that He never began." There was never a day that the Lord, who is eternal and timeless, decided to begin his love for us. We were made out of love timeless and eternal and it is this reality that is the surest evidence of our never-ending position of grace before God. Let's ponder this together. **How has the Lord been redeeming you in mind lately? How about in character? How has he been building hope in you lately?**

Leader's Notes: More of a discussion question, use this as an opportunity to catch up on the spiritual lives of those in your group.

2. Finally, we come to where Paul began, with instructions for the Thessalonians to stand firm. Not only this, but he provides an encouragement for the Thessalonians to be comforted in heart by Christ. It is a command we can also heed, for Christ is our Lord just as He is Paul's. We can also enjoy what Paul describes as eternal comfort and good hope through grace. **What exactly do we need to stand firm in during the struggles of our day? How can we actively take steps to live more in the comfort that we enjoy in eternity?**
- Leader's Notes: We need to stand firm in God's Word and the promise of Christ's return. So often we attempt to read the signs of our age and determine what we need to do to make it to tomorrow. But resting in God's Word means trusting what God has said first

and before anything else. Practical steps we can take involve reading God's Word more and designing our lives around what the Bible says.

Conclusion:

Our life is presented with plentiful obstacles to our eternal place in Christ. Whether it be temptation to sin or deception in doctrine, the battle we have stumbled into is a cosmic one between Satan fighting to deceive and mislead God's people and Christ redeeming them. So how do we remain faithful from now until the end? We don't depend on our own work, but upon our Saviour who's victory over sin and death is a certainty. We can rest in the predestination of us in the grace of God, and live every day by seeking Christ more and more, in both mind and heart,