

Message #3

Kurt Hedlund

2 Thessalonians

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## HOPE AND THE FUTURE COURSE OF EVIL

### 2 THESSALONIANS 2:6-12

I.

Sister Gertrude (PROJECTOR ON--- SISTER GERTRUDE) was the mother superior of a Benedictine convent in Rwanda in 1994. The two largest tribal groups in that African country are the Hutus and the Tutsis. In April of 1994 the Hutu-dominated government began a campaign to kill the minority Tutsis. Thousands of Tutsis fled their homes and took refuge in Sister Gertrude's convent, trusting that the nuns there would protect them.

Sister Gertrude, herself a Hutu, went to local Hutu militiamen and asked them to "clear" the convent. On April 22 Hutu militiamen invaded the compound and proceeded to kill the Tutsis with guns and machetes. More than 7000 Tutsis were killed in the massacre.

When a Tutsi army conquered Rwanda in June 1994, Sister Gertrude fled to Belgium. There she was arrested and tried in a Belgian court for crimes against humanity. She was sentenced to a 15-year term in prison. Survivors at the trial held in 2001 testified that at one point 500 of the Tutsis hid out in the convent garage. Sister Gertrude and one other nun brought gasoline so that the militiamen could burn down the building. Everyone who tried to escape was hacked to death.

The *New York Times* journalist who reported this story commented, "**What mixture of terror and hatred led these nuns to betray the promises of their faith? The Rwandan massacres left in their wake hundreds of disturbing questions like that one--- How does mass violence suddenly erupt? Are we all capable of murdering our neighbors? Where does evil come from? --- but none of them were resolved by the Belgian court. Justice is built to establish the facts of evil. It cannot explain them.**" (*New York Times*, 9/9/2001) (PROJECTOR OFF)

Psychiatrist Scott Peck writes in his book *People of the Lie* (p. 41, "**Dozens of times I have been asked by patients or acquaintances: 'Dr. Peck, why is there evil in the world?' Yet no one has ever asked me in all these years: 'Why is there good in the world?'** It is as if we automatically assume this is a naturally good world that has somehow been contaminated by evil. In terms of what we know of science, however, it is actually easier to explain evil. That things decay is quite explainable in accord with the natural law of physics. That life should evolve into more and more complex forms is not so easily

**understandable. That children generally lie and steal and cheat is routinely observable. The fact that sometimes they grow up to become truly honest adults is what seems the more remarkable. Laziness is more the rule than diligence. If we seriously think about it, it probably makes more sense to assume this is a naturally evil world that has somehow been mysteriously 'contaminated' by goodness, rather than the other way around. The mystery of goodness is even greater than the mystery of evil."**

The Bible says that the existence of evil is rooted in a conflict between God and a fallen angel known as the Devil. We humans have been infected with sin as a result of choices that our ancestors made. We humans too often choose to do that which is evil. The passage before us today tells us how this cosmic conflict is going to play out.

In our study of 2 Thessalonians we have seen that the church established by Paul and coworkers in what we know today as Greece was a healthy church. It displayed the virtues of faith, love and hope. Because of bad information received by the Christians in that city, there was concern that they had entered a time of judgment labelled in our text as "the day of the Lord." So Paul in #2 is explaining how these future events will take place.

(PROJECTOR ON--- CHART) Last week I showed you this chart to incorporate the teaching of Paul and other passages of Scripture about end-time events. The term *parousia*, often referred to simply as "coming," is used of the rapture of the church and the physical return to earth of Jesus at the end of a seven year tribulation. The day of the Lord begins at the start of the tribulation. The term "day of the Lord" seems to be used in the Bible to describe events that happen after that.

Today we are going to deal with a further explanation of the future course of evil. We will also learn about the importance and consequences of the moral decisions that we make.

II.

In vv. 6 & 7 of 2 Thessalonians #2 we find that THE REMOVAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL LEAD TO THE INTRODUCTION OF THE ANTICHRIST. (II. THE REMOVAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT...) In v. 6, which is p. 989 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs, we read, **"And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time."** We know from v. 3 that the one being restrained is the man of lawlessness, who is also the son of destruction. In v. 4 Paul says that this individual wants to be treated as God, and he desires to take a seat in the temple. Elsewhere in the New Testament he is called the Antichrist. Last week we looked at passages in Daniel and Revelation that describe the power that he claims during a future seven year period known as the Tribulation.

Verse 6 indicates that there is something restraining him. It is keeping him from being revealed, as v. 3 describes it. We saw last week that this revealing of the Antichrist probably has to do with his signing of a major covenant, or treaty. One of the things which this treaty accomplishes is that it guarantees the peace and safety of Israel and Jerusalem. The one who takes the lead role in making this treaty is the Antichrist. His identity will be clear by virtue of this agreement which is established. That will be his revealing.

The big question is: What is this restraining thing? A different form of the word is used in the next verse. It does not appear anywhere else in the Bible or in early Christian literature in regard to end time things. So look at v. 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."** Both the mystery of lawlessness and the Antichrist are somehow restrained by this restrainer thing.

As is true with French and Spanish, nouns in Greek may have a male or female form. As is true of German, they may also have a neuter form. It is the neuter form of "restrainer" that is used in v. 6. It is the masculine form that is used in v. 7. So we wonder whether Paul was referring to the same thing or person, or to a somewhat related thing or person.

What was evidently obvious to the understanding of the Thessalonian Christians is not so obvious to us in the twenty-first century. Down through history a multitude of answers has been suggested. They have included the idea that the Roman empire and a Roman emperor are in view, perhaps specifically Nero. Some have suggested that it is laws and government in general that have been a restraining influence and perhaps the head of government who is the restrainer. Some have suggested that it is the preaching of Paul and Paul himself that have been keeping back the revealing of the Antichrist. Some have suggested that it is demonic power and Satan himself who have held back the revealing of the Antichrist. The idea is that the leader of demons is waiting for the right opportunity to unveil the man of lawlessness. Another suggestion is that it is the archangel Michael and angelic power that is the restraining force. All of these ideas have drawbacks. One modern commentator (Best) expresses the exasperation of some, stating, **"No theory can be held to be satisfactory ... we must acknowledge our ignorance."**

For us who hold to a pretribulation rapture position the identification of the restrainer is not so difficult. If indeed the man of lawlessness is the Antichrist, who is empowered by the devil, then the only force powerful enough to restrain his appearance is God. Perhaps we can be even more specific than that. For the New Testament suggests that it is the Holy Spirit in particular who is involved in restraining sin. Jesus was speaking to His disciples in the Upper Room on the evening before His arrest and crucifixion. In John #16 v. 8 (JOHN 16:8) He is quoted as saying this about the Holy Spirit, **"And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment..."**

In Greek the word for "spirit" in "Holy Spirit" is neuter in gender. So the grammatically correct pronoun to use in referring to the Holy Spirit is also neuter in gender. But at least twice that I remember in John #16 the Apostle John uses the masculine pronoun to refer to the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is a person, and in the Bible God is described primarily in terms of maleness. So I wonder if perhaps Paul in v. 6 is thinking not just of the power of God in general but the Holy Spirit in particular and uses the neuter gender form of restrainer" to be grammatically correct in referring to the Holy Spirit. But then in v. 7 he uses the male gender form to more accurately refer to the personhood of the Holy Spirit.  
(PROJECTOR OFF)

If the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, how is it that He will get out of the way? One of the New Testament teachings concerning the Holy Spirit is that after Pentecost He indwells every true Christian. At the rapture of the church Christians will be removed from the earth. By virtue of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives we Christians function as salt and light in the world around us. We exercise a restraint upon sin. We use our moral influence to oppose injustice and to promote righteousness. But when the church is raptured, that influence is gone. The Holy Spirit will still be at work in the world during the Tribulation, but His restraining influence exercised through Christians will be lost. This will set the stage for the influence and power of the Antichrist to be exercised. The church will not be around to warn people that a powerful world leader who has seemingly recovered from a fatal wound and who wants to establish a major world treaty that includes a guarantee of the security of Jerusalem is a bad dude.

Paul in v. 7 makes reference to the "mystery of lawlessness." The term "mystery" is used by Paul later in his writing of Ephesians to refer to the church. The basic idea of "mystery" in its New Testament usage is something that was hidden in the past but is now revealed. The nature of the church was unknown to people in the Old Testament. The idea that Jews and Gentiles would be united in one body by a common faith in Jesus was unknown in Old Testament days. But this mystery was now revealed to Paul and the other apostles.

Lawlessness has clearly been known throughout history. But the reality of human evil, which is often minimized and explained away in our culture, will have its full revelation in the Tribulation. It is then that we will see just how horrible we human beings can be. Paul could say that there is evidence of it in his day. We certainly see evidence of it in our day. We know about atrocities like the massacres in Rwanda. We read the stories about the beheadings committed by ISIS in the Middle East. We have seen the atrocities committed by terrorists in the West. The unveiling of lawlessness in the future will be related to the coming of the Antichrist, who will bring evil to worst levels of depravity than what has been seen before. Such is the subject of the next verses in our passage.

III.

Thus in vv. 8-10 we find that THE CULMINATION OF THE FUTURE COURSE OF EVIL IS THE TRIBULATION.  
(PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE CULMINATION OF THE FUTURE...) In vv. 8-10 we read, **"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 power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."**

We saw last week from Daniel #9 v. 27 that the signing of a major world treaty providing for the peace and security of Jerusalem and Israel will mark the beginning of the seven year Tribulation. The major role of a world leader in the establishment of that treaty who seemingly suffered a fatal wound will be the key event that reveals "the lawless one."

The word that is used to describe the appearance of the Antichrist in v. 9 is *parousia*. Remember, that is the term that is used to describe the second coming of Christ. Often it is used to describe the coming of Christ in the rapture. But at the end of v. 8 the word is used to describe the coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation.

The Antichrist and his boss, the devil, are counterfeiters. Christ has a *parousia*, and the Antichrist has a *parousia*. The first and second appearances of Christ are marked by miracles. The appearance of the Antichrist on the world stage will also be marked by miracles. The true God offers love. The devil offers lust. God offers meaningful commitment and service. The devil offers addiction. The true God has genuine prophets. The devil has false prophets. The true God presents Himself in the form of the Trinity. The devil in the Tribulation will appear as a false trinity.

In v. 9 we are specifically told that the Antichrist will appear with great power and false signs and wonders. Verse 10 indicates that there will be great deception. Miracles alone are not a direct sign of the presence of the true God. In the Tribulation some of these miracles will point attention to a false god. The source of power behind the Antichrist is the devil.

The Book of Revelation describes how this comes about. (REVELATION 12:9) In #12 v. 9 the Apostle John sees in a vision, **"And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him."**

The text goes on to describe how Satan persecutes the woman who gave birth to a special child. It would seem that the reference is to Israel, which is the nation that gave birth to Christ. In the Tribulation many Jews will become followers of Jesus. According to Revelation # 12 v. 17 (REVELATION 12:17), **"Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea."**

We saw last week in #13 of Revelation that the Antichrist claims authority over much of the earth in the last 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation. After the passage that we read in that chapter we are told that a second beast appears and acts like an Antiholy Spirit. In vv. 13-16 (REVELATION 13:13) we are told, **"It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, (REVELATION 13:14) and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. (REVELATION 13:15) And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. (REVELATION 13:16) Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead..."**

Our passage in v. 10 refers to those who are perishing. These are people who have rejected Jesus Christ and have chosen to follow this false trinity. In the coming Tribulation they will buy into the program of the Antichrist. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Some during the Tribulation will believe in Jesus. Many of them will be martyred for their faith. Most people will not follow Jesus. They will reject the truth. Such rejection of the truth is at work in our day. This is the case with the transgender bathroom law discussion. On one side of the debate advocates argue that gender is determined by the choice of the individual. In British Columbia a couple of weeks ago an eight month old baby was allowed to have the gender marked on the health card as "unknown." The parent, with the support of the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal, wants to raise the child genderless until the baby has a **"sense of self and command of vocabulary to tell me who they are."** Such thinking is a denial of biological truth. Except in extremely rare circumstances, the biological identity of a child is obvious at birth.

The coming Tribulation will be a time of judgment where God will display wrath against sinful humanity. But it will also be a time during which the unholy trinity will be allowed to have room to operate. They will display evil to its maximum extent. Yet people will choose to follow the Antichrist and his forces.

According to v. 8 Jesus will kill the Antichrist with the breath of his mouth. That judgment is expanded upon in the last two verses of our passage.

IV.

Thus in vv. 11 & 12 we find that THE RESULT OF THE CHOICE TO FOLLOW EVIL WILL BE DIVINE JUDGMENT. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. THE RESULT OF THE CHOICE TO...) In v. 11 Paul writes, **"Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false."** Literally the text says that

they may believe "the lie." What is "the lie?" The context has to do with the claim of the Antichrist to be God.

So it is not just the display of demonic powers that will convince unbelievers to follow the Antichrist. Somehow God will encourage that choice. The previous verse says that the people have refused to love the truth.

In v. 7 Paul said that there were certain aspects of the mystery of lawlessness that were already at work in his day. We can find evidence of that around us in our day. In Romans #1 Paul identifies a pattern that works itself out when people reject the revelation of God that He provides for them.

Beginning in v. 24 of Romans #1 (ROMANS 1:24) we read, **"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, (ROMANS 1:25) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (ROMANS 1:26) For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; (ROMANS 1:27) and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (ROMANS 1:28) And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."** God gave them up to a debased mind. I wonder if this is something of what Paul envisions in the future Tribulation. The apostle goes on in Romans 1 to describe various other sins. Do we not also see evidence of this happening in our own culture? (PROJECTOR OFF)

In v. 12 Paul continues the statement that began in v. 11: **"Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe the lie, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."** The end result of God's dealing with sinful humanity will be justice. For Thessalonians who were enduring persecution there was a certain encouragement and reassurance in that. For us who live in an often unjust world there also may be a certain reassurance.

The end result will include a destruction of the Antichrist, which Paul mentions in v. 8. A description of that occurs in #19 of the Book of Revelation. Beginning in v. 11 (REVELATION 19:11) we read about what John saw in his vision: **"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. (REVELATION 19:12) His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. (REVELATION 19:13) He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. (REVELATION 19:14) And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. (REVELATION 19:15) From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.**

**He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.** What v. 8 in our passage describes as the breath of his mouth is here described as a sharp sword. (REVELATION 19:16) **On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."**

We will skip down then to vv. 20 & 21. (REVELATION 19:20) There John continues, **"And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. (REVELATION 19:21) And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh."** Such is what the Bible says will happen in the future course of evil. Judgment is coming.

The stakes are very high. The choices that we make have consequences for our eternal destiny. Christians can have hope in knowing that the future course of evil will be ended with the judgment of God. Those who are not Christians need to realize that one day they will face an eternal judgment from the God who is really there. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Lok Mani Bhandari came from a prominent high class Hindu family in Nepal. By age 18 he was already a well known street fighter and gang leader. Three years later he became a national champion in Tae-Kwon-Do and went to the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

In December of 1984 he had a motorbike accident that changed his life. He saw a vision of Jesus. He says, **"I had always read in the Hindu scriptures that someday there would come a judge riding on a horse with a sword in his hand. He would demand an account for what one did in his life and judge all nations. This judge was not given a name, but when I saw Jesus I knew this was the one. I could tell his character was different from the Hindu gods."**

Lok Mani Bhandari became a follower of Jesus. He had never been arrested for his street fighting or gang involvement, but soon he was thrown in jail for publicly preaching the gospel to a large crowd. In jail he led many cellmates to faith in Christ. He created such a stir that he was thrown out of jail. He resumed his street preaching. He has since become a pastor and begun several churches. The church in Nepal is still small, but it is growing.

It was the vision and insight given to Lok Mani Bhandari about the coming Judge that changed his life. A realization about the future course of evil could also change our lives. If you have never trusted in Jesus as the Leader of your life, you have one primary responsibility. You need to trust in Jesus. The Bible tells us that we are all sinners. We have this evil nature within us that separates us from God. But God sent His Son to become a human being. This God-man Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.



Our responsibility is to put our trust in Him, to receive by faith the gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life that He offers us. Let's pray.