

Easter 2018
2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

INTRODUCTION

You have heard that Jesus rose from the dead? You have heard that on Friday He was nailed to a cross where He died? You have heard that on the morning of the third day, He rose up from the dead?

And you have heard why this happened and that His death had an important purpose? You have heard that He accomplished forgiveness of sins for all who trust in Him by substituting Himself for sinners on the Cross? You have heard that His rising from the dead was not only proof that all that He said was true, but it is the guarantee that all who believe in Him will likewise rise from the dead?

You know that, right?

Well, did you know that the day of the Resurrection of His people is near too? Did you know that the story did not end the first time He came and died for sinners, rose and ascended to Heaven?

This matters because many people know that Jesus died for sins. They have heard that story many times. They know the Easter story. Many people know that truth, but knowing that Jesus died and rose is not enough to motivate them to follow Him. They look at the here and the now, and wager that they can satisfy themselves in this life without having to bother with Jesus.

So, this Easter, let's not look back at the Resurrection of Jesus. Instead, let's look ahead and see how what Jesus has done will affect the future of the world –your future.

TEXT: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

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.

The congregation of Thessalonica was very trusting and sensitive to false teachers. Some had been telling them that Jesus had already returned, but they didn't know it. They found this disturbing. Did God forget them? Were they stuck on the Island of Misfit Toys? Did they miss their chance at Heaven?

They knew that Jesus had Himself spoken of how He could come and gather His people together. Look at Mark 13:

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.” –Mark 13:24-27

Had the angels gathered the elect, but forgotten them? Some teachers were telling them so.

Paul comforts them like a father talking to worried children. He says, “Don’t be alarmed. Don’t be afraid. God has not forgotten you. When the Lord comes, you will know it.” He then reminds them of some things he had taught them before:

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?

Paul reminds them that he had already taught them what would happen *before* the Lord returns. Before Jesus comes back, there will be a rebellion and an evil man will appear. What do we know about him? We know a couple of things. One is that he is characterized by lawlessness. Mankind is restrained by laws. Laws are good for us. Why? Because we are self-centered and rebellious against God. If we live without laws of right and wrong, evil will be unrestrained.

We also know of this man that he will claim to be God. Along with this, he will deny all other religions as false. Paul is reminding them, “You have not seen a man lead a world-wide rebellion against all so-called gods, have you? You haven’t seen a man proclaim himself to all the world to be the true God, and have the world believe him, have you?”

Its as if Paul is saying, “Never worry about missing the return of Jesus. You will know when the end is very near because you will be living in a world controlled by lawlessness.”

Jesus spoke of this time period in this way:

“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. –Mark 13:14

There will be a buildup of lawlessness leading to a crescendo when the Man of Lawlessness reveals himself as if he is God.

By the way, I don’t know how close we are to the end, but I am certain that the foundations of the Man of Lawlessness are being seen all around us. The current state of thought in America and Western Europe reflects an embracing of lawlessness. There is no God in the eyes of the leaders of nations and cultures, so they are free to say right is wrong and wrong is right. They are free to abort babies and call it righteous, while oppressing and hating anyone who challenges their strange morality.

We are close.

But the point of the text is, “until you see the Man of Lawlessness, you haven’t missed the return of Jesus!” I’d say the same to you today.

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.

The lawless man is controlled by Satan. He will have the power to do what appear to be mighty miracles (they will be “false” signs). The whole world will run after this man as the savior of mankind, as God. Why hasn’t this man arrived already? Because God restrains him. There are many arguments about who it is that restrains the lawless one. I urge you not to get caught up in such speculation, as the Bible doesn’t say who it is. I have my own theory, but it is only that—a guess. However, I know for sure that the timing of this restraint is caused by God. When the right time comes, God will remove the restraint, and the lawless one will have his way, convincing the lost of the world to turn on all religions, especially the true God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

What will end this evil man’s works? The return of Jesus Christ who will destroy him and all those who follow him. Jesus is not dead. He rose from the dead. He is at the right hand of God, and He will return again.

It is important that we see the timing of this. Many Christians believe that Jesus will return secretly and steal away the church before the Man of Lawlessness arrives. This teaching is not correct. The order of events is clear. The Gospel is preached to the nations (as it is now, and has been for the last 2,000 years), then lawlessness increases (as it has been for centuries), the people of God are persecuted (as they have been for 2,000 years, and more than ever now), and then the lawless one is revealed (the same as the abomination that causes desolation). Then, the Lord returns and punishes the wicked and gathers His people. He does not sneak in and steal away the church. Many of us will survive all the events at the time of the end. Many of us won’t.

If we read Jesus’ account in the Gospel, we see the timing clearly:

“See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. . . . Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. . . . Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. . . . Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the

Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. –Matthew 24:4-31

These things are coming on the earth. They might be very near. Some here might see all the things spoken of that will happen at the end, including the return of Jesus.

Some people think, “Well, I may not follow Jesus now, but if I see this Man of Lawlessness, then I will convert.” No, you won’t. God won’t be mocked like that. If you know of His salvation, but choose to continue in your sin and unbelief, when the Man of Lawlessness appears, God will not protect you from his lies:

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.

Why am I telling you about all of this on Easter?

I’m warning you.

If you knew that you were about to drive off a bridge, wouldn’t you want someone to warn you that the bridge is out? If you were about to walk into an ambush, wouldn’t you want someone to warn you so that you could avoid being beaten and robbed?

I’m warning you that it matters what you do in this life because it will all come to an end rather quickly. It matters that you surrender your life to Jesus now, while you can, because one day it will be too late. Then, your blood will be on your own hands, for God has sent you people to warn you. Will you listen?

Before you answer that, let’s take another look at something Paul said to the church in Thessalonica. You see, hearing about all these difficult things to come can be frightening. Paul wanted to give them courage to endure these things by showing them the future of those who follow Jesus. He tells of what happens to them when He returns to crush the Man of Lawlessness, and to condemn those who hated the truth. What He has to say to those who believe in Him is all about Easter. The first Easter, only one person rose with a glorified eternal body, but that is not the only Easter. When He returns, life will come to all who believe in Jesus, and all who have believed in Him throughout time:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. –1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

When He comes to gather His people, those who have passed on before will be raised to life as living humans with a vibrancy and vitality never seen in any human with the exception of the resurrected Jesus Himself. They will join Him. Those who love Him and remain will then be changed, metamorphosed -- (the Scripture says: *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.* –1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

We will likewise join those saints and Jesus in the air and be with Him forever.

What a day of reunion and rejoicing that will be! Family reunited down through the generations! The great men and women of faith that we have never met, nor even heard of, will be there with us, glowing with life, and telling the stories of God's faithfulness in their times!

This day is coming. Christians, are you discouraged when you look around at the world and wonder how you can find a safe and satisfying life in this place? Stop looking at that which is passing away to find your home. Your home is coming when Jesus arrives. Take courage, have hope, and rejoice no matter what is happening. Your future is assured.

For those who have stubbornly put off following Jesus, the only reasonable path is to repent of their sins and run to Jesus for forgiveness, life, and safety.