

Gone with the Wind

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 July 2024

Preacher: Jeremy Martinson

[0 : 00] 2 Thessalonians. We are in chapter 2 and right in the heart of this chapter, verse number 5 and then down through verse number 12. 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 power and false signs and wonders and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved.

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.

Thank you. The Lord Jesus Christ said, I am the way and the truth and the life.

[1 : 14] Jesus said that. He also said you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

So it's no surprise then, or at least it shouldn't be a surprise to us, I don't think, that our adversary, the devil's strategy is deception.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John, he is a liar. Our adversary, the devil, is a liar and the father of lies.

And it started right away in the very beginning with Adam and Eve. You remember his deception. Did God say?

Were those really God's words? And then the twist, right? God had said, you will surely die.

[2 : 17] And the devil says, you will not die, but instead you will be like God. This is a compelling temptation.

It is simultaneously too good to be true and too good to pass up. That's a good temptation. It is simultaneously too good to be true that you could be like God, but also simultaneously too good to pass up.

What an opportunity. Rather than believing God's word to them, Adam and Eve take the bait of the devil's twisted deception.

He exploits their weakness and he leads them into disobedience and sin. Sin enters the human race.

And as Paul writes in Romans chapter 5, death by sin. And so death spread to all because all have sinned. So here we are at the very beginning.

[3 : 24] The devil's purpose, contrary to Jesus's purpose, who says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. Know the truth and the truth will set you free.

And the devil's purpose, instead, is to blind men and women, boys and girls, to God's truth. So that he can exploit our weaknesses.

So that he can lead us into disobedience. The devil deceives sinners in a futile, a futile but ferocious attempt to thwart God's purposes.

And so it's not at all surprising to us that Paul's concern for the Thessalonians and the Spirit's concern for us is that we are not deceived.

2 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse number 3. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way.

[4 : 34] Have you ever been fooled? Tricked? Deceived? How does this happen? How is it that we are tricked and fooled and deceived?

Kids, what do you think? How are you tricked or fooled or deceived? What would someone have to do in order to trick you or to fool you or deceive you?

Maybe they would hold back some information. That could be useful if you were trying to deceive someone, right?

Maybe they would flood you with too much information and you become so distracted by what is the real here, what's truly happening here.

I just don't know. I'm deceived. There's just too much going on. I can't comprehend it all. Maybe you are told outright lies.

[5 : 35] How do you feel? How do you feel when you find out that you have been deceived, tricked, fooled? I think most of the time we feel upset about that.

I could only think of one time when we don't feel upset about that. It's when you go to a magic show, right? Like you are willfully putting yourself in a position where you're like, I want to be deceived.

I want to be tricked. I want to be fooled. But other than that one time, and if you think of another, you let me know. Other than that one time, we do not want to be deceived.

No one wants to be fooled. Paul's concern, don't be deceived. The first imperative, the first command here in 2 Thessalonians results in this pastoral care for the church.

I know you're anxious. I know you feel insecure. I know you're worried because you think that you may have already missed out on Jesus' coming. But let me ask you, have you seen the two signs?

[6 : 48] What signs? Have you seen the two signs? Have you seen the final apostasy, the falling away of God's people, supposedly?

Have you seen that? Well, no. Well, have you seen the appearance of this man of lawlessness? Well, it's bad, but I don't think it's that bad.

We haven't seen that. Well, then you haven't missed the coming of the Lord Jesus. These two things have to happen first.

I imagine the Thessalonians, in their heads, they're thinking this, and maybe it actually comes out this way, and maybe that's why it's recorded for us here in 2 Thessalonians. Maybe it comes out, how will we know what this man of lawlessness is like?

Who are we looking for? What is this going to be like? How are we going to recognize him? Paul says, You will recognize him because he opposes God, and he exalts himself.

[7 : 55] Look at verse 4. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called God or object of worship.

How will he behave? He has this self-focus that allows him to exalt himself over and above anyone else or anything else that could ever claim that position.

And he opposes God. He does not fall in line with God's ways. He is not submissive to God's law. He doesn't want to do things God's way.

Why? Well, because he is aligned with and powered by the devil. Look at verse number 9. The coming of the lawless one is based on Satan's working.

With every kind of miracle, both signs and wonders, serving the lie. What is his intention?

[9 : 09] To deceive. To deceive. And yet, this man of lawlessness is empowered with Satan's power to do all kinds of signs and wonders to what end?

To serve the lie. To further the deception. To trick people. To fool people. To deceive.

He opposes God. He exalts himself. He is aligned with and empowered by the devil. And finally, he deceives unbelievers.

Look at verse number 10. with every wicked deception among those who are perishing. They perish because they did not accept the love of the truth and so be saved.

Look at the end of verse 12. Those who did not believe the truth but delighted in unrighteousness.

So here we have these two signs.

[10 : 13] The final apostasy and the final appearing. And if they haven't happened yet, then Jesus has not returned yet. What is Paul's purpose?

Calming. Calming. Forgetful. Fretful hearts. His purpose is pastoral care. Not intellectual gratification.

If studying the signs, if studying the end, eschatology, if it leads to more confusion, that bumps up against Paul's stated purpose for teaching about the end of the world.

His purpose is that God's people would not be deceived. His purpose is that we would not be easily upset or troubled. He doesn't want the Thessalonians to be deceived.

He wants them to know and remember these truths. Why? Because knowing and remembering and believing truth fuels hope.

[11:16] Now, because we can trace a few things about this final apostasy and this final appearing, this does not mean we have perfect clarity about the end of the world.

I don't think that that comes as a surprise to any of you, but just in case, I just want to state that. It does not mean that we have perfect clarity about what the end of the world will be like or that we need to have perfect unity around how we understand these things related to the end of the world. So let me state that right up front. Bible prophecy and these truths related to what will the end of the world be like are written oftentimes in an enigmatic style.

And that just means that they are written in such a way that they are intentionally vague. Intentionally ambiguous. This style of writing that you will find in apocalyptic books, Ezekiel, Daniel, which we had the privilege of working through together, especially the end of Daniel, the book of Revelation, also bits and pieces here in Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

These writings are written in an enigmatic style and this works a little bit like a riddle. Do you know what riddles are? They're not like jokes, although sometimes riddles and jokes are treated the same.

[12:54] A riddle is more like a kind of a catchy phrase and you're supposed to guess what the object of the riddle is. What do those words describe?

I will offer you one. A box without hinges, key, or lid, yet golden treasure inside is hid. This is one of Gollum's riddles to Bilbo in The Hobbit. I'll give it to you again because I know you're now thinking about it.

A box without hinges, key, or lid, yet golden treasure inside is hid. What do you think the answer to that is? Now here's what's going to happen.

When I give you the answer, you're going to go, oh, of course, that's so easy and obvious now. The answer is an egg. An egg.

[13:59] It's the golden treasure that is inside a box without hinges, key, or lid. Now you get the answer to that and you go, oh yeah, that makes sense, doesn't it? I won't be fooled by that one again.

But you might. You might be fooled by that one again. That's the way that a riddle works. After you know the answer, you look back at the riddle and you're like, oh, that does make sense.

Some of the writings in Scripture are like that. Apocalyptic, prophetic writings. You read it the first time and you're like, I don't really know what that's all about.

But then as history passes, we're able to look back and you go, oh, that's what God was writing about, right? Like you can see this and now this is probably going to cause this sermon to get along, but now here I am.

You can see this, for example, in like Isaiah 53, right? A beautiful text, but it starts out talking about this branch that's growing up, this root that's coming up and you're like, I don't know what that means.

[15:00] I'm so confused right now. Is it a root? Is it a person? And then this person dies and this person is like a lamb, but then at the end, there's this thoughts of seeing his posterity and you're like, but I thought he was dead.

And then when Jesus comes and we look back at Isaiah 53, we go, oh, that's what was happening there.

But we need the light of history. We kind of turn that flashlight back on those texts after they have passed and you're like, oh, now I see what God was talking about.

Now, the danger, of course, with this type of writing, this style of enigmatic writing, prophecy and apocalyptic writing, is that it is what?

Subject to abuse, right? Someone could show up and very dogmatically say, this is what this means and therefore, here's where we are at in the timeline of Bible prophecy.

[16:15] And perhaps that person is right. We should check what they're saying against Scripture. But if they are speaking dogmatically about something that the Scripture is not particularly clear on, we should be careful, lest what?

Lest we are deceived. That's what happened in Thessalonica. Someone shows up with a word, a prophecy, perhaps a letter, supposedly from Paul.

And the people are stirred up. But these Thessalonians, according to Paul anyway, should not have been deceived.

Look at verse 5. I love this about Paul. Don't you remember? Don't you remember that when I was still with you, I used to tell you about this?

The idea here is, I taught you this more than once. This wasn't like a one-time thing. I taught you these truths.

[17 : 24] Don't you remember? Why have you become stirred up and anxious and fretful? Don't you remember? I, when I was still with you, I used to tell you about this.

And you know, verse 6, you know what currently restrains him so that he will be revealed in his time. Here's this mystery.

Here's this mystery of lawlessness. Here is this enigmatic style that I was just describing for you. There is something that is active and yet it is invisible.

And it is powerful and yet it is right now being restrained. Well, what is restraining it?

Well, apparently Paul taught them enough so that they know. You see that there in verse number 6? You know. You know what currently restrains him.

[18 : 52] They knew. We don't know. We don't know. Paul apparently didn't feel the need to elaborate here for the Thessalonians who are going to receive this letter.

We sure wish that he would have elaborated a little bit because we, frankly, don't know what is restraining. And here is the challenge for us.

Here's why it's difficult to sort this out. Look in verse number 6. You see this. You know what? You know what? Do you see that?

But now, move into verse number 7 and notice that it changes. The one now restraining will do so until he is out of the way.

So, we have both a what, an object of some sort, an idea, something not a person, perhaps, who is doing the restraining, and simultaneously, a who is doing the restraining.

[19 : 59] Ideas about this abound. And you can always tell when we should not speak dogmatically when the answers to the questions are opposed to one another.

That is a clear way where you should be like, whoa, whoa, whoa. We got to have some humility here because we just don't know. So, here are some opinions and they are diverse and I'm not even going to comment on all of these.

You can go dig into these more if you want. I would love to learn with you. Perhaps, some have said, the Roman Empire is what is restraining the coming of the lawless one.

This idea fell apart a bit when the Roman Empire fell and here we are all still here. Some have said, perhaps it is the Jewish state and when the Jewish state has been reestablished, perhaps then that will mark the end and the coming of the lawless one and yet the Jewish state was established and that has not as of yet led to the appearing of the man of lawlessness.

Some have said, well, perhaps this is the idea of civil order, law, culture, society. Perhaps that is what is holding back the man of lawlessness.

[21 : 22] You know, that we are North Dakota nice, that we obey the golden rule, that we do unto others as they would do unto us and maybe we're just not bad enough yet.

We're still decent enough people that the man of lawlessness has not come and maybe that decency is what is still restraining. Some have said, perhaps this is talking about the Holy Spirit and that is true.

There are some occasions where the Holy Spirit is referenced in more of an objective way and then later on in the same text in an active person way and I think there's some credibility there.

However, the people who tend to hold this idea dovetail it with their view of the rapture and they say when the rapture happens then that will remove the Holy Spirit and then the Holy Spirit will no longer be restraining and that's why all manner of evil and wickedness will happen.

Some have just straight up said maybe this is Satan or some kind of a demonic power that is restraining restraining the man of lawlessness.

[22 : 46] I don't give a lot of credibility to this because it doesn't make sense in my mind that wickedness is holding back wickedness. Like Jesus tells us that, right? A house divided against itself cannot stand.

It doesn't really make sense. Like why not just unleash it now? So these are the ideas. Augustine said this, quote, I frankly confess I do not know what he means.

I think that's good humility and that's good for us as well. Here's what we can discern. I think we can discern that whatever this is that is restraining and whoever this is that is restraining that God is the

ultimate power behind the restraint.

I say that first of all for the reason that we have already stated that it doesn't really make sense to me that wickedness is holding back wickedness. But secondly, if you look in the text, I think there is an explicit, though it's subtle, reason in the text.

Look at verse number eight. Then the lawless one will be revealed. Here's the subtle, implicit little bit of clue that I think we can get.

[24 : 01] This word revealed, God or Christ is always the subject of it. Whenever you see this word, it is always God or Christ who is doing the revealing.

This makes sense, or I should say, or who is being revealed, right? It's always either God or the Lord Jesus who is doing this. So if the coming of the lawless one is going to be revealed, then in order for that to happen, the one now restraining him has to stop restraining him.

God is always the subject of this verb, and since God is the one behind the revealing, then I think we can logically, reasonably say, well then, God is also the one behind the restraining.

Perhaps some have argued this refers to Michael, the archangel, and we do read a bit about that in Daniel chapter 10 through 12, could be.

Perhaps this is talking about the gospel, and the proclamation of the gospel, and perhaps God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is seeing to it that the gospel continues to be effective, that the gospel continues to be viable, that people continue to respond to the preaching of the gospel.

[25 : 39] Why? Well, because Jesus has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And so, it is that we preach the gospel confident in God to continue to preserve his church, to continue to restrain the man of lawlessness, righteousness, and perhaps that restraint is the preaching of the gospel, and the work of the Holy Spirit, to open sinners' eyes, to grant them life and repentance and faith, so that they believe in Jesus.

So again, here is this mystery of the man of lawlessness, active, and yet not fully revealed, powerful, and yet restrained. Contrary to cultural tropes, Satan's strategy is not fear.

Satan's strategy, as we have looked at, is deception. He is not into scaring you to death. His intention is to deceive you into apostasy.

That is his strategy. And so-called prophets and manipulative TV preachers, even well-intentioned prophecy conference speakers, will make the focus of their preaching the Antichrist, this man of lawlessness.

And yet, Paul's concern is not so much with the final appearing of the Antichrist, but much more with the deception that infiltrates the church as a result of the Antichrist's power now.

[27 : 32] Consider three misconceptions, three myths that this text corrects.

first, this corrects the myth that the Antichrist has the next move. That somehow when Jesus has died and been raised and now ascended into heaven, that that was sort of a tag, you're it, to the Antichrist, and now we are just waiting around for the Antichrist to get bold enough or scary enough or strong enough or whatever, and then we're all just going to deal with him.

This corrects that myth. Verse number six, you know what currently restrains him so that he will be revealed, notice, in his time, revealed, same verb as we looked at in verse number eight, he will be revealed in his time, who does the revealing, God does the revealing, and God will do that revealing in his time.

It is not the Antichrist who has the next move. God, and not Satan, controls the timing of the end of the world, and this means, dear brother and sister, you do not need to be anxious.

anxious. You don't need to be anxious. It is not the man of lawlessness, not the Antichrist, not the devil or his powers who are in control of the next step in the history of redemption.

[29 : 25] That is under God's control. He will be revealed in his time. Here's the second myth the final battle between God and the Antichrist, between Jesus and the Antichrist, will be some kind of an epic struggle between good and evil and light and darkness, God and the devil, and the outcome is sort of in question.

This is a myth. We're not nervous about how things are going to end. And yet, that is the way sometimes that we are led to believe that when the Antichrist is revealed, that somehow there's going to be this just massive struggle and we're just not going to know and it's going to be like one of those superhero movies or one of those kung fu movies where the good guy just repeatedly takes punches after punches before finally conquering evil.

No, no, no, no, no. No. No. No. No. No. No. Verse number eight. I think this is one of the reasons why this text gets a little difficult is because Paul interrupts his thoughts which are in six and seven and again in nine and sorry six, seven and the start of eight and then he picks up his thoughts about the Antichrist in verse nine and ten again and he's interrupted with this thought about the Lord Jesus. Notice this. I'll start at the beginning of verse 8 so you kind of get the effect. And then the lawless one will be revealed. Hear it. The Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of his mouth and will bring him to nothing at the appearance of his coming. It's tempting to be more caught up with the Antichrist than with Jesus Christ. It's tempting to fall for this myth of some kind of epic struggle between good and evil.

[31 : 42] And yet that's not at all the way that Paul describes it here. Jesus will instantly and effortlessly destroy him and bring him to nothing.

This word bring to nothing is also translated abolish or end or make ineffective or powerless. How is that going to happen? Just look at it.

The Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of his mouth at the appearance of his coming. Instantly and effortlessly, Jesus wins.

And so you don't need to be afraid. You don't need to be afraid. If you are a child of God, you don't need to fear the end.

Jesus will deal with the Antichrist. If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, then this third myth is particularly relevant for you.

[33 : 02] Here's the third myth. Refusing to believe the gospel is an act of my free will.

I will believe whenever I want. I will believe when I'm good and ready. I will believe when I have all of my questions answered.

I will believe when I want to. Notice how Paul corrects this myth.

Verse number 10 in the end. Halfway through the verse. They perish. They perish.

Because they did not accept the love of the truth and so be saved. You can accept the love of the truth.

[34 : 00] And if you accept the love of the truth, that will result in salvation. That's good news.

That's the gospel. Accept the love of the truth.

It results in you being saved. But notice this. Some do not accept the love of the truth. And they are those who are perishing.

You see it there in the middle of verse 10. Twice. Among those who are perishing. Why are they perishing? Because they did not accept the love of the truth and so be saved.

Verse 11. For this reason. For what reason? For what reason? Because they did not accept the truth and so be saved.

For this reason. God sends them a strong delusion so that they will believe the lie.

[35 : 01] Stubborn refusal. To believe the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is not an act of free will.

Dear one. Dear one. This is an act of judgment from God. Do you see that here in the text? It is for the reason that they are refusing to believe.

Refusing to accept the truth. That God sends them a strong delusion. If you are not yet a Christian. If you are not a follower of Jesus. Do not believe the myth. That you can just get saved any moment that you want. What if God in his justice sends a strong delusion?

If you have a moment of clarity. And you sense that the Holy Spirit is working on your heart.

Causing you to recognize your sin. And to see the Lord Jesus as beautiful.

[36 : 15] And his death as for you. Do not leave that moment. Not until you have responded. By believing this gospel.

Sometimes we say. What is this world coming to? This world is coming to Jesus.

Jesus. God is in control. And the wickedness abounds. Right? We look around and we're like. Man wickedness is abounding.

God is restraining evil. In order to preserve his people. And to preserve his church. And to in his grace and his mercy.

Cause more people to respond. To the preaching of the gospel. Wickedness abounds. God restrains it. God restrains it. And even uses it to accomplish his purposes.

[37 : 23] God is moving history forward. Towards this final consummation. Don't. Don't be myth taken.

Jesus wins. Jesus wins. And so our mindset as followers of Jesus is not an escapist type of mindset. Our mindset is a redemptive type of mindset.

Not how quickly are we going to get out of here. But who around me needs to be saved? Our mindset is not defeatist.

Our mindset ought to be victorious. Not elitist as though we have all the answers. Brothers and sisters, evangelistic because we have the gospel of Jesus.

Our mindset is not to be know-it-alls. But rather, to call fellow pilgrims who also will set their eyes on Jesus.

[38 : 32] And keep their focus on him. And walk towards him together. We hold fast to God's truth so that we are not deceived.

And we share the gospel with urgency and compassion. Begging God to show mercy to those who are stubbornly unbelieving. Get that.

Mercy. Why? Because even now they may be under the strong delusion. Oh dear friend, keep preaching the gospel. Keep sharing the gospel.

Patiently, generously, repeatedly. Sinners just like you and me need to hear it. We beg God to show mercy to the unbelieving.

To grant them life and repentance through faith in Jesus. Who said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through, but by me.

[39 : 38] Don't see Jesus as some kind of a bouncer in that text. His arms are open wide. And he is welcoming sinners into his kingdom.

No one comes to the Father but through me. Let's pray. Good Father, we are grateful to receive your word.

Help us as we take it in to be discerning. Give us humility to learn. Give us wisdom to discern.

Give us grace to disagree. Help us to remember the importance of centering our mission, our vision, our efforts, our energy on the gospel.

And sharing it with those who do not yet believe. Father, would you please stir up inside of us compassion for the lost. We are surrounded by them.

[40 : 46] We know them. They're real people. People that we see every day. People that we see in our workplaces. People that we encounter in restaurants and coffee shops.

People who we encounter while we are taking walks and spending time in our backyard. We know them. Father, would you please help us to have compassion for them.

To be patient with them. To be generous with this gospel. To plead with you. To show mercy for those who are deserving your judgment because of their stubborn unbelief.

Oh, Father. Help us not to be deceived by any of these myths. And rather to keep our focus on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And his swift victory. That is certain and sure and secure and undeniable. We ask that you would stir up inside of us humble confidence to go forward with this gospel.

[41 : 59] And to persevere in faith by your grace. We ask this. For the fame of Jesus to continue spreading all over this world.

We ask this. That you might use us in spreading this gospel. We ask this for your glory and our good.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.