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II Thessalonians 2:1-5 "Knowing the Times and His Word"
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All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to II Thessalonians Chapter 2 verse 1.

The thing that you want to know about this little church that Paul planted here in Thessalonica is that it was born out of a tremendous persecution and at a time when believers were actually losing their lives for their faith.

Paul had come to Europe by the leading of the Lord in the second journey that he had taken out, missionary journey, and so far, it had been pretty bad. He stopped at Philippi. He was arrested and beaten, and then escorted out of town by the church leaders. He ended up here in Thessalonica, where he spent three weeks teaching a young body of believers, and then was chased out of town by rioters who threatened to kill him. Months later, when Paul was in Corinth planting a church, and Timothy had been sent to Thessalonica to see if anything could be salvaged, to hear that the church wasn't just surviving but thriving, thrilled Paul's heart. In fact, if you read in Acts 18 verse 5, it moved Paul's spirit. He was so discouraged, but now he wanted to serve and preach again.

He wrote these two letters just a couple of months apart, both from Corinth, both of them to encourage a church that was facing death for their faith. I guess it is no surprise that the topic more than anything else in these two letters is the coming of the Lord.

It's interesting how our hope for the Lord's coming depends on our circumstance. If you're about to get married, maybe the Lord will come in a few weeks. Or if I'm going on vacation, maybe the Lord will come next week when I get back. And now we have a pandemic, the Lord should come right now. I suspect that's why he was laying this out for this young church, because they were facing such horrors that you can just imagine what it would take to get them through.

It does interest me that Paul taught these truths about the rapture and the second coming as part of his basics of the faith class to believers who had been saved less than three weeks. He included this eschatology, this study of end times, and the timeline that the Bible gives us. I hope that you're familiar with that, so you're not easily put off or taken down a road by the latest prophet who's going to tell you what's coming next or tries to tie in things that may or may not really apply at all.

We have started to go through the Book of Revelation on Wednesday nights. If you haven't been with us, we'd love to invite you. We just started last week. You're three verses behind, so read ahead.

But Paul's concern for this young church was that their hope was in the Lord, and that they wouldn't give up because things had gotten hard. In fact, things were getting worse.

What prompted this second letter, at least in part, was the fact that there were some false prophets who were really always found. Wherever Paul went, they followed. These Judaizers, they always sought to draw men after themselves. They discounted Paul. They turned people's eyes off the Lord. They had come into town saying, well, the rapture's gone. Look how hard life has gotten. You're in the middle of the tribulation, man. I hope you make it. And the people began to, oh no. Why did we miss it? Why did the Lord leave us here? What happened to us? They produced a letter that supposedly Paul had sent. His name was forged at the bottom. That made it even worse. These folks who had come in, who claimed, spiritual revelation, they had false ideas and they were false teachers, and the people had suffering that was terrible. But the Lord had through Paul taught them the difference between, the tribulations that you have in the world Jesus talked about in John Chapter 16, "In the world you have tribulation" and the tribulation of the Great Tribulation, where the wrath of God is being poured out upon an unbelieving world, and the source is so different.

Paul had taught them, but they had become frustrated and fearful and confused. So really, Chapter 2 more than any of these three chapters, it focuses upon correcting their views and reminding them of what Paul had already told them.

We're going to look at the first five verses this morning, beginning in verse 1. We read "Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be so 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. Let no one deceive you by any means, for that Day will not come unless there is first a falling away, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or all that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was with you I told you these things?"

History is certainly filled with wicked leaders. From Cain to Saddam Hussein; from Hitler to Stalin; from Nero in Paul's day to Domitian, who exiled John; to Assad in Syria. You can make a list politically. You can also make a list religiously, because there have certainly been people over the years that have come to proclaim that they're the Christ. False prophets, cult leaders, swamis and gurus and charlatans, just a pack of wolves in sheep's clothing, always have sought to turn the hearts of the people away.

Yet there is one coming that will make all of the rest look like child's play, the most wicked man that ever walked upon the face of the earth, filled with Satan's power and his person, and known by many names. The Bible calls him the little horn, the prince that is to come, the king that will do whatever he pleases, a terrible beast by Daniel in Chapter 7 and 8. He's called a worthless shepherd by Zechariah in Chapter 11, and he's called the beast in the book of Revelation in many different places. Here in Chapter 2 Paul will call him the man of sin, the son of perdition, the lawless one, who according to the working of Satan will deceive men. He is perhaps best known by a title that only John uses in his writings, the antichrist, which is a compound name that defines this final world ruler who seeks one last time to take God's place. From the day where in Isaiah we're told he longed to sit in God's throne, to the end of Revelation where he finds out that he can't pull that off. He wants to be God, declares himself to be so, demands worship.

Throughout history, anyone that is of that intent, to take God's place, to speak in His place, John says is really of the Spirit of antichrist. He wrote in I John Chapter 2 verse 18, "Little children, it is the last times; you have heard that the antichrist will come. Even so, there are already many antichrists, which is why we know that that time has come." He said four or five verses later, I John 2:22, "Who is he that is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He's the antichrist who denies the Father and the Son."

Throughout history there's always been this opposition, hasn't there? This man of sin, the spirit of him who will ultimately show himself at the end. In fact, since the fall of man and the promise of God's Messiah that is to come, you can find that spirit of antichrist working in the Bible. Looking at history you'll find him constantly seeking to accomplish his purposes. His wickedness more often than not directed directly at the Lord, God's people, and God's promises.

In the days of Noah, sin and wickedness became so evil that God brought a flood that only saved Noah and seven family members. Later on in Egypt, Satan instigated the policy of killing every newborn son in Israel. Some 600 years later, the lineage of that promised Messiah was reduced to one single child, II Chronicles 22, as Joash was hidden by a priest from his wicked grandmother, who had decided she would kill every heir to the throne so she could rule herself. Her name was Athaliah. Later still, Haman was used as a tool of the devil to seek the destruction and the annihilation of all of the Jews in Esther Chapter 3. He failed due to the faithfulness of Esther and an uncle named Mordecai. At the birth of Jesus, Herod, the tool of the devil, gave a decree to slaughter every male child two years old and under in Bethlehem in the area, and God spared His son, sending Joseph and Mary away to Egypt to stay there until Herod died.

When Jesus came upon the scene publicly, you just watched the crowds wanting to destroy the one who only did good and spoke well, and healed and delivered. They wanted to stone Him with stones, and shove Him off a cliff, and vote to have Him crucified. At the cross, Satan thought he'd won, but the resurrection proved otherwise.

But that hasn't stopped him. The Spirit of antichrist is

certainly alive and well today, as Satan hates God and he hates you, and he hates the purposes of God. To this day, the Jewish people are subject to demonic hatred I think far above almost everyone else. The Holocaust of the past century and the radical Islamic calls for their destruction are just kind of modern-day preludes to what this man of sin will seek to do when given a chance.

He will appear, as we learn from the scriptures, to be a savior and a deliverer, at least for the three and a half years of that final seven years after the rapture. He will only show his true nature at the midway point, breaking his covenant with Israel, coming to a finished rebuilt temple, demanding that he alone be worshipped as God, demanding that you take the mark that would mark you a disciple of his, and if not, you would be killed, Daniel chapter 9.

Paul, writing to this young church, addresses in particular their loss of hope and their loss of joy, or their loss of foundation in facing what was just terrible in terms of persecution, because they had forgotten what he had taught them and were being deceived by those in their midst, the lies of the false teachers. Their conclusion about, well, maybe, the day of the Lord has come already, maybe we're left behind, was driven home because the persecution they were experiencing was getting worse, not better. And they weren't really remembering what Paul had taught them clearly: The difference, the timeline, the difference between the rapture of the church, which can happen any time, unexpectedly to the church, in the air, in the clouds, the dead in Christ rising first, and we who are alive and remain being changed in the twinkling of an eye, new bodies, the dead in Christ, those who are alive, that sudden snatching up, "raptus," Latin word, violent grabbing, and the second coming of the Lord which will be upon the earth, where the Lord will rule and reign and stay, and you'll be with Him there.

Paul here, notice in verse 5, says don't you remember? Don't you remember what you've learned? And then he reviews for them, at least down through verse 12, some of the points along that timeline to assure them that they hadn't missed a thing, but he expected them to have some sound biblical eschatology in terms of what comes before what and then what follows so they would be able to not be so taken in.

How's your grasp of those things? We can walk you through it in a few minutes, if you like. From 30,000 feet, we're not going to get very particular. But it's vital that we understand the order very carefully and clearly. The church age, which is what we are living in now, will end with the rapture of the church. The rapture of the church begins from the Bible's standpoint a whole period of time known as, in the Bible, the year of the Lord. Now, that covers a lot of ground. It covers the seven years of tribulation, it covers the 1,000 year reign of Christ, it covers the judgment that will follow at the end. It takes you all the way up to a new heaven and a new earth. It is the day of the Lord. And depending on the context, you know what part of that day of the Lord God's dealing is in focus or in view.

When the church is raptured, God's prophetic clock will begin ticking again. There is one final seven-year period left for God to deal with Israel, His promise to a national Israel, and His promise to them in terms of His rulership and oversight. You can find that time frame in Daniel Chapter 9 beginning in verse 24. But when God removes His own, that time clock will begin to tick again, and then God will turn to bring judgment upon what is left, an unbelieving world, and He will renew His work through Israel as a nation. We are told there will be exactly 2,520 days, or 360 days times seven years, the 60 days 360 being of the Babylonian calendar which is used virtually everywhere in the scriptures when it comes to prophecy.

We know from Daniel Chapter 9, again verse 27, that the antichrist, when he is revealed, will make a covenant with Israel for that seven-year period. But it is in the midst of those three years, or at the three-and-a-half-year mark, or if you will, in day 1,260 that he will show up in Jerusalem at the temple that is now finished, and rather than coming to dedicate it to the Lord, he will step in and declare he is the Lord, demand worship, taking his mark or you die.

Now, those three and a half years are referred to in the Bible in many different ways. If you turn, for example, to Daniel Chapter 7, it is defined as time singular, times plural, and half a time. If you turn to Revelation, I think Chapter 12, it is written in exactly the same manner. In Chapter 13 it is written in

Revelation verse 4 as 42 months. In Revelation 13:5 it is referenced as 1,260 days. Just so you don't get it wrong, give it to you in 100 different ways. But he is given that time to achieve, if you will, world dominance. He will be acceptable to all, this man of sin, before he will discard that character and reveal his true agenda.

His final pitch for glory, which starts in that halfway mark, is known in the Bible as the abomination that will make desolate; in other words, the offense to God that will lead us to the end of his judgment. Same thing, Daniel 9:27 again. Jesus used, by the way, those exact same words as He began to talk to the disciples about what was coming in Matthew 24 verse 15. Paul describes it here in verse 4. He will oppose and he exalts himself above all that's called God, all that's worshipped. He sits as God in the temple of God showing that he is God.

In Revelation Chapter 6, the first two verses quickly cover those first three and a half years. They describe the methodology of this antichrist. From verse 3 of Chapter 6 forwards, except for a few looks back in the text to very unrelated events that are kind of out of sequence, everything from verse 3 of Chapter 6 forward to Chapter 18 covers the events of the final three and a half years of the Great Tribulation; until you get to Chapter 19, where then you read of Jesus' return in His second coming to rule and reign, and then the sudden and immediate overthrow of this man of sin and his final rebellious world government.

Now, if you go and you read Daniel 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, you will read there Daniel describing the methods of the antichrist, both before and after he is found out for who he is. It talks about how glib his tongue is, how deceptive his ways are. John writes in Chapter 6 of Revelation that when this antichrist comes upon the scene, he will conquer with a bow without arrows. Not really good to have a bow without an arrow if you're in a fight. But, you see, he won't come to fight. He will win you over with charm. We will read there that he will wear a crown and sit on a white horse. He certainly looks like the savior to everyone else, but he'll be found out eventually.

Daniel writes in Chapter 11 about his pompous words and his blasphemies and his abominations, his plans to rule the world. Daniel writes in Chapter 11 that the king

will do according to his own will. He will exalt himself and magnify himself above every God. He will speak marvelous things against the God of gods, and he will prosper until the indignation is complete, and that what God has determined will be done. He's going to get away with it for a while, but then he's going to find judgment, and meet God's judgment. And it is those three and a half years that you read about in Chapter 6 through 18 of Revelation.

It is to that subject and to that timeline that Paul turns the hearts of these young saints. Like I said, I'm amazed that somehow, he was able to communicate much of that to them so that they would know better; that their fears were groundless; that the false teachers were obvious and they were being deceived.

He starts very kindly in verse 1. Notice he uses the word "brethren," which is really the word for family. It's a very kind, loving, supportive word. Notice he said, "Now, concerning the coming of the Lord and our gathering together with Him," the rapture, "we would you ask you," literally we beg you, we implore you, we plead with you, don't be so quickly taken in by the tactics of the enemy, who is trying to rattle your heart. Paul makes it extremely clear that the confusion and the susceptibility to false teaching was that the church wasn't remembering what they had learned. That's exactly what verse 5 says. We're just begging, don't forget that when these guys come to you, you won't be moved. Not shaken in your mind, not troubled in your spirit, not troubled with a word, not troubled, verse 2, with even a letter, as if somehow it came from us, that the day of Christ has already come.

And that was their fear. Life was getting so hard in the city for the believer that, they started to believe that maybe they were in the middle of the Great Tribulation, because that's certainly what it felt like. And notice that the subversion of these young saints happened very quickly. No sooner had Paul left and sent a letter than the enemy moved in and began to lie and turn the hearts of the people away from hope.

You see it in the church today too. The church is looking like a surviving church rather than a serving church. We just want to survive. Is that really all we want to do is hang on and survive? Or do you want to get

something done? Well, they were just hanging on. Soon shaken.

And the effect of the false teaching and the spiritual insight that they claimed and the forged letter just left the church unnerved. They'd lost their composure. They were frightened. They knew better, and so should we. But the joy of waiting for the Lord that had kept them through tremendous persecution had now been replaced with anxiety and false teaching and deceptiveness. Did we miss His coming? Is this the Great Tribulation?

Now, Paul had taught them about the rapture, that the day of Christ would bring victory to them and deliverance to them; they that they shouldn't be fooled by these liars. Look, God's coming for you first. Didn't I tell you that? Then these things would follow. And he says in verse 3, "Let no one deceive you by any means." When Jesus began to speak to the disciples in Matthew 24 about the end times, He starts off by saying in verse 4, let no one deceive you. Let no man deceive you. Take heed to yourselves. Be careful. Used the exact same words with them.

We constantly face the deception of Satan, who can come to us as an angel of light. Oh, he looks pretty credible. The way we overcome is by knowing and remembering God's Word, standing fast to the truths that God has taught us. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he said, "Look, don't be like little kids, tossed to and from, carried away by every wind of darkness, by the sleight of men, by cunning, craftiness, wherein they have looked to deceive you." So be careful. Don't be taken up or taken in.

When Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy from prison before he died, he said in II Timothy Chapter 3 to Timothy, that evil men and seducers are going to get worse and worse. They're going to deceive and be deceived. Continue in the things that you have learned, and be assured of whom you've heard them, and stand fast. Be careful. It's going to get worse before it gets better. And it had.

How important that you and I are comfortable with our eschatology, our outlook about those things. There's a lot of things we can debate, but the basics don't change. And it should keep you and strengthen you all along the

way. After all, to be wrong about the rapture can have serious consequences in your spiritual well-being.

When Peter wrote his second letter to the scattered church, he said to them, "Look, if we know that this earth is about to be dissolved, that everything that we see is going to go up with a fervent heat, if we know that this isn't going to last, what kind of people should we be now as we seek to walk with the Lord?" How should we live our lives, in our conversation, and in godliness?

John, when he wrote I John in his 90s, as he wrote towards the end of his life, said, "Beloved, we're children of God, and it doesn't yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when He appears, we are going to be like Him." And then he said, "Comfort one another with those words."

If you have this hope, it'll purify you. You want to be sure that you know what you believe. There is a day of Christ, where He will come for His own. There is a day of the Lord, which will begin after the rapture and extend throughout the Great Tribulation as well. It's important that you know the difference.

Notice in verse 1 and 2 that Paul talked about the rapture, the Lord's coming to gather us to Himself. But beginning in verse 3 and down through verse 12, that focus of Paul's teaching is about the Great Tribulation. It'll come like no one has ever seen before, not since the world began. It's going to be horrible. It ought to convince all of us to know the Bible well, the sequence of events you should feel comfortable with. And the key, I think, is in verse 5: Just remember what you've learned and what you have known, and stay the course.

I think that for me, and maybe for you as well, that much of our Christian life after you've been saved a while is just to remember what you've learned, don't you think? We've recently moved our offices over into this building as they work on the sanctuary. And I've been teaching for 40 years. I know I don't look it, but I am old. we're moving our study over. Now, I have everything digitally stored on the cloud wherever, unless they're not going to give it back to me these days. But in any event, I also have hard, like, paper copies, hard copies. We were moving these folders over with notes of mine through the entire Bible. 12,000 pages. Some of them

have kind of yellowed, but I always keep them. And every time I start a new book, I take those out and no sense starting over. You've done a lot of work. Use those and move from there. But I'm always amazed at starting a new book or even just a new series, when I read some of the notes I said, "Oh, that is awesome." And I wonder, why have I forgotten this? Why didn't I remember this to begin with? And I find that that's so often the case. When the Bible says the Holy Spirit will bring all things back to your remembrance, I need that help more and more. God, remind me.

Paul had taught them about the day of the Lord, and he had taught them that it wouldn't happen until there would be first a falling away. That day will not come until there's a falling away first. Don't you remember that I told you these things?

Now, there are many precursors to the Great Tribulation, and Paul wants them to focus on one thing in particular, the apostasy, which is what the word is here, for revolt or rebellion or defection. The only other place in the Bible, by the way, this word for apostasy is used, it is found at the end almost of Chapter 21 of Acts, where it's translated "forsake," and it speaks about those who had forsaken the law of Moses. But in both cases, apostasy speaks about a deliberate decision to defect from a formerly held position or belief or persuasion.

The church has always seen in its history a measure of apostasy. People that come in, you think they're a part because they're in the group, but they're not. It makes the church look bigger than it is. They stay for a while. Sometimes they have a terrible influence. I think if you go to the Laodicean letter of Jesus in Revelation Chapter 3, it's a pretty good example of apostasy. But I don't think that that's what Paul is talking about, because that's a constant in a sinful world. You're always going to have those who aren't what they seem to be. And until the Lord comes, that's just the way it's going to be. It's the wheat and the tares that kind of fix together.

Paul told Timothy those defections from the faith would grow worse and worse as the days got longer, as the days grew shorter. I Timothy Chapter 4, "The Spirit speaks expressly in the last day some will depart from the faith. They will give heed to seducing spirits, to

doctrines of devils. They'll speak lies and hypocrisy. Their conscience will be seared with a hot iron." That's the setting in which we find ourselves in the last days.

Luke said in Chapter 18 as Jesus is speaking, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" There is certainly a condition of man that is always kind of that falling away.

But I want you to notice that Paul as he speaks about falling away here is speaking in terms of a blasphemy that is unprecedented in magnitude, great falling away, and it is directly connected to the man of sin's revelation. This isn't some general trend or some flow of rebellion; this is a specific act associated with this man who's about to be revealed, this man of sin.

The man of sin is the consummate evil; right? When he comes, the antichrist, he is going to have greater influence than any wicked man that ever lived.

The word "revealed" here is a word that is in the aorist tense, which means it is a definitive time, and he will be seen through the eyes of the people for three and a half years, until his character is revealed, and then he shows up, demands worship at the halfway mark, and threatens the people. Put people to death if they won't worship him.

The term "son of perdition" means ruin. He's the only one besides Judas that gets that title in the Bible. Someone that is destined to be ruined.

Falling away, this great apostasy is surely to come after the church is removed. And thus, that coming, that falling away comes first, then that antichrist is revealed. Why? Because for three and a half years he's going to be everyone's darling. You won't be here, but the world will embrace him as the Messiah, and they'll find their error right at the middle of those seven years.

But that Great Tribulation will be marked by a religion without a Bible, and an abandonment of God and His ways. If you read the whole book of Revelation, you will find that in the midst of that kind of perversion, probably more people get saved than at any other time in history as well. But it will certainly be characterized by this

great apostasy, where everyone is on board with this antichrist, energized by Satan, aided by the false prophet, demanding world worship, take my mark, die if you refuse. The apostasy is revealed. It is unmistakable. It is great, and it is that which precedes in that day of the Lord the revealing of this man of sin, and, even more important, the coming of Jesus again to judge the world.

Paul's point very clearly is, hey, that hasn't happened yet, and so rest assured, you're not living in that day. The Lord is coming for you. In fact, it will never happen in your day. You're God's people. You're going to be delivered.

Sometimes people ask me, who do you think the antichrist is? To which I reply, I have no idea. And I don't think I'll ever know until I get to heaven. I think the Lord will tell me. But I don't think you'll be able to pick him out here. You won't be here. You'll be gone. You're not looking for the antichrist; you're looking for Jesus Christ. And He's the one that's coming, and He should be the focus of the church. But only those deceived and forgetful risk losing the confident hope of His imminent return.

Unfortunately, this young church had done that. They'd been overwhelmed by their difficulty. And don't you be overcome by yours. As bad as it can get, the Lord's coming for you, to deliver you from that time of His judgment upon the earth. Are we close? Without doubt I can say we have never been closer. If the Lord comes today, I couldn't be happier.

Paul will spend the rest of this chapter I shouldn't say the rest of the chapter down through verse 12 hitting on the one issue, the restraining work of God's Spirit in the life of God's people, the church, is what is keeping the antichrist from being revealed now. It isn't that Satan doesn't want to just start destroying now. It's his life. That's what he desires. It's what he will find out is impossible. He should have gone down that road. But since Isaiah 14, he wanted to sit in God's throne, he's been wanting to take this place. What has kept him? The work of God's Spirit in the life of the church. When you're removed, God's relationship with the world and the work of the Holy Spirit changes in that regard, and the man of sin will be revealed. But he'll

start by just deceiving just about the whole world.

That's his study next week down through verse 12. I hope you'll join us.