

We Missed the Rapture, part 2

(2 Thessalonians 2:6-12)

5/15/19; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

In 1999, Jerry Falwell was preaching in a conference in Kingsport TN..

A question was asked about the Antichrist.

Falwell responded in this way.

“Who will the Antichrist be?”

“I don’t know.”

“Nobody else knows.”

But then after saying that, he got in world of trouble by saying this.

“Is he alive and here today? Probably. Because when he appears during the Tribulation period he will be a full-grown counterfeit of Christ. Of course he'll be Jewish. Of course he'll pretend to be Christ. And in fact, since the Lord is coming soon, and he'll be an adult at the presentation of himself, he must be alive somewhere today.”

The media got hold of that comment about the Antichrist being Jewish and Falwell had to go on TV a few days later apologizing for being anti-Jewish.

Personally, I think Falwell was wrong.

Scripture seems to indicate that the Antichrist will be a Gentile.

Possibly Roman. Probably European.

WE looked at that last week.

But Falwell is not the first to make predictions about this man whom the Bible calls a man of sin and lawlessness..

In fact, there are plenty of people all throughout church history who have made predictions about the coming Antichrist..

Most of the early Christians had a view of the Roman emperor as the Antichrist.

After the advent of Islam in 700 AD, some began to see a Muslim as a good candidate for Antichrist.

The year 1000 AD began to see more and more people looking at the Pope as the Antichrist.

That theory continued through the Middle Ages all the way to the Protestant reformation..

At the time of the American Revolution, many began to claim that the Antichrist would be a political ruler like King George III.

In recent church history, predictions of who the Antichrist still include the pope or a Muslim, but have been expanded to include world leaders, American presidents and even celebrities.

In fact, many were convinced that Elvis Presley was the Antichrist because of the sway he had over many women and really the whole world.

However when Ronald Reagan was elected, folded were convicted it was him.

Ronald Wilson Reagan 3 names of 6 letters each, and the Antichrist experts went crazy with 666 comparisons..

Ultimately, all these predictions do more harm than good.

First, Falwell is right in a sense.

No one knows who this man is and no one knows when he will step onto the world scene.

But second, we need to let the Scriptures guide our predictions.

So what do we know about this coming evil figure?

Well, 2 Thessalonians along with the book of Daniel and Revelation and portions of Ezekiel reveal much about Antichrist, and folks would do well to read them before they go make predictions..

Well, tonight we further our understanding of the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians..

Let me read the first 5 verses of chapter 2 to help us review for a moment..

1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the [a]coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, 2 that you not be quickly shaken from your [b]composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a [c]message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the [d]apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above [e]every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. 5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?

Last week, we listened and learned as Paul tried to comfort the Thessalonians church..

Now the reason they were alarmed is that someone had come to them and told them that they were in the Day of the Lord.

It seems that someone has showed us in Thessalonica posing as an associate of Paul..

He had a phony that he read or even preached to the church as if it were from Paul..

And the point of the fake letter was to create panic and doubt in the church at Thessalonica with the hopes of causing a disturbance in the church there.

Obviously, it was the work of the enemy to attack God's people, but when word gets back to Paul, he writes the church a second letter to correct this false teaching..

And the correction begins in chapter where he tells the church at Thessalonica to RELAX.

They aren't in the day of the Lord, and the greatest proof of that is the absence of the Antichrist..

In fact, Paul reminds them in verse 5 that he had already taught them these things when he was there in Thessalonica for those couple weeks..

All they needed to do was to settle down and remember what Paul had already said to them..

However, beginning in verse 6, Paul offers a quick summary of some important truths related to this coming son of destruction.

The Thessalonians needed to relax and remember, but 3rd, they needed to realize that the Antichrist was not a reason for the believer to be frightened.

So lets pick it up in verse 6..

III. Realize (6-12)

6 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed.

Ok, let's stop right there for a minute..

After telling the Thessalonians that they weren't in the Day Lord since the Antichrist wasn't present, he now tells them why the Antichrist isn't present..

And the truth is that he is being restrained.

The Greek word for restrain is katechon, which means to hold back.

I see the picture of a racehorse in the starting gate.

He is ready to race but he is being held back.

In other words, what keeps the Antichrist from bursting on the scene and igniting the day of the Lord.

Well, for starters, the Antichrist is not in charge of the timing of the end.

Though he starts the tribulation period by signing a treaty with Israel, he won't pick up the pen until it is just the right time.

Now, we know and Paul taught that the Antichrist wouldn't appear until after the rapture.

You see, he can't appear until the very last believer in the church age is saved.

That is what the end of verse 6 is peaking of..

...in his time, he will be revealed.

His time is the time of the tribulation, but even that time is under the sovereignty of God.

You see, Satan doesn't sound the bell to let the Antichrist out of the gate.

The Lord sounds the trumpet to rapture the church but he also restrains the Antichrist after the rapture until the time that he signs the treaty with Israel.

However, some people debate how God does this..

Let's read verse 7..

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.

So how does God restrain the Antichrist?

Well, we get a couple clues here?

#1 - The restrainer is said to be removed.

Well, this can't be God, since God can't be taken out of the way or removed...

Some say that this must refer to the church being taken out of the way in the rapture.

I guess that is a possibility, but the church is always referred to as feminine since she is the bride of Christ.

But here, Paul uses a masculine pronoun.

“He” is taken out of the way.

Some have suggested that this may be Michael, the archangel.

Well, that would fit the masculine pronoun since all angels in the Bible are referred to with masculine pronouns..

But it doesn't seem like that is the case Michael refused to rebuke Satan over the body of Moses in the book of Jude..

Other suggestions for this restrainer who is taken out of the way include the Roman government, the Jewish nation, the preaching of the gospel..

But none of those seem to have the spiritual power to restrain a spiritual being like Satan from sending his man onto the world stage.

Ultimately, the reference to a restrainer being moved out of the way seems to be talking about the Holy Spirit.

First of all, the Holy Spirit has the supernatural power to restrain Satan and the Antichrist.

Second, the Holy Spirit comes and goes.

At Pentecost, the Spirit came upon believers and the church.

Third, the Spirit is referred to as He since He is God.

Fourth, the Spirit would know the plans of God in terms of when the Antichrist's time is.

Now, does this mean that the Holy Spirit would leave the earth?

No, the Spirit is omnipresent.

But furthermore, He would not have to leave the earth in order for the Antichrist to be revealed.

He would simply have to step aside from his ministry of restraint.

In other words, the Spirit has always held back the revelation of the Antichrist from the world.

The Spirit has always held back the evil plans of Satan.

In case you think that the world is bad, and it is.

I can assure you that it would be much worse if not for the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit..

In fact we get glimpses of how bad the world could be from time to time and cities see riots from time to time..

As nations have engaged in brutal wars throughout history.

If not for the restraint of evil by the Holy Spirit, the world would have long been gone...

In fact, look at what Paul tells the Thessalonians in the first part of verse 7..

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work;

The reality is that the church was just getting started but Satan was already active.

You see, Satan is not omniscient.

He does not know everything.

He certainly doesn't know the timing of the rapture or the start of the Day of the Lord.

He doesn't know the day that his man will sit down and sign a peace treaty with Israel to kick off the 7 year tribulation.

In fact, a lot of people who study the end times say that Satan has a man ready to be the Antichrist in every generation since he has no clue when that day will come.

I don't think that is an unreasonable theory..

In fact, the mastery of the man of lawlessness was already at work in 50 AD as Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians.

Now clearly the Antichrist wasn't revealed then, but the plans were in place if God had determined it was time..

As we put this into context today, I would tell you this.

The Lord will send his Son to rapture the church, and once the church is safe with their Lord in heaven, the restraints on the Antichrist will begin to loosen until he appears on the world stage.

He will rise to power in the first half of the tribulation by signing a peace treaty with Israel, but then all restraint will be removed at the midpoint of tribulation.

Then he will sit in the Jewish temple and demand the world's worship of him..

And if you think about it, that will happen really fast.

In 3.5 years, he will go from obscurity to world fame and even world domination.

That's just a reminder of how fast evil spreads when the Holy Spirit's restraint of it ends..

Now the point of verses 6-7 was to remind the Thessalonians of these end times truths that they had already been taught..

In fact, they didn't have to wonder who the restrainer was.

Paul told them in here 6 that they knew.

So the point is to simply remind them of what is coming and to make them realize that they are safe and in no danger of seeing the Antichrist since they are not in the Day of the Lord.

Now, Paul doesn't end there with his look into the life of this evil man..

Verse 8 comforts the Thessalonians even further..

8 Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His [f]coming;

The revealing of the Antichrist and his rise to power may sound unsettling, but the end of his life is very settled.

As I see the Scripture describing it, let me give you a little insight into the Antichrist's career.

I think he lives in obscurity for most of his life, similar to the life of Christ.

Yet, as his time approaches, he finds his way into politics and religion.

When the rapture occurs and the church is removed from the earth, I picture chaos politically and economically and spiritually...

I personally think that people will be alarmed at the disappearance of believers but that alarm will turn to relief as they can now act any way they please..

Sin will explode on the world scene like never before.

But governments will need to control that spiral and regain power and some sort of civilized society..

Well, there will be a confederation of European states that will join together and offer stability in the midst of all the chaos.

The book of Daniel describes a coalition of 10 kings that will rise to power..

It will resemble a revival of the Roman Empire of Jesus' day.

In this coalition of kings will be the Antichrist.

I don't think he will be prominent among the leadership until he sits down to establish peace in the Middle East, which seems to tell us that the world will be in chaos after the rapture.

However, this Antichrist figure will probably appear more a religious leader than a political one.

In fact, the 10 kings may bring the Antichrist on as their spiritual advisor.

Now interestingly enough, the book of Daniel says that he will not have a desire of women.

Which could mean that he is homosexual or that he is a religious leader that has taken a vow of celibacy.

Regardless of how he gets and who he is, he gets recognition when he signs the peace treaty with Israel.

The world is grateful for his work because they will be grateful for some peace in the midst of chaos..

And that leads to the world's adoration of this man..

He will be a political giant but his apparent spiritualness will win the world over since spirituality is lacking without the presence of the church..

So, he rises to power and his ego rises with Him, and for the most part he will be as a world hero in the first half of the tribulation.

However, his true nature will be revealed as he declares himself to be God..

Look back at verse 4..

4 who opposes and exalts himself above [e]very so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

With that display of ultimate apostasy, the world begins to see that he isn't that spiritual at all.

Rather, he is a man of evil.

Yet they will be under his sway and in his political, spiritual, and economic system..

And for the final 3.5 years, he will ruthless and demonic and empowered by Satan..

He will enlist a false prophet to further the worship of him.

He will engage in violence against Jews.

He will tighten the economic system and force people to mark their bodies or starve..

He will assume the rule of the entire political world.

Yet, all of that power and rule will lead him to gather an army to fight against the true God of the universe..

Let's go to that scene in Rev 19:17-21..

17 Then I saw [f]an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of [g]commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great."

19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.

20 And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs [h]in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with [i]brimstone. 21 And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

The end of the Antichrist comes just as swiftly as his rise to power.

He gathers to fight but ends up in a lake of fire, being one of that eternal lake's first two members...

And that end of the Antichrist in Rev 19 is exactly the same as Paul describes in in verse 8..

The Lord will slay him with the breath of his mouth and bring his short reign to an end.

The real Christ will conquer the false Christ..

Now before Paul ends his examination and discussion of this man, he issues a warning..

Verse 9-12..

9 that is, the one whose [g]coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and [h]signs and false wonders, 10 and with [i]all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11 For this reason God [j]will send upon them [k]a deluding influence so that they will believe [l]what is false, 12 in order that they all may be [m]judged who did not believe the truth, but [n]took pleasure in wickedness.

It is easy to sit her tonight and wonder how anyone in the tribulation period will fall for the Antichrist's deceptions..

And in a sense, it is natural that we order that because we are the church.

We know the truth.

We believe the truth.

We have access to the truth.

But imagine a day where the church is no longer around.

Preaching like we see today had almost completely vanished..

Sin is rampant and endorsed..

In that day, it will be almost impossible to not be deceived by the Antichrist..

He will have a monopoly on false worship, false power, and false signs...

He will even be able to stage an apparent death and resurrection.

There will be salvations in the time of the Antichrist but they will be exceptions to the rule.

For the most part, the world will be mesmerized by the Antichrist and their judgment will be sealed.

That is a scary thought for sure.

Now, that leaves one more section of chapter 2 for next Wednesday night, but let's close with a couple thoughts..

Conclusion

#1 - Evil is real and rising.

Do not be deceived church.

Satan is active and on the prowl.

We live in a culture that nearly denies the existence of evil.

In the modern mind, everyone is a good person who just needs a little guidance.

Look, evil is a real threat in this world.

Sadly, the world will find that out too late.

#2 - The church is real and secure.

Look, I understand the fascination with the Antichrist.

I am fascinated myself.

But let me say this clearly.

The church has nothing to fear from this evil man.

If the rapture is going to happen in the next 30 years, he is alive today since he apparently comes on the world stage as an adult..

But even if that is the Lord's timetable, there is nothing to indicate that he is identifiable....

In fact, the book of Daniel describes him as a little horn in the beginning, which suggests obscurity and being overlooked.

For that reason, you will never hear me identify someone as the Antichrist.

In fact, people who do that often mislead the church rather than help us.

The church belongs to Christ.

We are His.

Even if He appears in the church, which the Bible doesn't seem to teach..

But even in his does, we belong to Christ, and greater is He that is in us than He that in the world.

#3 - Christ is real and victorious.

For all the power that this man will possess, he is no match for the Prince of Peace.

When we talk about the battle of Armageddon, we misspeak.

There is no battle in valley of Armageddon.

There is the appearance of Christ and the annihilation of Antichrist.

No fight.

No war.

No battle.

Easy and clear and certain victory.

I really need to amend what I said before.

We will see the Antichrist as the church.

We will sit on our horses and watch him fall to the words of Christ.

Let us pray.

IV. Resist (13-17)