

Place: Lurgan Baptist 11:10:2016

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

54. THE BOOK OF 2 THESSALONIANS

The story is told of a distinguished man who is the only white person buried in a Georgia cemetery reserved exclusively for coloured people. He had lost his mother when he was a baby. So, his father who never married again hired a coloured lady to help raise him. That Christian lady took her task seriously and seldom has a motherless baby received such warm hearted careful attention. As he grew older he often spoke of her faithfulness. One of his earliest memories was of her bending over him in his upstairs bedroom in the morning and softly saying, “*Wake up, my boy morning is come.*” With the passing of the years this devoted woman continued to serve as his subs mother. The young man went away to college but when he’d come home each summer she’d climb the steps again, more slowly now that was getting older and call him in the same loving way.

One day after he became a successful business man the sad message came. “*Mandy is dead. Can you attend her funeral ?*” As he stood beside her grave in that cemetery he turned to his friends and said, “*If I die before the Lord Jesus comes I want to be buried here beside Mandy. I like to think on that glad day she’ll speak to me and say*

“*Wake up my boy, God’s morning is come.*” I wonder are you anticipating that great getting up day ? That day when the “*Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*” (4:16-17) Are you living in the light of His Coming ? Now two of Paul’s earliest epistles in the New Testament are 1 & 2 Thessalonians. This little letter was written by Paul in the early fifties to the church in Thessalonica a few months after he had penned 1 Thessalonians. Both letters were written from the same place Corinth. (Acts 18:5) Paul wrote the first letter to tell them that they had not missed the Rapture. He wrote the second letter assuring them that they were not enduring the Great Tribulation. What was it that motivated Paul to write this second letter ? Well, do you recall that this church was born in persecution ?

The gospel was Preached in Thessalonica: (Acts 17:13)

The gospel was Received in Thesslonica: (Acts 17:4)

A tide of conviction set in as the Word was preached. Men and women were converted. It was no small movement of the Spirit of God. But then,

The gospel was Opposed in Thesslonica: (Acts 17:5)

Satan’s territory was being invaded and the enemy was aroused to definite action. (Acts 17:5) In fact the persecution grew worse and some of the believers thought they were living in the time of the Tribulation. (2:2) What made matters worse was that the Thessalonian believers had been receiving false information about the day of the Lord, that final day when God would step into the arena of human affairs to deal directly with its

wickedness. They were being told that the day of the Lord had already come. They had this information on what seemed to be excellent authority. Look at (2:2) They had been ensnared by a three fold deception. The message was plausible enough. The day of the Lord had already come. Notice the three fold deception. There was,

1. **A FEIGNED REVELATION:**

“ *Neither by spirit,*” (2:2) This was s spirit utterance. Someone it seems had stood up in their assembly and had said that the day of the Lord (That time of judgment also called the tribulation that time of blessing during the millennium) had come. The spirt utterance had not come from the Holy Spirit but from a deceiving spirit.

2. **A FALSE REPORT:**

“ *Nor by word,*” (2:2) That is a prophetic announcement. These Christians had been deceived by a man in their midst supposedly speaking by direct Holy Spirit illumination, who had given them a pronouncement contrary to the body of teaching in the Old Testament about the day of the Lord. In other words, they had been by false prophet and had they known their Bibles they would have detected the error at once.

3. **A FORGED REPORT:**

“ *Nor by letter as from us.*” (2:2) Here was a group who forged a letter from Paul in which it was alleged that the day of the Lord had come. Needless to say the church at

Thessalonica was confused and troubled. Some of the believers concluded that since the Lord’s coming was near they ought to quit their jobs and spent their time waiting for Him. This meant that the other members were under and extra burden to care for them. My do you how Satan was working overtime ? As the lion he was seeking to devour (1 Thessalonians) as the serpent he was seeking to deceive. (2 Thessalonians) The first letter has to do mainly with the church, the second letter has to do mainly with the world. The first tells of Christ’s appearing in the air, the second tells of His advent to the earth. The first has to do chiefly with the “ *day of Christ,*” and the second chiefly with “ *the day of the Lord.*” So here is Paul writing to this church who were *discouraged by persecution: deceived by false teaching; and disobedient to divine commands.* So what does he say ? Well, like the first letter this one is all about the Lord’s coming. Notice there is,

(1) **COMFORT THROUGH THE SECOND ADVENT 1:1-12**

You see, these Thessalonian believers were undergoing severe persecution for their faith in Christ. Though they were bearing up remarkably well, many thought that they were experiencing that foretold time of tribulation. Some of them were being discouraged “ *Why try any more ?*” they groaned. “ *There’s no justice. Everything is always against us.*” As an antidote to this attitude Paul reminds them that a day is coming when God will set everything

right and repay them for their sufferings. He also explains why they are allowed to suffer in the first place. You see,

(a) They Could Endure the Tribulation of Men: 1:1-6

Do you see how Paul begins this letter ? (1:1-2) Mr. Mullan once called attention to four unchanging principles set forth in these early verses. He talked about **1. The Unchanged Humility:** “ *Paul,*” not “ *apostle.*” **2. The Unchanged Unity:** “ *the church of the Thessalonians,*” **3. The Unchanged Deity:** “ *In God our Father and the Lord Jesus,*” **4. The Unchanged Necessity:** “ *Grace unto you and peace.*” And they needed that “ *grace and peace,*” for they were in the midst of persecution. No doubt the Thessalonian believers did not consider themselves to be very spiritual as they suffered but Paul detected what God was doing in them. You and I are the worst one to evaluate our lives. Many times others can see the spiritual improvement when we miss it completely. For what blessings did Paul give thanks and thereby encourage his friends ? Well, I want you to notice they could endure the tribulation of men for they had

1. A Developing Faith:

Do you see how Paul describes it in (1:4) ? The words “ *groweth exceedingly,*” (*huperauxano*) means “ *to increase beyond measure.*” We are not talking here about saving faith but with maturing, growing faith. Suffering helps us to grow. “ *The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,*” wrote the Latin church father Tertullian. A devoted Chinese Christian said “ *The suffering in China*

has multiplied the blessings because it has purified the church.” I wonder is that what we need in Ulster ? A period of suffering to purify the church. You see the faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. Faith like a muscle must be exercised to grow stronger and tribulation is the thing that God uses to strengthen our faith. In Hudson’s Taylor book “ *Spiritual Secret,*” you read how Hudson Taylor’s faith in the Lord grew from the first day he determined to live by faith alone in God alone. He learned to trust God for his salary, especially when his employer forgot to pay him. He learned to trust God for daily needs and as his faith was tested he grew in faith and was able to trust God for His supply for an entire missionary organization. Sometimes it seemed that God had forgotten but Hudson continued to pray and trust and God honoured him. You know, an easy life can lead to a shallow faith but a hard life can lead to a growing faith. Is your faith growing ?

2. A Deepening Love:

This was an answer to Paul’s previous prayer in his first letter. (3:12) You know, suffering can make us selfish but when suffering is mixed with grace and faith it produces love. (Gal 5:6) As Warren Wiersbe says “ *When Christians suffer their faith reaches upward to God and their loves reaches outward to their fellow believers.*”

“ *Behold how they love one another,*” was the confession of the pagan world as it beheld the wonder of Christian fellowship. But the early Christians were only obeying the command of the Lord “ *A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another as I have loved you.*”

(Jn 13:34) 1:2:

3. A Depending Patience:

Look at (1:4) “ *For your patience,*” or as the word implies “ *perseverance, or endurance.*” Paul tells us in Romans “ *that tribulation works out endurance.*”

(Rom 5:3) You don’t become patient by reading or a book or listening to a message you have to suffer. What were these believers enduring ? Well “ *persecutions,*” means “ *attacks from without,*” “ *tribulations,*” means “ *pressures,*” and “ *trouble,*” (1:7) means “ *to be pressed into a narrow place.*” No matter how we look at it the Thessalonians were having a difficult time. But God never wastes trials. He permits them to build character into our lives. He can grow a mushroom overnight but it takes many years and many storms to build a mighty oak. Could it be that you are suffering for your faith ? In the home, in the workplace, in the family ? Is your faith developing, is your love deepening, is your patience depending on the God of patience ? (Rom 15:5) You know all of this resulted in

4. A Delightful Testimony:

For Paul says “ *So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith.*” (1:4) You see, their testimony was helping others. Not only can suffering help us to grow but we can help others to grow. For God encourages us that we may encourage others. (2 Cor 1:4-5) During World War 2 when enemy armies invaded North Africa the missionaries had to flee and

there was great concern over the churches left behind. But when the war ended and the missionaries returned they discovered strong, thriving churches. The sufferings of war purified the churches and helped strengthen the faith of believers. What an encouragement this was to the churches of the free world. So these Thessalonians (a) But,

(b) *They Would Escape the Tribulation of God:* **1:7-12**

You know when people go through a time of great persecution they say, “ *Isn’t there going to be a time when this injustice is corrected ?*” *How can Hitler get away with killing millions of Jews ? How can Stalin get away with killing so many of his own people ?*” *Why do corrupt leaders stay in power ? Why doesn’t God punish these evil doers now ? Why does God wait so long to straighten things out ?*” But Paul says “ *Have faith be patient.*” You see, there is a day when repayment will be made. Believers will be repaid for their sufferings for their sufferings are evidence or “ *a manifest token,*” that God is righteous working out His great plan for them and preparing them for glory. Unbelievers will be repaid for their evil works and they will suffer an eternal hell. The Lord Himself will be repaid for He will be “ *glorified in His saints and be admired in all them that believe.*” (1:9)

Now I say that these believers will escape the tribulation of God for the end of this first chapter deals with Christ returning as judge at the end of the seven year tribulation

period. (Rev 19:11-15) Now this is not the same event as that described by Paul in (1 Thes 4:13-18) In (1 Thessalonians) Paul deals with the Rapture. But here in the opening chapter of 2 Thessalonians Paul deals with the Revelation of Christ. These two great events are not one and the same and should not be confused. William McDonald offers this helpful distinction. At the Rapture: Christ comes to the air: (1 Thes 4:16) At the Revelation: Christ comes to the earth: (Zech 14:4) At the Rapture: He comes for His saints: (1 Thes 4:16) At the Revelation: He comes with His saints: (1 Thes 3:13) The Rapture is identified with the day of Christ: (Phil 1:6) The Revelation: is identified with the day of the Lord: (2 Thes 2:2) The Rapture: is presented as time of blessing: (1 Thes 4:18) The Revelation: is presented as a time of judgment: (2 Thes 2:8-12) The Rapture: seems to involve the church primarily: (4:13-18) The Revelation: seems to involve Israel primarily and the Gentile nations. Now I want you to notice that:

The Rapture will mean Rest for the Saints:

Look at (1:6-7) The first phrase of the seventh verse should be treated as a parenthesis. So we could read it like this. “ *To recompense tribulation to them that trouble you when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.* ” (1:7) But the saints receive their rest when the Lord returns to the air and catches us to be with Him. The word “ *rest*,” means “ *relief, release, not under pressure.* ” My in this life we are pressured “ *Pressed out of measure,* ” (2 Cor 1:8) but when we see Christ we

will be released. We don't face fiery wrath and judgment for God has already judged our sins at Calvary. (1 Thes 1:10 5:9) My we are not going through, we are going up, it's not tribulation, its translation, it's not Antichrist its Jesus Christ. It's not a war we are facing, it's a wedding we are attending. But,

The Revelation will mean Ruin for the Sinners:

For when Christ comes to the earth with His church He will then judge the wicked who will then be living on earth. What kind of future does the unbeliever face ? Well look at the dramatic words Paul used to describe it, “ *tribulation, vengeance, flaming fire, punishment, and everlasting destruction.* ” This Christ rejecting world will receive from God exactly what it gave to His people. Pharaoh drowned the babies of Israel and God drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Haman plotted to wipe out the Jews and he and his sons were wiped out. Judas betrayed Christ to be hanged on a tree, and Judas went out and hanged himself. The unbelieving Jewish leaders who sacrificed Christ in order to save the nation (Jn 11:49-53) in a few years saw their city destroyed and their nation scattered.

Do you know something ? Sinners reap what they sow. It is a righteous thing for God to judge sin and condemn sinners. Folk who say, “ *I cannot believe that a loving God would send people to hell,* ” do not understand the holiness of God nor the awfulness of sin. Sure, God is love 1 Jn 4:8) but God is light (1 Jn 1:5) and in His holiness He must deal with sin. Do you see that phrase ?

“ *Everlasting destruction,*” it’s not annihilation, its hell for ever. Should that not make us earnest in our dealings with sinners ? Should that not drive us to our knees in prayer ? Should that not energize us to seek to bring the lost to the Saviour ? (1)

(2) CORRECTION CONCERNING THE SECOND ADVENT: 2:1-12

Here Paul comes to the heart of this letter, his explanation about the day of the Lord and the man of sin. You see, these believers at Thessalonica were “ *shaken,*” because they had been told falsely that the day of the Lord was already upon them. Look for a moment at (2:2) Do you see the phrase “ *the day of Christ,*” the better text sources indicate “ *the Lord,*” rather than “ *Christ.*” “ *At hand,*” should be “ *already present.*” The idea that the “ *Day of the Lord,*” had already come conflicted with what Paul had previously told them about the Rapture. You see, certain events must take place before this day of wrath and judgment can come to the world. In this section Paul speaks of the prophetic events that make up God’s timetable. Look at them for a moment. There will be,

(a) *THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH:*

Paul appeals to them to “ *calm down,*” on the basis of the truth he had taught them in his first letter, namely that the Lord would return and catch up His own to meet Him “ *in the air.*” Now is this the “ *coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him.*” (2:1) Christ is the great Gatherer. ***He is the Gatherer***

Historically: “ *His fame spread abroad and all the city was gathered together at the door.*” (Mk 1:33) ***Christ is the Gatherer Congregationally:*** “ *Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.*” (Matt 18:20) One day He will be ***the Gatherer Universally:*** “ *That he might together in one all things in Christ.*” (Eph 1:10) Very soon He will be the ***Gatherer Adventually:*** “ *The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him.*” (2:1) My “ *what a gathering that will be.*” But once the church is out of the world Satan and his forces will unfold their program. You see “ *the day of the Lord,*” is that period that follows the rapture of the church. It will be a time of Tribulation for the people on earth. Satan and his forces will be working on earth, and God will send righteous judgments from heaven. John describes it for us in (Rev Ch 6-19) Its only then that Satan will be able to unveil his man. Why is Satan unable to reveal his “ *man of sin,*” sooner ? Because God is restraining the forces of evil in the world today. Do you see (2: 6-8) ? Watch Paul’s use of the words.

“ *Now, already, then.*” Another Translation puts (2:7) this way “ *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.*” Now who or what is the *Restrainer* ? Perhaps the answer to that question is found in answering another question. “ *Who is powerful enough to hold back Satan ?*” The only answer to that question is God. Many Bible scholars identify the Restrainer as the Holy Spirit operating in the church. Time and again down through the centuries Satan has been ready to bring in his

man and take over the planet only to have his plans hindered by the Holy Spirit. Consider the Wesleyan revival which swept through Britain, and which the historian Lecky said saved England from “ *bloody revolution*.” Conditions in England were as bad as France but France had revolution and England had revival. Providentially the Wesley brothers and George Whitefield were God’s instruments for spiritual revival. Millions were saved and through the Methodist revival a bloody revolution was averted in England. Undoubtedly “ *the mystery of iniquity was restrained*.” But the rapture of the church will signal the end of this age long restraint. The Holy Spirit will then step aside and allow Satan to have his brief day. (a)

(b) THE REVELATION OF THE ANTI-CHRIST:

“ *Then,*” says the Holy Spirit “ *shall that Wicked or lawless one be revealed*.” Dr. A.J. Gordon said something worth pondering in this respect. “ *The mystery of godliness is God humbling Himself to become a Man, the mystery of iniquity is a man exalting himself to become like God*.” I want you to notice here,

The When of the Antichrist:

When will he appear ? Well (3:8) gives us the answer.

“ *And then shall that Wicked be revealed*.” When ? When the Holy Spirit ceases to restrain which in turn will not be until after the rapture of the church.

The World of the Antichrist:

Look at (2:3) His coming will be heralded by a “ *falling away*.” The word Paul uses is (*apostasia*) from comes our English word apostasy. (Acts 21:21) Are the marks of this coming apostasy not evident in the world today ? Do you want to know what its going to be like in the end times ? *Well, look at the days of Noah and see how permissive society was* (Matt 24:37-39) *Look at the days of Lot and see how perverted society was*. (Lk 17:28) My are we not a permissive society ? One book suggested as suitable text for young children is entitled

“ **Show me.**” The cover describes this as “ **A Picture Book Of Sex for Children and Parents.**” The cover picture is of a carefully posed but evidently naked little boy and girl. The boy has a challenging expression on his face and the girl is pondering his question to “ **show me.**” (John Phillips Exploring the Future p, 275) Are we not a perverted society ? Not only has sodomy been accepted as a lifestyle but now we have gay marriages. We have people being ordained into the ministry who are gay.

John Phillips in his book “ *Exploring the Future*,” tells us that as far back as 1979 the Episcopal Church I assume in U.S.A. ordained a lesbian into the ministry and in 1972 the United Church of Christ ordained a homosexual clergyman. But you say “ *That is America. That’s not Ulster*.” Do you know what you need to know ? Go down to our capital city on Gay Pride Day and see the thousands who are parading and mocking the Word of God and start to get earnest in praying for your children and grandchildren.

The Wickedness of the Antichrist:

This “*man of sin*,” contrasts with Christ the Saviour from sin. He is the son of perdition, Christ is the Son of God. He is the liar Christ is the truth. We commonly call this man the “*antichrist*,” which means both “*against Christ*,” as well as “*instead of Christ*.” As the Lord Jesus was the visible expression of the invisible God so the Antichrist will be the visible expression of the invisible devil. He will be the man of sin, glorying in sin, sponsoring sin, popularizing sin, enthroning sin, living in sin, embodying sin. The When, the World, the Wickedness can you see,

The Worship of the Antichrist:

Look at (2:4) Self deification will be the policy of the Antichrist as he sits in the Jewish Holy of Holies.

(Rev 13:15) Are you starting to see the picture ? The church will be raptured: the Antichrist will begin his rise to power in a peaceful way: he will unite Europe and make a seven year covenant with Israel to protect it.

(Dan 9: 27) After three and half years he will break that covenant and invade Israel. (Dan 9:27) he will abolish all religion and set up himself to be worshipped (Rev 13:15) At the end of the seven year Tribulation Period Christ will return to earth and destroy the Antichrist and his system. Indeed is this not what Paul says here ? There will be (a) (b) and,

(c) THE RETURN OF THE LORD: 2:8-12

Do you see (2:8-12) ? The beast Satan’s diabolical antichrist will be destroyed at the second coming of

Christ. What about those who are unsaved and left behind at the Rapture ? Well, Paul says that Satan’s man will come “*with all deceivableness of unrighteousness*,” (2 Thes 2:10-12) My millions of people will be saved and swept into the kingdom after the Rapture (Rev 7:1) but those who have heard and rejected the gospel in this age will be excluded from their number. All such will believe lie and be damned. Since they would not have the truth, then let them have the lie. They wanted no part in Christ, so let them have their part in antichrist. Could anything be more just ? Could anything be more righteous ? Yet could anything be more terrible ? A deliberate rejection of the truth now, means a deliberate acceptance of the lie then. I wonder, will some of our family be there ? Will some of our friends be there ? Do we not need to pray more fervently ?

***Oh give us all a passion
For souls as ne’er before
To warn men and to tell them
The Judge is at the door***

(3) CONDUCT UNTIL THE SECOND ADVENT 2:13-3:18

For having dealt with the error Paul now turns to practical issues. You see, some had concluded that since the Lord’s coming was imminent there was no point in doing anything else except wait for Him. They were saying “*Why not just wait until Christ comes back for us ? Why should we concern ourselves about making a living ? Let’s just enjoy ourselves and wait for His coming ?*” But Paul

did not look on this doctrine as a theory to be discussed but as a truth to be lived. He knows that its so easy to get Christians unbalanced about the Second Coming either by ignorance or fanaticism. So in this closing section of the book he tells them,

(a) TO CLING TENACIOUSLY: 2:13-17

Look if you will at (2:15) The word “ *tradition*,” simply means “ *that which is handed down from one person to another*.” It’s the same word translated “ *ordinances*,” in (1 Cor 11:2) and speaks of Christian doctrine in general. “ *Stand fast*,” means “ *do not move away from the truth of the gospel*,” and “ *hold*,” implies “ *a vigorous tenacious grasp*.” My as the end of the age draws near it will be more difficult to live for the Lord and serve Him. Forces around us will want to move us away from the faith. What are we to do ? Stand fast. Hold on to the Word of God. Don’t be moved by world convulsions, political upheavals, or religious apostasy. All these things must take place but God is still on the throne. Don’t listen to the lies of the devil, the teaching of the cults, and the sugar coated promises of false teachers. Hold on to the Word of God. Is that what you are doing ? (a)

(b) TO PRAY INTELLIGENTLY: 3:1-5

Do you see what Paul says in (3:1) ? Though Satan is at work in the world we can still pray to God and see Him answer. Isn’t Paul’s request interesting ? That they pray for the ministry of the Word. You see, the only way to counteract the lies of the devil is to get the Word of God

out. This Word is living (Heb 4:12) and Paul desires to see it “ *run freely*.” (3:1) Where the Word is ignored Paul wants to see it glorified. (1 Thes 2:13 2 Thes 2:13) Should we not be praying more for the ministry of the Word ? (Acts 4:29-31) (a) (b)

(c) TO WORK CONSCIENTIOUSLY: 3:6-18

“ *If any is not willing to work neither should he eat*,” is the literal translation of (3:10) You see, there were some “ **adventist idlers**,” who were saying “ *let’s just drop everything and wait for Christ to take us away*.” Down through the ages fringe groups have made the same mistake. They have left the world, gone off to a mountain and waited for the Lord to come back only to return home embarrassed. This is neither realistic or spiritual. It’s just lazy and foolish. Christians are not to sponge off others and the church. Far from supporting laziness the church is to withdraw fellowship from those who refuse to work. (3:6-7) These believers in Thessalonica were to engage in *hard work*: (3:8) *honest work*: (3:9) and *helpful work*: (3:13) W. Neil says they were to “ **stop fussing, stop idling and stop sponging**.” Idle busybodies are to be avoided (3:6) admonished (3:15) and ashamed (3:14)

My the King is coming. Do you believe it ? Do you long for it ? Are you living in the light of it ? When Christ appears will you be unashamed before Him at His coming ?

