

THE DAY OF CHRIST  
2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

INTRO: I want to take you to a very interesting passage with regard to the return of Christ for the Church (read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-4). The point of particular interest to me for this message is the phrase, 'the day of Christ.' The subject matter of this passage is 'the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him.' That is a specific reference to what we call the 'rapture'. The word rapture is the Latin of the word 'caught up' in 1 Thessalonians 4:13. That the rapture, or 'catching up' and the second coming are two distinct events is agreed by pre, mid and post-trib teachers. The rapture is when He comes for the Church. The second coming is when He comes back down to earth to set up the millennial kingdom. For the post-trib view, the rapture is a very brief event. Christ comes into the air for the Church. The Church meets Him in the air, and both Christ and the Church return to earth. What is in view, in our passage is the rapture of the Church.

In verse 2, Paul encourages the Thessalonian believers, and I quote, "...not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as the day of Christ had come." Paul has quite thoroughly taught these young believers regarding the rapture. In his first letter to them it says in 1:10 how these Thessalonians had turned from their wicked ways to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

So they were expecting to be delivered from the tribulation, at the very least from the very worst part of the tribulation. Then in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul speaks to them of Christ's coming for us and our gathering together to Him, just as he does in this mornings text. So they were expecting Christ to come and take them to heaven before the wrath of God was poured out. With that bit of background, let us look at the subject of the day of Christ.

I. THE IDENTITY OF THE DAY OF CHRIST

There is expressed, in verses 1-2, a grave concern by the Thessalonian believers. They had been informed

that the Day of Christ had come. Before we consider what caused them such great concern, we must examine what the phrase 'the day of Christ' refers to. There are three great days mentioned in Scripture. The most often used day is 'the day of the Lord'. Then there is another day called the day of God. It is mentioned twice in Scripture. I believe these three days do not all refer to the same thing. I will not take time to explain these three days other than to say that the day of Christ, in my understanding is neither the same as the day of the Lord, nor as the day of God. This day is referred to 7 times in the NT. 1 Corinthians 1:8 calls it the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 5:5 calls it the day of the Lord Jesus. 2 Corinthians 1:14 calls it the day of the Lord Jesus. Philippians 1:6, the day of Jesus Christ; Philippians 1:10, the day of Christ; Philippians 2:16, the day of Christ; and 2 Thessalonians 2:2, the day of Christ.

I think the first matter important to understanding this passage is to determine what is meant by the phrase, 'the day of Christ.' My own conclusion is that the day of Christ refers to the seven years that Christ spends with His new wife, the Church, in heaven. There is an interesting bit of information verb in the words, "...as though the day of Christ *had come*." In the original language the verb in this clause is in the perfect tense. I think it could be translated, "...as though the day of Christ has come and is now in progress." In other words the day of Christ does not refer to a particular 24 hour day, but to a time period of greater length. We use the term 'day' to mean something different than a 24 hour time period. For example we talk about our grandfather's day or our dad's day. Or we speak of the day of information and so on. We are not talking about a particular 24 hour day.

Daniel B. Wallace in his book, "Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics" says of the perfect tense that it speaks of an action that happened or was accomplished in the past, with results existing in the present. That makes me believe that the day of Christ is not that moment when Christ raptures the Church or the day when He raptures the Church. It refers to that period of time when He raptures the Church and at least some

time following. I think this is to be understood from the perfect tense.

Is there any support for such a view? Well, no lesser of a writer than J. Dwight Pentecost says in his book *Things to Come*, "In each case in which the Day of Christ is used it is used specifically in reference to the expectation of the Church, her translation, glorification, and examination for reward. The word *day* as used in Scripture is not necessarily a time word, but may be used for the events which fall within any period. Paul so uses it in 2 Corinthians 6:2, when he speaks of the 'day of salvation'" (232). So, in my understanding, the phrase 'the day of Christ' refers to a time period.

## II. THE CONCERN REGARDING THE DAY OF CHRIST

The second matter we must examine is the concern that was raised in the Thessalonians regarding the day of Christ. Paul instructs them in verse 2 to , 'not be soon shaken in mind or troubled'. Now the idea behind the original wording here is a violent shaking. A shaking that could cause them to lose heart all together. It is a shaking so violent, it could cause panic. And what had caused the violent shaking was that they had been informed that the day of Christ had come, that is, it had come and was now in progress. If that was true, then they had missed out and they were now entering the tribulation.

You see, Paul had taught them a lot about the return of Christ. Look at 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (read). Here is what Paul had said would happen. Christ would return into the air, the atmosphere. Then believers who had died would be resurrected and caught up to meet Christ in the air, and living believers would be caught up right after this. By the way, the words 'caught up' are the words from which the word 'rapture' comes. The rapture is simply 'the catching up'.

Now this 'catching up' is precisely the same as that which is described in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 as 'the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering together to Him.' This is the 'rapture' or the 'catching up'. This 'catching up' along with one other event, is

what constitutes the beginning of the 'day of Christ' as I see it.

### III. THE INDICATORS OF THE DAY OF CHRIST

Now let me ask a question: Where did the Thessalonians go wrong in believing the day of Christ had come? Why had they been deceived by the teaching that this day had begun? Well, they had failed to remember what Paul had taught them (read vv. 3-5). And what had he taught them? Well, in verse three he tells them what he had taught them. First, the day of Christ would not come unless two things had taken place.

The first of those is that the 'falling away' must come first. Now let me shock you first and then show you why I have come to this conclusion. I believe the word translated 'apostasy' actually refers to the rapture of the Church! I heard that teaching first many years ago, and one of those who held to that was a good friend of ours from Pennsylvania, Dr. J. Otis Yoder of the Old Order Mennonites. He was a great scholar of the Word but I took exception with his teaching on this. When I would teach the Bible course on 1 and 2 Thessalonians in Bible class I would say, "As much as I respect these men, I think they are bending the Scriptures to fit their view."

Let me tell you on what ground I taught that and why I changed my view. I always argued that the Greek noun, *apostasia* only occurs twice in the NT and its first use refers to an apostasy from Moses' teaching (see Acts 21:21). Therefore, since it means an 'apostacy' in its first occurrence, the greatest likelihood is that is also its meaning here in 2 Thessalonians 2.

Then a few years ago I read an article by Dr. Thomas Ice, and he challenged me beyond anything I have ever read or heard before. Let me reduce that for you in brief. First, with regard to the noun 'apostasy' which is a transliteration of the Greek 'apostasia', I was correct about this word occurring only twice, but that is as a noun. What I had never checked was that the verb, from which the noun is formed, occurs 15 times and is usually translated in the KJV, 'to

depart' and it could always be translated 'to depart' and that is its meaning. Let me give you one example (read Acts 12:10).

Now if the verb means 'to depart', then the noun should be 'a departure'. And of the two uses of the noun, it could in both instances be translated, 'a departure'. Look at the first one (Acts 21:21 'to depart from Moses'). If this is the case, then the best translation in 2 Thessalonians would be, "...for that day will not come unless the departure comes first..." So it is most likely that the word, 'apostasia' should be translated, 'the departure'.

That leads us to a second observation, that of the article before the noun. In the original, as in our English it is, 'THE' falling away, or 'THE' departure. I quote now from my notes to 2 Thessalonians, "The article points to some definite event. The best explanation for the use of the article in this text is that it points to something already mentioned earlier. But no apostasy is mentioned at all in either 1 or 2 Thessalonians. However, the departure, or the rapture is mentioned in both 1 and 2 Thessalonians and most recently in 2 Thessalonians 2:1. So viewing this word as the rapture or departure is most consistent with the word used and the article used."

There is a third argument why 'departure' is a better translation than 'falling away' or 'apostacy'. Let me quote now from Dr. Thomas Ice's article: "The first seven English translations of apostasia all rendered the noun as either a 'departure' or 'departing.' They are as follows: Wycliffe Bible (1384); Tyndale Bible (1526); Coverdale Bible (1539); Breeches Bible (1576); Beza Bible (1583); Geneva Bible (1608). This supports the notion that the word truly means 'departure.' In fact, Jerome's Latin translation known as the Vulgate from around the time of A.D. 400 renders apostasia with the word discessio, meaning 'departure.' Why was the King James Version the first to depart from this established translation of 'departure'?"

So I conclude that the first reason Paul gives how the Thessalonians should have known that the day of

Christ had not yet come is that 'the departure' the gathering together of believers to Christ in the air had not yet happened. But these Thessalonians might say, "Well, how do we know that the departure did not happen as we were informed, and we are all left behind because maybe we are not truly believers? Maybe we have been left behind because we were never truly saved. Maybe the catching up happened, but we are still here because we were never truly saved." So Paul gives them a second reason how they could know that the day of Christ could not have come. If the rapture had happened, and they had been left behind because they were not truly believers, then there was a way for them to verify that (read vs. 3).

From all this I conclude the order of events like this. 1 The Church is caught up to meet Christ in the air. Now we must understand that when the Church is caught up, it will cause a tremendous commotion on earth. Think for one moment what news reporters might be saying. Think what family members will be going through, when some are gone and some are not.

Let me digress for one moment. Maybe some time in the future I will take time to explain the rapture and eminency in the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24-25, Mark 13 and Luke 21. Now the reason why it needs an explanation is that even very big name pre-tribulational teachers say that these verses do not refer to the rapture and they have some convincing arguments. However, I take exception with that and I want to take you to that passage and show you something of what the rapture will be like (read Matthew 24:40-41).

What will it be like on earth at that event? How do you explain that all of a sudden, in a nano second all Christians are gone? What would family members think? What would an unsaved wife think if her husband were gone? What would an unsaved man think if his wife suddenly disappeared? But that is exactly what these fantastic verses teach!

So, first the 'catching up' takes place. And I think that it is right there the antichrist is revealed. I want you to note this carefully as we read 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8 (read). What happens? The Church

is removed, and then the antichrist is revealed. Let us reread verse 7 (read). To whom does the pronoun 'He' refer to here? You will notice that the NKJV has capitalized this pronoun and I think rightly so because it refers to the Holy Spirit. And how is the Holy Spirit removed? Why, by the removal of the Church. Do you know what keeps this present world intact? No, it is not the president of the US, it is not even the governments of the world. It is the presence of believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He is the one who restrains. But as soon as the Church is gone, antichrist will appear.

I believe one of the things that will immediately sell him to the whole world will be that he will be able to explain why those nasty intolerant people, known as Christians are gone. And people will swallow his message hook, line and sinker.

Let me read for you the poem I wrote when we had the Y2K scare just before the year 2000 (read). In this poem I suggest what I had heard from others as to what antichrist's message may be:

It was said by the Lord  
From earliest time;  
"Today with your Master,  
You may be called to dine."

'Twas mocked by the world  
All through the years;  
And even today  
Its derision one hears.

Said the world to the Church,  
"Your message is dead;  
Eat, drink, and be merry,  
You'll be farther ahead."

Then years came and went  
And still no Lord;  
Till the Church too fell silent,  
And laid by its sword.

Now, wouldn't you believe it,  
The world had been right;

No Lord in the morning,  
No Lord in the night.

They laughed and they married,  
They ate and they drank;  
Then said, "Toss now your Bible  
And come join our rank."

Well, none had expected it,  
No not a one;  
In the twinkling of an eye  
All Christians were gone.

The world lay in shock  
For a moment of time;  
Till antichrist's message  
With this evil line:

"They were wicked, they were,  
The whole lot of them;  
And we've just evolved  
To the highest of men."

Some years came and went,  
Just seven to be sure;  
When the Lord came to earth  
With saints white and pure.

Now peace reigns on earth  
As sure as can be;  
Just open God's Word,  
It plainly you'll see.

Yes, and many more things  
The Bible does say;  
Yet none can be found  
Of the "bug", Y2K.

Let me make one other point from 2 Thessalonians 2, from verses 9-12 (read). From verse 9 we find that the antichrist will be a master of deception, more masterful than our present US president. And people will flock after him in almost unbelievable awe. And those who had a clear presentation of the Gospel before the tribulation will be deceived to believe the antichrist, and why will they so readily fall for



him? Because they did not 'receive' the love of the truth that they might be saved.

Now in verse 11 we are told that because they did not receive the love of the truth, God will send them strong delusion. The word translated 'delusion' is *planee*. We get our word 'planet' from this word. The word 'planet' refers to those objects in the heavens that do not stay in one place but wander about, like the moon. The stars stay put, but the planets wander. People who reject the Gospel now will wander after the antichrist.

Second, the original says they will believe 'the lie'. And what is 'the lie'? I think it will be antichrist's explanation for why all Christians suddenly disappeared. Having heard the Gospel before, yet these people will believe 'the lie'. I worked for a man years ago who said, "Well, if this is all true about the rapture, I will wait until it happens and if it happens then I will know you were right and then I will believe." But according to this passage, even he will be deceived to believe the lie.

I want us to notice one more thing. Verse 10 says these people did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved. Saved from what? Well, in the context, saved from the wrath to come, the hour of trial.

I want you to see this in another context. Let us read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (read). Now here is the beginning of the 'day of the Lord', in contrast with the 'day of Christ' we have been looking at. And notice in verse 3 that when 'THEY' shall say "Peace and safety" then sudden destruction comes upon 'THEM'. And 'THEY' shall not escape. The 'they' and the 'them' refers to the lost, those who have entered the tribulation. Then Paul goes on in verses 4-5 to say that we are not sons of the night, but of the day. Then in verse 8 he encourages Christians, who are of the day, to put on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. The hope of salvation from what? Look carefully now at verse 9, "For God did not appoint 'US' to..." what? "to wrath"! But to obtain, what? Salvation! That is

salvation from the time of wrath! Now note verse 11 (read). You see, there is comfort in this teaching!

CONCL: So, let us conclude. Two things will happen before the 'day of Christ' commences. First, the great departure of believers from earth will take place. And second, the great revelation of the antichrist will take place on earth. With that, the day of Christ will begin in heaven and the day of the Lord will begin on earth. The Christian will be saved from the wrath to come. The unbeliever will experience the wrath to come, and oh, what an experience that will be. It is described in great detail in Revelation 6-19.

But there is salvation from the time of wrath. To those who receive the love of the truth, turn from their sins and to Christ, deliverance from the day of wrath is promised. If ever we needed to hear the message of John, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand", it is today. It is even at the doors. And the salvation the Christian experiences, is a salvation from the day of God's wrath.

In Mark 13 the very last verse we find these words of Jesus, "What I say to you I say to all, watch!"