

The Coming of Christ, Part III

Call to Worship: Psalm 147:1-11

Hymn Insert- *10,000 Reasons*

1st Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Hymn #216- *Crown Him with Many Crowns*

2nd Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12

Hymn #178- *O Sacred Head Now Wounded*

Introduction:

Paul has been refuting a false teaching about the return of Christ, which has made its way into the Thessalonian church. Some were stating that Jesus may have already returned.

Recognizing the danger which this heresy posed against the very foundation of hope, upon which, the Thessalonians rested, Paul took aim against it by reaffirming that certain significant events had to take place before Christ would return.

Preceding our Lord's final coming, there had to be a great "falling away," where a large portion of the church would apostatize, and this would lead to the rising up of the "man of sin," who would make bold blasphemous claims and reek utter havoc on the church. Ultimately, this man of sin (this "lawless one") would be destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming. The mystery of lawlessness was already at work in Paul's day, setting the stage for the falling away and the revealing of the man of sin. However, something was presently restraining, preventing the man of sin from rising up any sooner than his appointed time.

I have sought to give a somewhat detailed explanation, identifying what I believe to be the falling away, the man of sin and the restrainer. And so, I will avoid reiterating that all here. If your weren't here last week, you can get that information by listening to the message at **sermonaudio.com**.

This morning, we focus on the power behind the man of sin, and especially the sobering realities surrounding the large number of individuals who are deceived by him.

I. The Operative Power Behind the Man of Sin (the "Lawless one") [vs. 9-10a]

"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception..."

Here, Paul opens up something critical about this man of sin, which he wants his audience to remember. The real power behind the man of sin is Satan himself. Satan, who has deceived the world from the beginning (when he first tempted Adam and Eve to sin), likewise, uses his power of deception through this man of sin, to bring about his rise to power. The man of sin rises in stature, even over kings and all government officials, by pretending to be a servant of God, who is affirmed by counterfeit miracles and lying wonders. Unlike the Lord Jesus Christ, who actually performed miracles, in the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit, unto the affirmation of His messianic office, this man of sin, like Pharaoh's magicians during the time of Moses, deceives people into believing that he exercises the power of God, when in truth, he is a liar and a deceiver, like the devil himself, who pretends to be God, but is nothing more than a conniver and swindler.

All in all, the man of sin, rises to power through unrighteous deception. He is a sham, but most people buy into the sham and subject themselves to him, thinking that in doing so, they are gaining favor with God. And so, by this deceptive means, he gains the following of the people, commanding their obedience and driving rulers and kings to be subservient to him, indeed, begging for his favor so that they can maintain the respect of the people. It becomes the best interest of all to retain his favor, since he allegedly wields the power of God. And I challenge you brethren, to go back and read about how the demonic, adulterous, wretched popes have fit this description to the very minutest details.

But, let us look now upon the alleged victims of this man of sin, and see how they actually bear their own guilt in believing the lies and rejecting the truth.

II. The Deluded Masses

"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception *among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness*" (vss. 9-12).

Here, we find that the large mass of people who are deceived by the man of sin, are by no means innocent victims. In other words, they are ultimately the cause of their own fate. Those who fall into the trap of the man of sin's lies, perish, because they do not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved. In other words, they are repulsed by the true light and do not want to leave their darkness. They enjoy and delight in their sin, and they recognize that to embrace the truth, they would have to part with their sin and follow Christ. And so, they would rather believe the lie, because it grants them the ability to continue on in their sin. They would rather serve the man of sin, and the Satan behind him, than bow the knee to Christ, even though they don't consciously realize that that is what they are actually doing. And so, in that sense, they are vulnerable toward, and ultimately welcome the deception, which provides them with a mirage of support that will enable them to continue on in their sin.

And so, Paul adds, "*And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness*" (vs. 11-12).

God gives them over to their desires, as it were, sending them a strong delusion so that they will ultimately believe the lie of the man of sin, and get swept away in the deception. Again, they refuse to receive the love of the truth, and so, God gives them over to the delusion. And notice again why they ultimately refused to believe the truth. Because they "had pleasure in unrighteousness."

You see, at the end of the day, God is not mocked. He is no fool. He knows the heart and He is not at all impressed by man's continual "punching the clock of man-made traditions" and being "religious," when in reality the heart is far from Him. He knows the desires and pleasures of the inner man...He looks at the heart, which ultimately drives the whole ship. You don't simply "get some religion in your life," like you would get health or dental insurance. Authentic Christianity is life changing. It involves a new birth unto new ideals, desires and a whole new worldview. Everything else comes from the comforting voice of the man of sin, as it were, who offers peace, when he himself has no peace to offer, because he doesn't represent God in any true sense. His peace is itself a lie from the pit of hell.

And so, the victims of the man of sin, are really victims of their own unrighteous desires, which drive them to reject the truth altogether. And therefore, God *strongly* gives them over to the lie, and they bear their own guilt at the final judgment.

III. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) Brethren, let us be reminded that our ultimate enemies are spiritual in nature, and though they utilize flesh and blood to bring about great evil, our real wrestling is not with flesh and blood, but with the spiritual enemies themselves. If we lose sight of this, we will fight the battle with fleshly means, and fail to persevere and advance in the battle. Here, we find that the man of sin is ultimately brought to power by Satan himself.

Consider as well, Paul's sobering words of exhortation to the Ephesians, found in Ephesians 6:10-20, "*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*"

Brethren, we are in a spiritual battle. All of the corruptive forces that are at work in this world are merely the outward representation of a much greater war that is going on behind the scenes. And we can't fight this battle with earthly, fleshly weapons. We need to don the armor of God, if we are to stand firm to the end! We can't fight this battle by casting our hope on the ideologies of some political party. We need to be a people of the Word, and of prayer, joining

hands with one another, as the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, full of the power of the Living God and of the Holy Spirit! This war is spiritual!

2) Friends, it is important to recognize that we are ultimately responsible for our own deception and condemnation, when we embrace lies and reject the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, we have no one to blame but ourselves when we stand upon religious foundations that are unbiblical.

Here in our text, we find that God gives people over to a strong delusion because they take pleasure in unrighteousness and do not desire to receive the truth. And so, while those who maliciously deceive people into going astray will indeed bear a greater judgment for that, those who are themselves deceived, still bear their guilt for being deceived, because they yet willingly reject God's truth. Paul alludes to this idea in Romans 1 as well, when he states that the whole world is guilty before, and under the judgment of God, because although the truth of God is hardwired into us, we suppress that truth in unrighteousness. In other words, our rejection of the truth is willful, regardless of the deception that plays into that.

And so, friends, you may be given all kinds of assurance from many false teachers, but at the end of the day, you are responsible for believing and responding to what God teaches in His Word. His Word is the ultimate authority and we are responsible for what we do with it. If your confidence and hope are in your baptism, your taking communion, your confirmation, your church attendance, your tithing or in any man-made traditions, you have to understand that you're resting your soul on quicksand! And, in the end, you cannot point the finger at anyone else but yourself, when you stand guilty before God, for rejecting His appointed means of salvation.

And so, in conclusion, hear this friends. Understand this. Process this. There is only one place of safety, and that is in Jesus Christ! He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no one comes to the Father but through Him. If you are trusting in anything or anyone else, and if you are holding onto any sin, unwilling to repent and turn to Christ, then you must understand that you will bear the full brunt of your guilt, if you die in your sin.

Amen!!!

The Lord's Supper!