

BIG EVENTS CALL FOR SOBER THINKING

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

It is worrying how easily believers are thrown off course (v2). Churches in the US have been stirred up over the last couple of years because of the appearance of a number of so-called 'Blood Moons', that are thought to have prophetic significance. People in churches get easily carried away. The recipients of Paul's letter were in the same category. They had forgotten things that Paul had taught them (v5). Yet in these verses we see that there are two big events that we are to keep before us.

1. The biggest event.

The biggest event is the coming of our Lord (v1). It is the Day of the Lord (v2) or 'that day' (v3). Furthermore it talks of the appearance of His coming (v8). This coming of our Lord is decisive and never to be repeated. He comes, but does not then go away again, or suffer some defeat. He destroys all who oppose Him (1: 7-10). It will be an unmissable event though Scripture is clear that we should not try to predict the time of it (Matthew 24:36). Yet it is only going to happen once the lawless one has come, the second big event.

None of this should be a source of fear to the believer. We are not required to acquire some special knowledge to be able to learn some complicated formula so that we will be on the right side when the Lord returns. We are not about to make some fatal mistake that shuts us out of the blessing. There are all kinds of strange ideas abounding about the vaccine and whether it is disobeying God to take it. People like to invent new ideas that they then put people under pressure to believe. We are told to be on our guard and not to believe all the claims that are made (Matthew 24: 4-5; 23).

Yet one day, punctuating what begins as an ordinary enough day, great supernatural happenings will break out in our known world. It will be the end of the world, and the beginning of the new. As such, it is not a source of fear to us but of hope and joy. While the events will be spectacular (Matthew 24:29), behind them all is a Person, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is wonderful and most excellent. His coming will be a day of total victory for Him as He will easily destroy the lawless one, who will appear more pathetic than powerful. We will be gathered to Him (v1; also 1 Thessalonians 4: 16-18). For the believer, the Lord will not be a figure generating fear in us, but wonder and amazement. The powers of darkness and all evil doers will be no match for Him (see 2 Peter 3: 9-10;

Revelation 20: 9-10, 15; and 21:8). There will be no context and there will be no rival to Him.

Sober thinking about the Second Coming means that we should be more absorbed in thinking about this great Person, getting taken up in what His First Coming meant. It should kindle in us faith in what He accomplished then. He prevailed on earth then, and will prevail again when He returns.

2. But someone else has to come first.

Before our Lord's return, there has to be the appearance of the lawless one (v8) or man of sin (v3). He is the son of perdition (v3), destined for destruction. This knowledge is not given to us for idle speculation nor to terrify us. His appearance is the prelude to the Lord's return. So we need to be alert and ready, thinking soberly. It is unavoidable that this figure should appear. And he is a single person, rather than a system of thought or government. He is against the law of God, is self-appointed and claims to be God Himself, a Saviour for the world. He is very blasphemous, arrogant and cruel. He will oppose the true church and stand with the false church in persecuting true believers. The world our Lord will therefore return to is not a happy world but one full of opposition, unbelief and immorality. We see this in Luke 17: 26-30. People will, in some senses, just be getting on with life, but it will be an immoral, godless, Christ-less world.

We learn that he does not appear until the time that the Lord has appointed. He is 'restrained' (v6) and when that restraint is 'removed' (v7), then he will be revealed (v8). Perhaps the best way to understand that restraint is to think of law and order, the restraint of family life. It may be a time that has witnessed a collapse of moral and intellectual life. Immorality may have been made very acceptable so that this is the 'new normal'. People may be very accepting of the claims of the lawless one. But behind him is actually the working of Satan (v9). He will work false signs and wonders, and practice wicked deception (v10).

It is not difficult to see today how much in the church revolves around false signs and wonders. The Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements have played host to a range of weird experiences. These are claimed to be the work of the Holy Spirit but are actually the products more of hysteria and hypnosis. We are therefore to be very sober thinkers, not carried away ourselves by these things. Instead we should look to be built up in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should be more and more acquainted with the whole armour of God, such as faith, the Word of God, righteousness and truth.