

Hope or Fear?

Living in Light of His Return (2 Thess. 2:1-12)

Introduction

- I served as a part-time youth pastor while in seminary. One of our adult youth leaders had a sister who worked in an inner-city mission, so we took our students to serve at the mission on a regular basis with our church van. One of those trips stands out to me, not because of who was in the van, but because of who wasn't in the van. We gathered like usual & everyone was encouraged to use the bathroom ahead of our 30-minute drive. I took a headcount & then loaded everyone up. Something didn't look right to me in the rearview mirror, so I asked everyone to count off again. This time I realized we'd left 1 of our students behind, so we turned around to get him.
- There's nothing quit as upsetting as thinking you've missed the bus.
- The Apostle Paul addressed part 2 Thessalonians to those in the church who thought they had "missed the bus" on Christ's second coming.
 - It's clear from ch. 5 v. 5, that Paul had included some instruction about the end times in his brief discipleship with the believers there.
 - According to v. 2, someone had convinced some of the believers that Jesus had already come back again and they had missed it.
 - This misunderstanding caused significant stress in the church. (Read passage)
- Conversations around end times, bible prophecy, and eschatology can provoke strong emotions and far too often those emotions are negative.
 - I remember hearing about Christ's return in high school. I was a little excited, but mostly I dreaded it – I had too many things I wanted to do first.
 - Various views of the end times have been embraced throughout church history.
 - During times of war & persecution – the view has been more urgent.
 - During times of peace & prosperity – the view has been more long-range.
- No matter the situation or the season, **God's plan for the future should be a source of hope, not a reason for fear.**
 - God's Word is lifechanging & practical, so I preach it from that angle.
 - I don't just give you some information about the end times, I want to have hope and to help you be faithful in your walk with Christ.
 - And if you don't know Christ yet, I want you to see why it's important to trust Him before it's too late.
- So, how do we find hope in God's plans for the future?

Body

I. Evaluate everything with Scripture (v. 1-2)

- A. Paul mentions 3 possible ways that this error invaded the church.
 1. "A spirit" or prophetic utterance: He had already warned them about this.
 2. "A spoken word" or a sermon: False teachers were common.
 3. "A (false) letter claiming to be from Paul: this was also a possibility.
- B. The story of the church in Thessalonica is sometimes connected to their nearest Macedonian neighbors, the Bereans. (Acts 17:10-11)
 1. They "examined the Scriptures" to see how they matched up.

2. That means they studied & analyzed what they knew & compared it.
- C. We live in a world today with unprecedented access to gospel truth.
 1. Books, T.V., articles, podcasts, the socials – even our service livestream!
 2. These can also be outlets for false teaching/error if we don't "examine"

II. Keep the focus on Jesus Christ. (v. 3-8)

- A. Paul lists 3 events that will happen closely together before Christ's return.
 1. The "rebellion" will come. (v. 3)
 - a. The *apastacia* could be political, but here's it's probably religious.
 - b. This matches the warning in 1 Tim. 4:1: "fall away from faith."
 2. The "restrainer" will be removed. (v. 6-7)
 - a. Paul uses impersonal & personal terms to describe this.
 - b. Various guesses include God Himself, the HS, & the gospel.
 3. The "man of lawlessness" will be revealed. (v. 4, 6-8)
 - a. He is the final Antichrist from 1 Jo. 2 & the Beast from Rev. 13.
 - b. His identity is obscure, but his approach is clear – claim to be God.
- B. These 3 events will lead up to the climactic coming of Christ.
 1. He will destroy the Antichrist & Satan once and for all.
 2. He will usher in the 1,000-year reign and the new heavens & new earth.
- C. C.S. Lewis was open about the parallels between his *Chronicles of Narnia* & the biblical narrative. There's moment in the final battle in *The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe* where Peter is being overcome by the White Witch when Aslan appears. All eyes are on him as he destroys the witch once & for all.

III. Believe the truth. (11-12)

- A. Paul closes out with more details on the activities of the "lawless one."
 1. He will pretend to be God and welcome false worship.
 2. He will work closely with Satan, the Father of lies. (Jo. 8:44)
 3. He will perform all kinds of false signs and wonders. (Pharaoh's magicians)
 4. He will deceive the deceivable, who are hardened to the truth.
- B. How do we believe the truth of Bible & the message of the gospel?
 1. We use our reason and logic to look at the evidence.
 2. We test them in reality and see how they hold up in real life.
 3. We receive the work of God & step out on faith.
- C. It in *Jeopardy*, the question to every answer of the board of life is "What is belief?"

Conclusion

- God hasn't chosen to reveal every detail of His plans for the future, but they are secure. **His plans for the future should be a source of hope, not a reason for fear.** You can grab a hold of that hope if you'll take these 3 steps.
- As I said, I wanted you to see why it's important to trust Christ right now.
 - Scripture is full of verses predicting His sudden & unexpected return.
 - There are some signs that will precede it, but it's not as clear as we want.
 - Imagine you are standing in the ocean as a storm begins and the waves crash into the shore. You brace yourself against their force, but you never know when the next wave, the "last wave" will sweep you off your feet.