

Topic	Standing Firm in the Midst of Anxiety
Reference	2-Thessalonians 2
Date	19 November 2017
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We do not have the full picture of the everything which is explained here because in this text in itself Paul says, *remember all the things that I have taught you before*. So merely what he is doing in this letter, he is trying to remind people of what he has actually previously taught them. We don't have that teaching. It is something that he did personally with them. There are three questions that I want to highlight today.

1. What are you anxious about?

There are many things first to be anxious about. Many of us are anxious about what tomorrow will bring in terms of our financial situation, the future of our children, anxious about being lonely. The Thessalonians were anxious as well. It says here in the text,

1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed,

They were alarmed, they were shaken in mind. They were worried that they are in this period of time suddenly where the Lord would have already come, so they are thinking they are already in this last stage of the end times. They were worried that Jesus has come and they have may missed the boat. This is a church that is going through great suffering and trial and tribulations, we know this from chapter 1. In chapter 1 it says, that Paul gives thanks for them for the fact that they were growing abundantly and that they are being steadfast in having faith in the persecutions and afflictions that they are enduring. So this is a church that is going through persecution and is being steadfast. So it was a church that has trails and sufferings and a church that is confused about which time they are in. Now because of their suffering and the persecution that is coming against them, they thought maybe we are at this final last stage. Ultimately what they really afraid about is their salvation, that they missed the boat. Were they left behind? Previously in 1-Thessalonians chapter 5, it says that Jesus might come like a thief in a night.

We might be anxious about some other thing, there might be sin in our lives and we might be anxious about it. Some of us may have not made the decision to follow Jesus yet. We feel dirty, we feel we are not clean, there is too much blood in our hands and Jesus can't wash us clean and we are anxious. It says in the text there has been teachings, may be a letter written by Paul, a letter written which falsely was signed by Paul, giving confusion to them that adds into their

anxiety. Imagine you are really anxious about something and then somebody adds false news on top of it that confirms it. It gets worse in our life.

2. What do you believe?

The Thessalonians were believing that false news that was coming in, so Paul had to teach. He had to correct the news that was going around. Maybe they were misunderstanding his previous letter and that emphasize with this prophecy or this false word, he had to re-teach. He had to teach two things. The two things will happen before the day of the Lord will come.

We are living in this time called the already and not yet. This is period of time in between that Jesus has come and redemption has happened through Jesus Christ on the cross, but he has not come back yet to consume the kingdom. There are many teachings in scripture and many different theologies and many different people have different opinions on how this future will happen. Now we are not going to go into all these kind of theologies today, but this church was particularly thinking that they in the last days or Jesus have already arrived and they have missed the boat. What Paul is trying to teach them, relax there are couple of things that need to happen first before the final days here.

3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

The rebellion is not specifically identified here in the text but from other teaching in Mathew 24 we read, then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another and many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. So this rebellion is kind of like a time where many people will fall away. There will be lot of betrayal. People will hate one another. Many false prophets will come around, it would be very intense period of time for Christians, that's the rebellion. That's the first thing that needs to happen. The second thing that needs to happen is that the man of lawlessness will be revealed. Who is that man?

He is not Satan. He is somebody who works under the power of Satan. So he is Satan's man on earth, fully revealed. So there is going to come this time and we also know him as the antichrist. What he will do is that he will oppose and exalt himself against every so called god or object of worship. So that he takes a seed from the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

The second thing that needs to happen, is that this person who will come and he will oppose and exalt himself against every God and ultimately the one and Only God and he will do that in great splendor. He will give glory to his name. He will try to proclaim himself as God and he will try to do things that only God can do. So throughout history, people have tried to identify who is this person that Paul is talking about. Has this person come already? Has he revealed himself already and there are many characters in history who might fit such a description.

A very famous character is Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He was a Greek king. He is somebody who went greatly against the Jews. It was about 175 BC when he was reigning. He made Jewish priest fight in the arenas. He forbids the teaching and ultimately he put a statue, an idol of himself in the middle of the Jerusalem temple and sacrificed a pig on the altar. Of course, this was completely not kosher and against their religion, wanting to be worshipped, somebody who greatly opposed the Jews. Out of this came the Maccabean Revolt, in which they fought him, the overcoming of that is celebrated today with Hanukkah for the Jewish people.

Even though this person fits the description, it cannot be him for couple of reasons, because this happened before Paul was writing it. May be Paul was referring to Caligula. He was a Roman Emperor, who was reigning about 10 years before this letter was written. He again said that he made himself a God. It was Roman practice that sometimes after a Roman Emperor die that they would make him divine, make him a god and worship him like a god. Caligula made him god while he was still alive. He asked everybody to worship him like a god. But it cannot be him because he also died and he ruled 10 years before this was written as well.

So may be what Paul is talking about is the destruction of the Jewish temple, which happened in AD70. Many people think that it couldn't be that, because Paul so often uses the language of temple to mean the church. So it may be somebody who sets himself in the middle of the church. May be it is the Medieval Roman Catholic Church. The reformers definitely thought it was, they thought the Pope is the antichrist, because they saw him doing things that only God could do. To give forgiveness of sins through the payment of indulgences. May be it was an earlier pope. Maybe it was Adolf Hitler, somebody who tried to create a new humanity and said I will rule for 1000 years and so history goes on and there are many people who fit that kind of category.

We try to make sense and we try to figure out, who is this man of lawlessness and who will he be, but I think there is this part of scripture that really helps us to understand the spirit of this text and it says in 1 John 2:18

Children, it is the last hour and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that is the last hour.

So John here in this text is not saying that there won't be a final antichrist. There will be a final antichrist and he will be coming, but in the light of him coming, there are also many antichrists that have come already. So in our text it says that the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. there are many antichrists which are going to come. In Revelation 13, it talks about the antichrist, the beast being slain and the beast having a fatal wound and then the beast is alive again. It is this imagery of receiving a fatal wound and when you receive a fatal wound, you usually die, but then it is healed again. So it is this imagery of the antichrist dying but then coming again, kind of what he is saying there is this antichrist coming, but there are many antichrists, the lawless one is coming but lawlessness is already at work. So instead of getting

stuck with the details, let us look what the principle of this text is saying and it is saying two things.

First thing is yes, Jesus might come back any day. He might come like a thief in the night, but there might be also a period of time in which we have to wait. There are certain events that might have to take place first. So that period of time might be tomorrow, it might be a long time. Certain things need to happen first. I think the best way to explain this is looking at the parable of the 10 virgins, in which five are wise five are foolish. They are invited to the party. All 10 of them got lamps and all 10 of them go to the bridegroom's house and they are waiting for the party to arrive. The wise have extra oil with them, the foolish don't.

This story tells that everyone was ready, but only the wise had extra oil. The wise were ready to wait for long time, they were prepared for the wait, the foolish ones weren't. So yes we have to be ready at any time but we also have to be ready to wait for some time. In this time the question is, what are we believing. Because in this time the lawlessness is going to be already at work. There is going to be many false teachers and more false prophets that are going to arrive, many antichrists will come. Some of them will go directly against Christians and some of them will come as false teachers. We have both pictures in the scripture. In this particular passage, we are talking about false teaching that has to do with end time theology. In theological terms, what this teaching is about is, is about an over-realized eschatology. It is talking about believing about things which are for the future, believing that they are already available now. A very prominent over-realized eschatology is the prosperity gospel. It is believing what the Bible says is for heaven, is actually for us available here. When the Bible talks about complete full healing for eternity, all the riches that we will share with Christ, all this language is for heaven, promises that we will have eventually, guaranteed for us in the glory, believing that it is available for us today. It is a similar kind of false teaching that comes from the same kind of false theology. I am not saying that there are no blessings or healing today, I am not saying that God cannot provide for you today, but the guarantee that He will do so is in heaven, not necessarily for us here today.

So there are many false teaching which are coming and the question is, what are we believing in right now. The real hard part of this passage is

9 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so to be saved. 11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

There seems to this language here of saying, God sends delusions, so that people may not believe. You might be a skeptic saying, how can I believe in a good God who sends delusions to

people. Isn't God supposed to draw everybody to the truth. The text says, *and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.*

So first there are people who are hearing the truth, but they refuse to believe. So it is on our side a danger of willing participation in the deception that we are willing to participate in the deception and willing to believe the truth. We are not willing to believe the truth, but we wanting to believe lies and therefore God sends delusion as a reaction. So in one sense this text is saying this that if we are confronted with the truth continuously, one thing that the truth will do, it will condemn eventually. If you are hearing the truth over and over again and you choose not to believe the truth, eventually God will say, fine you want to believe lies I let you go and believe your lies.

In John 8:45 Jesus says this, **because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.**

Something that truth does is that it divides. It divides those people who want to believe and those people who do not want to believe. The truth does two things, it either hardens our hearts or it softens our hearts and this text is telling us that eventually as we are coming and not believing the truth, eventually there is going to be time when our hearts are so hardened that God is going to say fine, believe your lies. So what are we believing in. There might be some of us here who have been continuously pursued by God, but you choose not to believe. The day of salvation is today, we should believe now. One day we might not have the opportunity anymore. One day we will just continue believing our lies.

3. What are you holding on to?

Of course in the church there was much anxiety. People were not sure, whether they are saved or they are not saved. There was false teaching coming in and in the midst of this, the question is what are you holding onto and I think this text primarily is talking to Christians here.

13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

So he is talking about people, who believe in the truth. But when we are feeling anxious, when we are uncertain, when we feel deceived, when we do not know what to believe what are the things that we are holding onto. It says, he hold onto this. If you are somebody who confesses his faith in Jesus God has chosen you to be his child, that he has adopted you into his family, hold onto that truth. God choose you and he did a work in your heart, to give you a new heart, so that you can believe the truth. It's God working in your life and he has chosen you before the foundations of the earth. So when you are anxious, hold onto that truth, God has chosen you and God is keeping you. It says here, through the sanctification by the spirit that God is doing the work in us by the Spirit. The same grace that choose you, sanctifies you, sees you through.

14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So if you are worried, am I going to be left behind, am I going to be condemned, am I really going to make it, am I going to persevere through, am I really saved or am I going to be forsaken. Know this, on the cross Jesus cried out. He says, “O God, O God, why have you forsaken me.” He was forsaken so that we might not be forsaken. The work is finished, it is done. He will not forsake you. There is no condemnation coming upon you now. Nothing can separate you from his love. This needs to be established in our hearts. This is the truth that we need to hang on to in the midst of our anxieties, in the midst of our troubles and is not just the truth that will work for the temporary, it is the truth that you need to hold on to not just for this momentary sin or anxiety, no, this is a truth that will give you comfort through eternity. It is an eternal comfort.

15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace,

Hope that we will share in Christ glory, a certainty. A Christian hope is a certainty of being with Christ at the end and that has achieved to us not by our works but by our strength but through grace. The same grace that called you, that choose you, that is making you look more like Christ, is the same grace that will give you internal comfort and deliver you in to glory. This is what we stand firm on, the good news of Jesus Christ that He will not forsake us, but that he will be with us always if we choose to believe in him.