

2Thessalonians 12-09-28a

This is Friday, the 28th of September, 2012. We're in the Book of 2 Thessalonians, and we resume tonight in the section we are spending some time on, which is verses 3 through 12. We'll take a moment at the outset to go to the Lord in prayer, dedicate our time and our concentration to Him, and cultivate the active ministry of God's Holy Spirit for the delivery and the reception of the things we look at tonight.

Shall we pray? Father, it is exciting to devote our attention to a portion of your Word that directly informs us about things that are soon to come, about the return of the Lord Jesus, about our expectation and the fate of those who will remain here on this earth. We thank you for the confidence and the comfort and the peace that comes to our souls when we recognize that you have all things firmly in your control, that despite the activities and the intentions and the motivations and the schemes of those who oppose you, that you have found a way to work these things together for good, and particularly for our good. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we have all things and through whom we receive all our blessings.

We thank you for sending Him. We thank you for expressing your love to us and manifesting it in His person and in His work. And we ask that as we study your Word this evening, that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts.

May each one find pertinent and meaningful application in the things that we look at this evening. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's just read this section once again so that we have it firmly in mind. You know the church to whom it is written. You know their situation in terms of having difficulties in their environment, their culture, their society, their peers, their neighbors are actively persecuting them because of their Christian faith.

Not because they're in a different political party, not because they have a different view on some social issue, but because they are no longer interested in pursuing worship at the synagogue, they want to worship the Lord Jesus. There has been a new revelation of truth, and they're hungry for truth. They have seized upon it, they have placed their faith in it, and because of this they have entered a whole new level of experience.

God has allowed this testing to come into their lives. Think about it. Among many other things, if it weren't for that circumstance, you and I would not have this letter.

Those Thessalonian believers had no concept that nearly 2,000 years after the fact, Christians, their fellow believers in Jesus Christ, would be blessed because they were faithfully enduring a persecution. Can you imagine somebody 2,000 years from now benefiting because you are faithfully enduring a persecution? It's just beyond our comprehension. We have no thought for that.

They had no idea that the New Testament was being built or that God was writing inspired scripture and that there would be literally hundreds of millions of believers who would come to the pages of the letter that they received in their time of need, and that the comfort that Paul gave them would spread to the entire Christian world for generation upon generation upon generation. They could not possibly know that. Scripture teaches us that God is using us in ways that are well beyond our comprehension or our knowledge, and it is required of us to be faithful.

We don't know why things happen to us. These Thessalonians didn't know why they were being persecuted, but look at what God has done with their situation. Unimaginable to them, easily imaginable to God.

The same is true with you and me, and we commit ourselves to the hands of a faithful creator. We commit ourselves to our God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we're confident that He knows what He's doing. And this is one of the great initial thoughts and applications of this.

So as Paul is writing this letter to these people in their particular day and time, we come to the second chapter, and he says, Now brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, this is the header, the topic announcement, We ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Don't misunderstand your trials. Now this could never be suggested.

It wouldn't have any traction if they weren't in difficulties, right? If Paul had come and suddenly everybody's business was prospering and their families were growing and their health was exemplary and they were just walking through flowery fields of trees heavy laden with fruit and everything is just all wonderful, and somebody said, Oh, you know, the day of the Lord has come. They'd say, What? Why does this have any traction at all? Why do they believe it? Because they're having a really hard time. And Paul told them when he was there that in the latter days perilous times would come, right? So they think, Well, maybe, and there are people who are twisting this truth and saying, You know what? You're already in trouble.

And some of them are these Judaizers. They're taking these truths and twisting them. They're disturbing them.

They're upsetting them. And Paul says, We beseech you. We plead with you.

Don't let your heart be troubled. Jesus says the same thing in John 14. Let not your heart be troubled.

And by the way, this tells us that worry and excessive concern is within our power to control. There are people that say, Well, I just can't help it. How can you expect me to be calm? God expects us to be calm.

We have the tools. We have the resources. We have the truth to stabilize ourselves in times of

stress.

This is why we have commands that say, Don't let your heart be troubled. Don't let your spirit be troubled. Do not be shaken in mind.

And if it's a command, that means we can do it, right? We're not commanded to do things that are impossible. So we have an obligation. We have a responsibility.

And we have what we need to be stable, to be calm, to be steady when stormy winds are blowing. Do not be soon shaken in mind or troubled by any avenue of communication. And you notice today how easily... Wouldn't it be great if you could just shut off all media? No internet, no TV, no radio.

You could not possibly be disturbed by what's going on in the Middle East, in Washington, in some district court somewhere, by some happenstance, a school shooting or a terrorist attack or whatever it may be. If you didn't know about it, it couldn't disturb your soul and mind. What is it that brings disturbance to us? Communication.

Communication. And this is why Paul names these three kinds. And he says, don't let somebody communicating by any one of these three means shake you up.

Why? Because there is a fourth source. Instead of some spirit or some letter or some communication, given at second or third hand, he says, stick with what you know from the Word of God, the Spirit of God, the Messenger of God that has appeared to you. We hear news from different sources.

You can hear that something's going on and so you go to one network and they pitch it and give certain details. You go to some network that's got a different ideology or stance and they twist it a completely different way. Well, we have a choice of who to believe.

And Paul says, don't start believing things that come from these nefarious sources. Stick with what you know from God. People say, oh, crisis, oh, catastrophe, oh, disaster.

And we say, well, thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee because he trusts in thee, right? We have a choice. We choose whether we're going to be troubled or we're going to be at rest. We choose.

We decide. Don't blame the sources. Don't blame the media.

Don't blame the nefarious bad actors. It's us. We want to be the ones who are keeping our heads while all others are losing theirs.

This is what Paul says. Let no one deceive you. And there's an awful lot of deception going around, an awful lot of exaggeration, of twisting, of partial truths.

It's a message for us. Don't do it. Don't let yourself be destabilized by information purporting to be the truth.

Let no one deceive you by any means. Now, we've got three verses emphasizing this, which is why I've reemphasized it tonight. Then we have what I've translated for you.

No one should deceive you by way of any new course or any turn because except the departure comes first, the leaving a previous standing, that's what apostasia means. Apostasia means something was standing there and now it's not. The military guys were loyal.

Now they've defected. The crew was loyal. Now they're mutinied.

The believers were sticking with the plan. Now they've apostasized. They were standing and now they're not.

It is a departure of some kind. Unless the departure comes first and the lawless one, the lawless man, the man of no law, anomia, no rules, unless he has been revealed, the son of destruction, the one opposing himself and exalting himself against everything named God, everything called God, every object of veneration, everything that people hold in esteem, so as to seat himself in the temple of God, demonstrating that he is God. And you have this constant reference to God.

This is significant. He exalts himself against everything that is named God. That's one.

Or any other object of veneration, anything that would be worshipped as God, so as to seat himself in the temple of God, in the place of residence where God ought to be, demonstrating that he, for practical purposes, is God. I am your God. What does that mean, that he is God? Does anybody seriously think that the creator God of the universe has come down and that this man is him? What is the thought here? If somebody thinks that this is God incarnate, who is the one unique God incarnate? It's Jesus Christ.

If this guy is sitting there instead of Christ, who is he? Antichristos. He is the instead of God. You know that the president of Iran believes he's a Shia Muslim.

Shia Muslim eschatology believes that there's this series of Imams. And there's been 12 of them that have come. The last guy, number 12, came in 800 and some change, Anno Domini.

AD 828 or something like that. He was around and he died. Well, they think he's coming back.

The 12th Imam is coming back. Ayatollah Khomeini believes he's coming back. Hundreds of thousands of Shia Muslims all over the world believe this like you and I believe in the rapture.

I mean, totally dedicated, the guy is coming back. What's interesting is, the prophet, the right-hand man, the hatchet man, for the Mahdi, M-A-H-D-I, the 12th Imam, when he comes back, he's coming back with Jesus Christ. Ahmadinejad mentioned the Lord Jesus two or three times in that

last page of his speech.

Mentioned him outright and it was making an appeal to the international assembled community there to welcome what he called the ultimate savior, the righteous one, with Jesus Christ who will come and establish human dignity and freedom and love and happiness, chicken in every pot, every man his own vine and his own fig tree. You cannot believe, and this is a first. Hear me now.

In the history of recent humanity, nobody has stood in front of the assembled nations of the world and made this kind of pitch for the antichrist. This is our hope. This is our ultimate savior.

Nations of the world unite and welcome him. He's coming with Jesus. It's all going to be good.

By the way, the Shia Muslims believe that Jesus is a Muslim and that he will enforce worship of the Mahdi. You worship or die. You conform or die.

Jesus will get you to worship or Jesus will kill you. When the Mahdi comes back, read the speech. It will raise the hair on the back of your neck.

This guy is in the UN General Assembly making a pitch for people to accept the antichrist. When has this ever happened? Do you know what kind of times we are living in? By the way, also calling for the complete and utter destruction of Israel. How much closer can you get to the eschatology of the Bible than this? It is happening in our time.

Paul says, don't let this kind of stuff rattle you. The day will not come except the departure, the standing away comes first and the man of no law is revealed. Look at Iran.

Look at North Korea. Look at the nature of the cultures that think these guys are okay. There are hordes of people in our country who think, why don't we just leave them alone? It is none of our business what they do over there.

If they want to destroy Israel, we should let them. What is our stake in Israel? All we are doing is wasting a lot of money and time over there. If we get out of there, they could probably resolve that just fine.

I say, let the pajama bod guy launch a nuke. Let them get their situation resolved. We should leave them alone.

Let's all just get along. Wouldn't it be easier if they would just give the Palestinians the land? Get those Jews out of there. They have been troublemakers all through history.

Let's just get rid of them. I think maybe this is a good idea. People in this country, tens of thousands of people in this country, hundreds of thousands of people in this country have that attitude.

Did you notice that no media that I saw picked up on this eye-popping section of that speech? A

few of them mentioned, oh, by the way, he doesn't seem to be too friendly toward Israel. Very watered down, very mild coverage. They were more interested in people not wanting him to speak than in covering what he said when he got there.

It's just stunning. This is the foundation. This is laying the groundwork.

The attitude of receptivity. Somebody can make this kind of pitch to the UN General Assembly and it doesn't raise an eyebrow. This is my suggestion to you.

This is evidence of that mystery of lawlessness that is already at work. He's going to substitute himself. Why do people look to God? What do people want from God? We want deliverance from evil, right? Jesus in the prayer, deliver us from evil.

We want provision. We want protection. We want a calm, long and happy life without care.

Well, if this guy sets himself up as the source of those things, he demonstrates that for all intents and purposes, he is God. When this guy comes in and figures out, when he makes a covenant with the many for a week and solves the conflict in Israel, I personally think if it was going to happen anytime soon, they'll trade. They'll give Israel the Temple Mount and they'll give the Arabs a homeland.

We'll trade you this tiny half acre up here. You guys get the Gaza Strip, you get the West Bank, you get the Golan Heights, whatever. And it'll be a fair trade because there'll be enough in Israel who say, we'll take that Temple Mount.

You get all your guards out of there so that we can build our Temple so that we can worship up there and we don't have to go through your security and put up with your harassment. We don't have to knock our heads down there on the wailing wall anymore. We can go up on the mountain.

Okay, fine. Take the Strip, take the heights, take the bank, give us the mountain. Can you imagine? If a guy can pull that off and everybody's happy, the Arabs say, nah, we didn't want the old Dome of the Rock anyway.

Or I don't know, maybe it falls down. Maybe they keep it and have a little right-of-way there, a little easement. We'll give you one little path up there to your Dome of the Rock, but we get the whole rest of the mountain.

Peace in the Middle East. Stunning. Do you not think people would say, this guy is the Second Coming of Christ? Peace on Earth, goodwill to men.

Proving, demonstrating that He is God. Paul says in verse 5, do you not remember that when I was with you, I said these things to you? And he's saying, you remember the part about perilous times will come, but do you remember these things? This is the rest of what I said. We've got to try to be comprehensive.

We want all of the truth in a passage, not just a part. We want to remember everything that Paul said, not just a part, not a piece, not cherry-picking, not taking things out of context. Vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction.

Okay, now I'm a Calvinist. No, go back and take the whole ninth chapter. Do you not remember these things? In addition to what they're trying to stir you up with, remember these things that I also said when I was with you? And now, and I want to revise slightly the translation I gave you last week, because we need to move a word.

As I've looked at this, I realized the Greek word order, you just get so conditioned to your English. This is the Greek word order in verse 6. And that which now holds back. Our English says, now you know what holds it back.

Like now you know? No. You already know what now holds it back. The now belongs to the holding back, not to the knowing.

You see what I'm saying? And you have known, remember it's a perfect, you have known what is now restraining, what is now holding back. This is going to be important when we come back from the break, because this is one of a trip-stitch, of a triad, of a three-fold manifestation in this paragraph. You know what is now restraining.

With a view toward him to be revealed in his own fitting season. Remember fitting season, Kairos, from last time. For the hidden thing, the mystery of lawlessness, no law, anomia, is already at work.

Energeia. Its energy is working. There is only the restrainer at present, until he, it, becomes out of the way.

Then will be revealed the lawless one, the anomia, the anomos guy, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of his mouth and set aside with the epiphany of his coming. The word translated brightness there is epiphany. And it itself means appearance.

But epiphany is like a really impressive appearance. I just had an epiphany. Something just struck me like a big bolt of lightning.

Well, we are going to pause here and take our break. Let me point out one quick thing though, if you don't mind marking your Bible, here are three dots you can connect. First, start in verse 6. That which now holds back.

That which now holds back. That's one. There is a holding back taking place now.

In verse 7, that which restrains at present. See that? Now holds back that which restrains at present. In verse 8, when that restrainer is taken out of the way, then will be revealed.

Something now holds back. Something restrains at present. But then, you've got a now and an at present.

And you've got a then. Isn't this really the meat of Paul's response to their danger of being troubled? He says, don't be troubled. There's a now, there's an at present, and there's a then.

What separates the now and at present from the then? Go back to verse 3. The departure comes first, then the lawless one is revealed. You see the threefold connection? If there's any doubt, you know, people say, well, you know, he doesn't really identify what restrains. It could be anything.

It's very clear if you connect the dots. The apostasia is the dividing line. The now and at present is before the departure.

And because there has not yet been the departure, there is something that now holds back. And there is something that at present restrains. The apostasia is the removal of the restraint, the standing away of the restraint.

What is the restraint? Obviously it is God the Holy Spirit in the church. It's not just the church. We're too weak and anemic.

We couldn't stop any lawlessness. But we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, right? Take away the temple, take away the spirit. You are God's presence.

God's Shekinah is not in Jerusalem. God's Shekinah is not in the wilderness in the tabernacle. God's Shekinah is in us.

When we go, the Shekinah goes. When we go, the Holy Spirit goes. And that which now restrains, that which at present holds back will be taken away.

Then he will be revealed. He can't get uncovered. He can't get loose until we're gone.

We are that which restrains. And it's not just us being human beings. It's us as the dwelling place of God.

Christ in you. I and my Father will come and make our home. God the Holy Spirit indwelling and filling.

The presence of God on this earth forces lawlessness into a corner and keeps it there. When God leaves, darkness will descend. This man will be revealed.

So it's really very clear. Now, it says in verse 7, for the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Why doesn't it just say lawlessness is already at work? Why does it say mystery? Well, there are 10 mysteries that I have enumerated.

And when we come back from the break, we're going to look at what exactly is a biblical mystery.

What is a New Testament mystery? And we're going to look at these 10 mysteries and see where this one fits into that puzzle. But let's pause here and take our break.