



THE SECOND SUNDAY OF END TIME – LAST JUDGMENT

What Pure Evil Looks Like

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (NIV)

¹ Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. ³ Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? ⁶ And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷ For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, ¹⁰ and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie ¹² and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

We just finished another Halloween. Taking note of the costumes you saw this year, which one personified pure evil? Certainly not the superheroes, the Transformers, the princesses, or the baby sharks, right? But those who dressed up as Pennywise the clown or Freddy or Jason or the zombies with the very detailed gory flesh hanging from them, maybe those did. How about those people who dressed up in the grotesque, red-eyed demon looking costumes? Maybe that is the best representation of how pure evil looks.

We are living in the end times and have been since Jesus' ascension. God has revealed in his Holy Word that there are things yet to take place before the Day of the Lord comes, when Jesus returns to judge the world. So, Christians have always been looking and recognizing the signs of the End. We know it hasn't happened yet because Jesus has not returned in the grand way that he said he would, and life on earth continues on as it did the day before. However, even in the Apostle Paul's day, some 20-30 years after Jesus ascended into heaven, the Thessalonian Christians were unsettled having been fed a report that the Day of the Lord had already come and they somehow missed it. Paul writes this letter to settle their minds and put them at ease in regards to the coming Day of the Lord.

"Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction." (verses 1-3)

The Day of the Lord, Jesus' return to judge us and to end the world, will not take place until two specific signs are fulfilled. One is that the "rebellion occurs." The Greek word translated as "rebellion" is phonetically pronounced "apostasy," meaning, as translated, a rebellion or a falling away. Jesus himself told us that this would happen in the end times - that many would turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other. (Matthew 24:10) We've already seen this. In America, those who claim no religious affiliation is growing. The people of the rebellion are those who actively or passively reject God and refuse to worship him. And God says that that's what evil looks like.

Evil looks like people we know. That's hard to stomach. Evil looks like family members who once believed in God and have since rejected that belief. It looks like friends who dismiss God because he doesn't fit with their worldview, their criteria of evidence and proof. Evil looks like the person I see in the mirror because I have rebelled against God, because I have insisted on sinning instead of fighting it, doing what I set my mind to instead of bowing my head in submission to my God. Evil looks like me. The rebellion is occurring. The end is coming.

This falling away from faith is one sign before the coming of the Day of the Lord. Paul tells us to look for another: the reveal of the man of lawlessness. This is a man of pure evil, but what will he look like? How will we know it's him?

God in his Word describes this man in a couple of ways. Through the prophet Daniel and Jesus himself, this man was described as the "abomination that causes desolation." The Apostle John called him the antichrist - one who puts himself in opposition to Christ and in the place of Christ. This is how the Paul describes him: "[The man of lawlessness] will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God." (verse 4) In

other words, he sets himself up in the church. He's not going to look like the red jumpsuit caricature of the devil with his horns and a pitchfork or that red eyed grotesque demon costume you saw last week. He is going to look like a Christian, like a devout, pious man, who is set up within the church but then exalts himself over it, claiming that when he speaks, he is speaking for God. His words, however, teach things that God never revealed to us, things that run contrary to his revealed Word. "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing." (verses 9-10a)

This is unsettling, isn't it? Alarming even. Pure evil isn't what artists have depicted. Pure evil looks very religious and very godly. Pure evil wants to look that way so that it can trick us into following it instead of God, being a part of that rebellion that refuses to love the truth, refusing to love God. How will I know this man? How will he be revealed? What if I missed that revelation? So many other things in the Bible have come and God has revealed the fulfillment of these things in his Word. But this guy, the antichrist, how can I be sure who that is? God has not come back and told me exactly who this man of lawlessness is.

It's unsettling that many people will follow this man of lawlessness, the antichrist. Who, then, do I trust? How do I know that I can trust them? Have I already been duped? Am I under the influence of this powerful delusion? Do I believe lies? Will I be condemned? Will I perish? Will God even help me in this?

What's maybe even more unsettling is that there's not just this one antichrist. There is one man of lawlessness, one entity that will be revealed, but an antichrist is anything that is set up in opposition to God or anyone who exalts themselves over God. Do I ever exalt myself above God? Do I ever say that I know better than God as I rebel against his Word and do what I want regardless of his revealed Word? Do I set myself up in place of God, higher than God? Am I an antichrist? Am I what pure evil looks like?

It's unsettling that God reveals things that are happening to us right now and we don't have the benefit of hindsight to see exactly how his Word is fulfilled as it is being fulfilled before us. But that's why Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonian Christians. He told them what to look for. Look for someone who sets himself up in God's temple, within the church. This person is going to look holy, righteous, like a Christian but is not. Look for someone whose power has been at work since Paul's day (verse 7) and is still at work today. Look for someone who claims to speak for God yet reveals things that are contrary to his revealed Word. Look for someone who adds to and subtracts from God's Word. Look for someone who tells you salvation, rescue from this world of sin, is found elsewhere than in Christ alone. Look for someone who tells you that there is more that you have to do in order to be rescued from sin and eternal damnation than to believe that Christ is the atoning sacrifice for your sins received by God-given faith to declare you "not guilty" on your judgment day. God has already given you the tool to reveal this man of lawlessness: his Word.

When we cling to God's Word, we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. God will not send us a delusion to trick us into believing these lies of Satan coming through the man of lawlessness. No, because God has caused us to believe his Word. He has caused us to love the truth. He has caused us to be saved. Forgive me, Lord, when I have elevated myself to your place, when I have rebelled against your truth. Place me back into your kingdom as your son, your daughter, through faith in Christ - my one and only source of salvation and forgiveness.

What's more is that God has already declared and revealed the man of lawlessness' fate: he is "doomed to destruction." (verse 3) With nothing more than the breath of his mouth our Lord Jesus will overthrow this man. His seemingly great power topples as easily as a house of cards. Not only will Jesus overthrow this antichrist, but he will then destroy him by the splendor of his coming. The antichrist will not prevail over God, and so he will not prevail in our world or in our lives. Pure evil does not stand a chance before God, no matter what it looks like.

Until then, Paul says, God is holding this man of lawlessness back and "will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way." (verses 6-7) The antichrist does not have free reign. Yes, he lies to us. He will produce all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, but those who love the truth of God will not be led astray by that. Why? Because God is the one guiding and leading you with the truth away from these lies. He is leading us to eternal salvation, dwelling with him forever in heaven. This is the importance of clinging to God's Word.

We live in the end times. The man of lawlessness is at work right now. People are believing his lies. They are falling away, perishing because they love the lie instead of truth, God's revealed Word. But God has chosen you to be saved through belief in the truth, belief in his Word, the Bible. He has called you through the gospel – the good news of Christ's victory over sin and his inevitable and irresistible victory over the man of lawlessness. Jesus will destroy pure evil, no matter what it looks like. Let nothing unsettle you or alarm you as we wait the return of our Lord in judgment of the man of lawlessness. Amen.