THE REVELATION OF THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

Key Verse: 2:8

“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming.”

Thank God for the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven to bring an end to all unrighteousness and evilness of men and to set up his righteous kingdom on earth. What a grace it is that he called us to be saved and live with the Lord in the hope of his coming and his eternal kingdom. May we open our eyes more and more to see our Lord Jesus and live a life that is worthy of his calling and, by his power, fulfills every good purpose and every act of faith for the name of our Lord Jesus. In today’s passage, there is another revelation, the revelation of the man of lawlessness with the description of the person, the time of his coming, his destiny and his work. And Paul enjoins the believers to stand firm.

**First, the man of lawlessness (1-12).** Paul says in verses 1 and 2, “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.” Concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus and our being gathered to him is definitely the Lord’s coming to snatch his bride out of the world written in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, “After that, we who are alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” However, apparently they were easily unsettled or alarmed, in other translations, quickly shaken in mind or troubled, by a certain false teaching that the day of the Lord has already come.” The teaching was by prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us”, or in ESV, “by a spirit, or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us.” Probably some false teachers claimed that their teaching was a clear word from the Spirit and another Pauline letter. Anyway, the Thessalonian believers were confused, probably thinking that they missed the wonderful time of meeting the Lord in the air, the time of being snatched by the Lord, called “rapture.” In 1 Thessalonians, after talking about the Lord’s snatching the church, his bride, in chapter 4, Paul mentioned the day of the Lord in chapter 5, saying, “for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape” (5:2-3). Here, Paul clearly says in verse 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.

Here, the rebellion is in Greek *apostasia*, which is in English apostacy. In history, there have been many rebellions and apostacies, but this is the rebellion, the apostacy. “Apostacy” means abandonment of one’s belief. Jesus said in Matthew 24:9-10, “…you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith…” The apostacy happens when the man of lawlessness is revealed.

Here Paul clearly mentions the man of lawlessness. Here, “lawlessness” is in Greek *anomia*, meaning lawlessness, iniquity, sin. The man of lawlessness is the “man of sin” in KJV, and also called the son of destruction or the son of perdition. He is doomed to destruction. He belonged to destruction by nature as the son. He belongs to perdition and eternal torment in hell.

John says in 1 John 2:18, “Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrist have come.” So the man of lawlessness is the Antichrist, the final antichrist while there have been many antichrists. In John’s term, the man of lawlessness is the Antichrist. According to Daniel 7:8, he is described as a little horn, who rises from obscurity and becomes a dominant power. This is a little, insignificant horn who eventually rises to global power. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man, which indicates his intelligence, and had a mouth that spoke boastfully, which indicates both his oratorical skills and his arrogance. In Daniel 8:23, he is portrayed as a stern-faced king, a man of intrigue, and 11:36 as the king who will do as he pleases. In Revelation 13, John saw a beast coming out of the sea, which had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The dragon that is Satan gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority (13:1-2). So this man of lawlessness, the Antichrist, is full of Satanic power, like Satan Incarnate.

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) could be a prime example of the coming Antichrist who will be Satan-filled. Those close to him said that when he spoke openly and in public, he had a completely different voice than his normal voice, because demons were speaking through him. Hitler was possessed by forces beyond himself, demonic forces, and he was only the temporary vehicle of such forces. A little more obscure and ancient illustration of this is Antiochus IV Epiphanes who was Seleucid king of the Hellenistic Syrian kingdom, reigning from 175 to 164 BC. He resolved to eliminate the Jews from the earth. Bated Jerusalem, killed thousands of Jews, sold others into slavery. A circumcision of a child was punishable by death. He erected an altar to Zeus in the Jewish temple, offered pigs’ flesh on that altar, turned the temple into a brothel, did everything he could to desecrate it; deliberate effort, a cold-blooded effort to wipe out Jewish religion, Jewish people, and destroy the worship of the true God. He also was Satan’s man. But far worse than Antiochus, far worse than Hitler will be the final Antichrist. This final Antichrist will be a culmination of all those who hate God and hate Christ, all false Christs, false teachers, false prophets, all hypocritical liars who claim to be spokesmen for God but speak for Satan. He is the final epitome of all that has been set against God and against Christ throughout all of human history.

Here in 2 Thessalonians, Paul says in 2:4, “He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.” What the man of lawlessness does is directly against God, putting himself in the place of God to be worshiped. It is written in Daniel 9:27, “He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.” And Jesus said in Matthew 24:15, “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—.”

Then Paul continues in 2 Thessalonians, 2:5-6, “Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time.” No one can hold him back who is completely in the control of Satan but God himself. When we read Job, Satan works in the compass God allows. Specifically, God the Holy Spirit holds him back. It is the restraining work of the Holy Spirit. It is so that the man of lawlessness may be revealed at the proper time. Galatians 4:4 says, “When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law.” As God ordained a time for his Son, the incarnate Son of God to come, so God has ordained a time for the appearing of the man in whom Satan lives. His appearing is set by God’s plan.

Then Paul says in verse 7, “For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so until he is taken out of the way.” We remember that John said in 1 John 4:3, “every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.” And we know that still the world is maintained in order because of God’s control. Then there will be a time when the restraining work of the Holy Spirit to hold back the power of lawlessness is no more. In that situation the man of lawless will work rampantly. This is the reason Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “…now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation.”

Subsequently, Paul says in verse 8, “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy the splendor of his coming.” It is very interesting that the lawless one being revealed and the Lord Jesus’ overthrowing him are written together in this one verse. The end of the lawless man is when Jesus shows up. This is his visible encounter with the glorious Lord Jesus. What an encounter, between the man of lawlessness and the one who is the very embodiment of God’s law, between the Antichrist and the Christ, and between Satan Incarnate and God Incarnate, now the glorious Lord. The glorious Lord Jesus will paralyze the daring presumption and arrogant activity of this lawless one. This is so powerful a reality. Isaiah 11:4 says, “He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breadth of his lips he will slay the wicked.” And we read in Revelation 19:11-16, “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war…The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’” What a consistent description concerning the destiny of the lawless one and the victory of the Lord Jesus. Even here in 2 Thessalonians, the man of lawlessness is destroyed just by the splendour of the coming of the Lord Jesus.

In verses 9 and 10, Paul has to say more, “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.” The work of the lawless one is in accordance with the work of Satan, which consists of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders and evil deception. In Revelation 13, we even see the fake resurrection, “One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished/filled with wonder and followed the beast.” (Rev 13:3). And the description draws our attention, “every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.” Who are deceived? They are those who are perishing. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Those who reject the message of the cross, the gospel of Christ are vulnerable to be deceived by the lawless one and perish. “Loving the truth.” What does that mean? It is preferring it above everything else. Loving the truth means you sell everything to buy the treasure in the field in the pearl of great price. Always, loving includes commitment. Those who love the truth are those who have made a commitment to the truth, ready to pay the cost at each time because of the preciousness of the truth, which is priceless and invaluable.”

Paul continues in verses 11 and 12, “For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted wickedness.” Why does God, the God of truth, send a powerful delusion. It is to sift, the sorting out of those who are perishing and those who are being saved.

Why do people believe the lie? Vladimir Lenin said, “A lie told often enough becomes the truth.” Communists tell one lie after another again and again so persistently that the crowd of the people believe the lie as if it is true. When people hear the lie repeatedly, they become accustomed to it. In fact, people usually follow the majority and the trend of the world, which seems to be a convenient way of living. We remember what Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” Loving the truth is entering through the narrow gate and going through the narrow road. Yet is the way to defeat the secret power of the lawlessness and the spirit of the Antichrist in our time.

**Second, stand firm (13-17).** Verse 13 says, “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.” Paul’s mind goes from the end to the beginning, even before the creation of the world before time began, as written in Ephesians 1:4, “He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” Paul’s mind ranges all the way from the horrors of the coming man of lawlessness to the love of God that chose us to be saved, great doctrines of election and salvation. What a grace! The love of God in Christ Jesus is the truth. In his unfathomable love he chose us from the beginning seeing the end time. So his choice for salvation in Christ Jesus is sure and certain. This is truly an eternal encouragement.

God chose us to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When one believes in the truth, the Holy Spirit works for sanctification, separating us from sin and creating in us a new nature to love God and serve him. The author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 10:10, “…we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Paul says in Titus 3:5, “…He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” The sanctifying work, being made holy, the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit all go together. This is being transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God’s dear Son. This is being transferred from being a slave of sin to a slave of righteousness (Romans 6:18). And Paul exclaims in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If anyone is Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Paul continues in verse, “He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The purpose of his calling of salvation is to share the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, which includes his victory over the lawless one, ultimately Satan and his ruling in the kingdom of Christ. We were not destined for judgment, we were destined for glory. We’re not looking for Antichrist, we’re looking for Christ as people chosen for glory. Praise God!

How can we bear this wonderful grace of God? Paul says verses 15, “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.” Paul had said in 1 Thessalonians 3:8, “Now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.” Now he tells them to stand firm holding to the teaching they received. Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 16:13, “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith…” Peter also says in 1 Peter 5:9, “Resist him, standing firm in the faith…” and James says in James 5:8, “…be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.” It will be great to stand firm in the Lord and in the faith to the end, by holding to the words of God, which is definitely related to loving the truth.

Paul’s exaltation is not enough. So Paul prays, “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.” How gracious God our Father is! He loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope. Our hope in Christ Jesus is good and blessed, as also Titus 2:13 says, “…we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.” What a prayer it is, “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word! We need the encouragement of our God and Christ Jesus beyond human encouragement.

At God’s set time the man of lawlessness will be revealed, and his destiny of destruction is also set, the destruction by the majesty of the coming of the Lord Jesus. The secret power of the lawlessness, that spirit of the Antichrist, is at work. However, in God’s choice of salvation in his great love we are not destined for judgment, but for glory in Christ Jesus. May we stand firm in the Lord, in the faith with his eternal encouragement and the blessed, good hope of the coming of our Lord Jesus for his glory, and all the more experience the victory of Christ.