

# ROUTE 66 – 2 THESSALONIANS

Hope That Doesn't Disappoint

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**Note:** The following are the pastor's notes used in preaching this message. This is not a complete, word-for-word transcription of what was preached. These notes serve as a companion to the complete message, which is available by listening to the audio version. Bible quotes are primarily from NASB and ESV, respectively.

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Written within months of 1 Thessalonians – couriers back and forth between Corinth and Thessalonica alerted Paul to the continued growth of the church there – but also brought news of problems: 1) continuing persecution and poverty, probably because of loss of jobs because of persecution; 2) a false letter received under the apostolic authority of Paul's name that said that the day of the Lord had already come (2 Thessalonians 2:2) – this caused them to be “*quickly shaken*” – leads some to think that the main emphasis of the book is prophetic but this must be seen in the context of the overall pastoral tone of the book; 3) relational problems had occurred regarding those who were lazy and wouldn't work – 2 Thessalonians 3 should be seen as additional instruction on church discipline along with Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5

## I. COMFORT FOR THE AFFLICTED

### A. Greeting

### B. Thanks – 2 Thessalonians 1:3

2 Thessalonians 1:3 – “*We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater...*” – they had continued to mature in their faith since the last letter – their love for each other had grown – probably as a result of the persecution they endured

Persecution results in sense of community and love for each other – Americans know little of this

### C. Encouragement – 2 Thessalonians 1:4

2 Thessalonians 1:4 – “*therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.*” – proper sense of pride – telling other churches about the way the Thessalonian church persevered under pressure and grew in their faith

### D. Explanation of God's judgment – 2 Thessalonians 1:5

#### 1. For the believer

Rather than suffering being an indication of abandonment by God, suffering is an indication of God's forming your life so you will be “*worthy of the kingdom of God*” – 2 Thessalonians 1:5, 6 – “*This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you...*”

To give relief – 2 Thessalonians 1:7 – “*and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire...*”

Hope in His return – 2 Thessalonians 1:10 – “*when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.*”

#### 2. For the unbeliever

Ultimate justice – 2 Thessalonians 1:6 – “*For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you...*”

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Retribution – 2 Thessalonians 1:8 – *“dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”* -

Eternal destruction – 2 Thessalonians 1:9 – *“These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power...”*

### **E. Prayer for the church – 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12**

Good indicators for our prayer life – 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 – *“To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

## **II. CORRECTION FOR PROPHETIC ERROR – 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12**

### **A. The problem – 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2**

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 – *“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.”*

Fifth time *“the day of the Lord”* is mentioned in Thessalonian Letters (1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19) – this is not one day – it is a period of time in which God will establish justice and His rule on the earth – seven years of tribulation – 1000 year millennium – the ultimate end of the *“day of the Lord”* is seen in 2 Peter 3:10 – *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”*

Other aspect they were concerned about – *“our gathering together”* – indicates Thessalonian church was pre-tribulation – they were waiting for the rapture – 1 Thessalonians 1:10 indicates they were waiting for the rapture next to rescue them from future persecution – *“and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”* – 1 Thessalonians 5:9 also – *“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...”*

What caused this problem? – 2 Thessalonians 2:2 – *“that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.”* – a letter of some kind had been sent to them as if it was *“from us”* – i.e. – Paul and Timothy – must have indicated that *“the day of the Lord”* had already occurred and they had missed it – i.e. – they had missed the rapture.

The aspect of His particular coming in view here is identified by the next phrase *“our gathering together,”* which conveys the idea of all believers meeting together with the Lord Jesus, obviously referring to the rapture of the church described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and John 14:1–3. Cf. Hebrews 10:25 for the only other use of this phrase in the New Testament. This was the event the Thessalonians were anticipating (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 3:13; 5:9).

2 Thessalonians 2:5 – *“Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?”* – indicates they were shaken by this letter

### **B. The correction – 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12**

People argue over this – but the sequence seems clear

1. Apostasy comes first

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2 Thessalonians 2:3 – *“Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first . . .”*  
– “go away, withdraw, depart, fall away” – it can also refer to some kind of military, political, or religious rebellion  
– apostasy refers to those who claim to be Christians but never were – a true Christian cannot apostatize

The day of the Lord cannot appear until some kind of great spiritual defection occurs – Paul indicates some great act of rebellion which he sees as *“the apostasy”* – probably refers to something the man of lawlessness does

## 2. The “man of lawlessness” is revealed

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 – *“Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.”*

This is not a force or an idea – it is an individual – so powerful and arrogant that he is called *“the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.”* – this is the Antichrist who will be revealed at the midpoint of the seven year tribulation:

- Daniel 9:27 – *“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”* – the focus here is the future of Israel – Antichrist will make a covenant of peace with Israel which he will break *“in the middle of the week”* – mid-point of the seven year tribulation – from that point on he will be emboldened by Satan himself to think that he is indestructible and can literally change time itself – Daniel 7:25 – *“He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.”*
- Daniel 11:36 – *“Then the king will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation is finished, for that which is decreed will be done.”*
- Revelation 13:6 – *“And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.”*

2 Thessalonians 2:8-10 – *“Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.”*

## 3. The “restrainer” taken away

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 – *“And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.”* – what restrains the Antichrist? – some suggest: 1) human government; 2) preaching of the gospel; 3) the binding of Satan; 4) the providence of God; 5) the Jewish state; 6) the church; 7) the Holy Spirit; and 8) Michael – but whatever it is must be supernatural – if the Antichrist is empowered by Satan (Revelation 13) then it must be God’s power that restrains him – this is best seen in the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers who make up the church – when the church leaves in the rapture, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the earth leaves with them – thus the “lawless one” begins to have his way

## 4. A “deluding influence”

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 – *“For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.”* – old song said, “The answer my friend if blowing in the wind” – with no doctrinal mooring people will left blowing

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in the wind and will believe any lie that comes along – God’s purpose is even in this – those who rebel against God will see that He will harden their hearts and give them what they want

5. The “appearance of His coming”

2 Thessalonians 2:8 – God will bring it all to an end “...by the appearance of His coming...” – Second Coming of Christ – not the rapture – Revelation 19:11-21

6. Judgment

2 Thessalonians 2:12 – God will cause all of this to happen “...so that they all may be judged...” – a final judgment seen in Revelation 21:12-15

### C. Assurance for believers – 2 Thessalonians 2:13

These seem like “doctrinal” issues to us – but if you were in the middle of persecution and you might view election as a lifeline – what comfort is there if our salvation depends on our choice – that means you’d better “choose” rightly or you have no assurance of God’s protection during persecution

1. You are chosen – 2 Thessalonians 2:13

2 Thessalonians 2:13 – “*But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.*” – what hope would we have if salvation depended on our choice – under persecution it is a tremendous comfort to know that God not only chose us but will keep us through the persecution

2. Stand firm – 2 Thessalonians 2:15

2 Thessalonians 2:15 – “*So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.*”

3. Prayer for comfort – 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 – “*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.*”

## III. CONCERN FOR THE CHURCH – 2 Thessalonians 3:1-18

### A. Prayer concerns – 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Good example of things to pray for:

- The “...word of the Lord will spread rapidly...”
- Rescue from “...perverse and evil men.” – Tracy in N.Y.
- That God “...the Lord is faithful...”
- God will “...strengthen and protect you from the evil one...”
- Pray for confidence for others to do what Scripture commands
- Pray that God will direct hearts into the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ

### B. Guidance for relationships – 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

1. Those who are unruly – 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7

2 Thessalonians 3:6 – “*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.*” – this isn’t a “suggestion” – Paul issues this as an order that carries full apostolic weight – “*unruly*” is the translation of

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two Greek words – “*ataktos*” – from *tasso* – “arrange, appoint” – it has the sense of being aimless – no arrangement of activities – no appointments to keep – idly “hanging out” – second word is “*peripateo*” – “to walk around” – this person is like the teenagers who “hang out” at the mall or on street corners – idle, nothing to do, nowhere to go – trouble! – they were not living “...*according to the tradition which you received from us...*” – Paul had already taught them in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 – “...*make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.*” – same thing in Ephesians 4:28 – “...*he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.*”

2. Those who won't work – 2 Thessalonians 3:8-12

Paul's example of work – 2 Thessalonians 3:8-9 – “*nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.*”

2 Thessalonians 3:11 – the specific charge – “*For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies.*” – it's possible some had quit work because they thought the Lord was returning soon – ala Harold Camping's teaching in 2012 – Paul wouldn't have any of that

3. The biblical work ethic – 2 Thessalonians 3:13

So much of what is called the “Protestant work ethic” is found in Paul's commands – work is not merely to earn a paycheck – or to simply buy things – 2 Thessalonians 3:12-13 – “*Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.*” – same instruction he gave in 1 Thessalonians 4:12-13 noted above

The application of these verses is free market capitalism – all governments want to regulate and control this – but the most profitable economic systems are those that encourage and reward hard work and allow people to keep their money with welfare handled by the family and church – only extreme cases should be handled by state – when government interferes with work or regulates it by wage controls and infringing on the freedom to control your own work and wages, everyone suffers

Calvin demonstrated this during the Reformation – previous to this all money flowed to the church or the nobility controlled by kings – both thought they had a divine right to rule people – Calvin said “no” – when people “work with their hands” and restrictions of nobility and Roman Catholic Church are removed, they keep their money – things changed! – many refugees who fled to Geneva were craftsmen – villages and cities began to vote on following Roman Catholic or becoming Reformed cities – in 1536 Geneva began to attract both capital and refugees who were craftsmen fleeing Catholic persecution – found they could “*work with their hands*” and keep their money – Basle and Geneva became depositories of capital, and the modern Swiss banking system was born – manual labor was honored as a call from God – new industries cropped up where initiative, creativity, and skill were rewarded – Swiss clocks and watches – publishing industry – paper making and production of type – cloth, drapery, and silk industry flourished – Swiss economic historian Jean-Francois Bergier points out that the three factors essential for modern capitalism were born: 1) influx of investment capital; 2) manufacturing skills and capacity; and 3) distribution network – result – modern banking system established in Geneva – Calvinism was so powerful that everywhere these ideas went, nations prospered – the “Western World” has been largely shaped by Calvinism – nations that were not touched by Calvinism became poverty stricken

Work is noble because it is God's way of supplying for our needs – He could have provided everything for us – but didn't!

**God's plan for work:**

- **Work follows God's pattern**
- **God intends for us to work** – 1) the lazy or sluggard is not honored in Scripture; 2) If you don't work, you don't eat – 2 Thessalonians 3:10 – “*For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if*

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*anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.*” – getting political here – this is also true for banks, mortgage firms, auto industry – wherever government gets involved it brings loss of freedom, corruption, and control – government officials have never signed the front of a paycheck – know little about creativity, initiative, developing skills, hard work, and the bottom line

- **All work is honorable** – Exodus 28, 31, 35 – metal workers, jewelers, garment makers were skilled craftsmen who were called “wise” – Matthew 25 – Jesus honored work in the parable of the talents – Before the Reformation, the doctrine of vocation was reserved for the clergy – Calvin's elevated all areas of lawful work to a level of dignity, worth and value – taught even common labor was done for the Lord – said all watch makers would give an account to God someday for every watch they made.
- **Work reflects God's glory** – Colossians 3:23 – *“Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men...”* – work reflects labor, creativity of skill development, diligence, honesty, providing products to better people's lives
- **Work is to benefit others** – 1 Timothy 6:18-19 – *“Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.”* – always works best in families and churches – when government gets involved – massive welfare fraud today!

### **C. Affirmation of authorship – 2 Thessalonians 3:17-18**

2 Thessalonians 3:17 – *“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write.”* – not because he had bad eyesight – he was stressing this to prove that this letter indeed had apostolic authority – as opposed to the one he referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2:2.