The Mystery Resisted — Delivery Transcript

2 Thessalonians 2:1–13 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, December 12, 2021 · *The Mystery of God*

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If you have your Bibles, you can open them to the book of 2 Thessalonians. We have been as a church working through the book of the Revelation, line by line, verse by verse. That's kind of how we do things around here. But ever since about three weeks ago we pressed the pause button and we've been doing a little miniseries on this phrase called the mystery of God. And it's really about what we just talked about with Advent. It's this idea that the mystery of God will one day be completed, that this tension we feel right now of this already not yet kingdom of God, not yet being what it's supposed to be, but already giving of us a foretaste of what it could be, that will finally be finished when Jesus comes again in the days of the blowing of the seventh trumpet by the seventh angel.

And so we've been looking at this idea of the mystery of God. We started out in the book of Colossians and we got the mystery defined. And if you wanted to define the mystery of God in a word, you could really call it the gospel. It's that good news, as Taylor kind of talked about in his prayer, that Jesus came, he lived a life that we could not live, a sinless life of love and obedience to God the Father. He died the death we should have died, a death of a sinner on a cross, even though he had no sin, he who knew no sin became sin so that we could become the righteousness of God.

He was buried, and three days later God raised him from the dead defeating death, and almost as if God, through a stamp of approval, is saying it has been paid in full, the sin debt has been atoned for, and then about forty days after that Jesus ascended to the right hand of God and is now seated at the right hand of God, ruling and reigning. That's the Christian gospel. That's what we say we believe. That's what the church has been commissioned to display. That is the mystery of God. And so if you're somebody that likes to take notes and

you wanted to review the last couple of weeks, the mystery was revealed through Christ, the hope of glory, Christ in you, not just that Christ lived in history, but that he lives in us today through the Holy Spirit.

It is displayed through the church, that we've been called as believers not just to attend the building, but to display the mystery, to let the gospel transform us from the inside out and to announce not just to brothers and sisters and family members, but to principalities and powers that Christ is king. And then the last thing or the third thing we're going to look at today as we start our message is the mystery resisted by what I'm going to call a counterfeit. A counterfeit mystery. It's so interesting this phrase, the mystery of God, it's this little Greek word, mysterion.

Biblically speaking, it doesn't mean some secret that nobody knows about. It means a past truth or a past event that was hidden, but it's now revealed for all to see. And that mystery is the mystery of Christ in you. It's the mystery of the gospel. But in our text today, Paul says, but there's also a counterfeit mystery. There's a kind of an opposition mystery that's fighting against this mystery of God. And you need to know about that because you've been commissioned to display it. And as you display the mystery of God, you're going to have an opposing force coming against you, trying to undermine that and overcome what it is that God is doing in you and through you.

And so with that in mind, let's read our text, 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. We'll read the first twelve verses. We'll actually read the first three, and I want to give you a little bit of context to what's going on. Paul said, now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the second Advent, and our being gathered to Him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to be easily upset or troubled either by a prophecy, or by a message, or by a letter, supposedly from us, alleging that the day of the Lord has already come.

Do not let anybody deceive you in any way, for that day will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. Now, for those of you who are not familiar with the Bible or familiar with all that discussion, that's just a lot to kind of take in right there. Basically, this is Paul writing a letter to a church that he had planted. And like a lot of those early churches, there were people within the church who were saying, that's not the truth, what I say is the truth and they were having to fight it and address these false teachings.

And when it came to the church in Thessalonica there were two errors they were making when it came to the second coming of Jesus Christ. One error, and Paul addresses this in his first letter, was that they were going beyond what the Bible actually says about the second coming. They were saying more than what the Bible says. And some churches do that today. When it comes to the second coming, some churches say way more than what the Bible says. And you watch 'em on TV preachers all the time. They're talking about dates this and Gog

and Magog is Russia and Barack Obama's the antichrist and all, they go beyond what the Bible says, because the Bible doesn't say Barack Obama's the antichrist.

Unfortunately, none of that's in there. Other churches say way less than what the Bible says, and that's the mistake this church was making after they got it wrong on the first one. They made these predictions, they said Jesus is going to come in this way at this time, and he didn't. So instead of admitting defeat, they said, well, he's already come and you missed it. And I missed it and we all missed it. So you had a group of Christians in that church at Thessalonica who were going, well, dang, you know, I thought it was going to be different than that, and I thought things were going to get better than this, and basically these teachers were saying, no, it's not going to get any better than this, and this is as good as it's going to get because Jesus has already come.

He just came spiritually. He just came secretly. He just came in your heart. And that's what a lot of churches, unfortunately, preach today as well. They say way less than what the Bible says. They said that the second coming of Jesus is a spiritual coming. He comes in your heart. And when you love people like Jesus loves people, then that's the reality of Christ on earth. And this is as good as it's going to get. So let's just kind of get used to life as it is and try and make it better.

And Paul says neither one of those things are true. They're wrong on both accounts. Do not be misled or deceived by either one of those errors, because the second coming of Christ, number one, you're not going to miss it. And number two it's going to be preceded by two other events that you're not going to miss. And he talks about this great falling away and this man of lawlessness that's going to come. So in your notes, I call it a corruption from within and a crushing from without. There's going to be a corruption within the church.

There's going to be Christians, churches—we'll see it in our day—that are just— Jesus says the love of many will grow cold. They just, I don't want to do this anymore. You know, Christianity is too hard in our culture. I don't want to be a weirdo. I'm tired of not having any business. I'm tired of being outcast and alienated. I'm tired of the negative impact. And so I'm going to become one of those type of Christians that can have their cake and eat it too. And I'm going to compromise here and compromise there and I'm kind of going to love the picture of Jesus as it's presented by my preacher who tells me what I want to hear.

Have my itching ears scratched. And that's going to happen to a greater and greater degree. There's going to be a corruption within. And then at the same time, there's going to rise up a figure who— sometimes the Bible calls him the antichrist. Here he's called the man of lawlessness. He's going to rise to power and he's going to crush the remaining faithful remnant of believers. And so Paul basically says, if that hasn't happened yet, then Jesus hasn't come yet, so chill out, is the takeaway. And then he goes on to describe this man.

In verses 5 and following, or 4 and following, he says that this antichrist opposes and exalts himself above every so-called God or object of worship, so that he sits in God's temple proclaiming that he himself is God. Don't you remember that when I was with you, I used to tell you about all this? And you know what currently restrains him so that he will be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Now that's what we're going to camp out on right here. The mystery of lawlessness, the counterfeit mystery.

It's the same Greek word, mysterion. But it's not the mystery of God, it's an alternative, a false gospel, an anti-gospel that is not just as powerful, but it is similarly powerful, similarly religious, similarly effective at persuading people to embrace it, but it is doing the opposite of what God's gospel is doing. And it's already at work among you. He says the one restraining him will do so until he's out of the way, and when that happens, the lawless one will be revealed. The Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of his mouth and will bring him to nothing at the appearance of his coming.

And the coming of the lawless one, you need to know, is based on Satan's working. So this future antichrist is going to be indwelt or animated by Satan with every kind of miracle, both signs and wonders serving the lie. He'll be able to perform supernatural acts with every wicked deception among those who are perishing. They perish, these people who follow the antichrist in the mystery of God or the mystery of lawlessness, they perish because they did not accept the love of the truth, and so be saved. And for this reason, because they wouldn't accept the truth, God sent on them a strong delusion so that they would believe the lie, so that all will be condemned—those who did not believe the truth but delighted in unrighteousness.

Now a lot of preachers take a verse like that and they go to town on this antichrist prediction and predicting the antichrist, and that's actually a temptation, but I'm not going to do that today. Because again, you don't want to go beyond what the Bible says about these kinds of things. And a lot of people do, and they get themselves in trouble. That's not the point of this text necessarily. The point of this text is that the kingdom of God is a kingdom in tension. The church has been commissioned to display the mystery by proclaiming the gospel, advancing the good news of the kingdom.

But there is an opposing force that's coming against them. And Paul is basically telling these Christians, you need to know that force is coming. You need to be able to identify it, and you need to have the resources necessary to resist it, to mount a counteroffensive against that offensive, so that the mystery of God can conquer this counterfeit mystery of lawlessness. And so that's what we're going to do today. To understand that the kingdom of God is a kingdom in tension and that we can successfully overcome this counteroffensive against us by being able to identify this man of lawlessness and this mystery of lawlessness.

So first, the kingdom in tension. And a lot of Christians really get discouraged in the Christian life because they don't understand this concept. A lot of Christians become believers and they think, well, now my life is going to be awesome and everything's going to get better and Jesus is going to be my solution to all my problems and that is true in a lot of ways. But the kingdom of God as it exists on earth right now is a kingdom in tension, which means there's an already not yet tension to it.

Already Christ is king, already we're forgiven of sin, already the power of sin is broken in our life, so through the Holy Spirit you can overcome addictions, you can overcome your propensity towards sin. All that's true. Already you can have reconciliation in your relationships. Already you can have a really awesome marriage. Already you can have a lot of things in the Christian life. The fruit of the Spirit. It's all yours now. But not yet do we see the abolishment of death. Not yet do we see everything sad coming untrue. Not yet do we see victory over things like disease and cancer.

Not yet do we see the fullness of Jesus' kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. We got all these other yahoo politicians running the show. You know, not yet has it gotten where it's going to be. And you've got to understand that as a Christian or you're going to become overly optimistic, naively, or overly pessimistic unnecessarily. You see this. Some people—you might call it, the technical term is an overrealized eschatology. It's this idea that you just kind of name it and claim it, baby. I declare the victory. I declare— we're going to have a nice big house, a nice big mansion.

I remember listening to Joel Osteen say that one time in his little book, *I Declare*. I read it in Target. I was like, this is a bunch of nonsense. That is not what the Bible teaches about the kingdom of God. You don't just name it and claim it. You don't just speak, I speak the blood over this, and it just magically fixes it. That is not the way the kingdom of God works. But you see some churches and some traditions that really push that. And if you just pray the right prayer and say the right words and have the right emotions, then God has to.

It's a commanded blessing, and that is not what the Bible teaches about the kingdom of God. It is here in part, it is here in seed form, but all of that stuff is not all the way in yet. Doesn't mean God can't heal, doesn't mean he doesn't heal miraculously, doesn't mean he doesn't listen to prayer. I'm not saying that. I'm just saying you can't have an overrealized eschatology to assume that the fullness of the kingdom is going to happen now when it's future. The other side of the pendulum is that people will kind of have this Negative Nancy, Eeyore, this-is-as-good-as-it's-going-to-get you know, Jesus has come in our hearts and so let's just kind of tolerate sin and you know in the church it's just going to kind of be messy and let's live in the mess and let's not call people to a higher standard, let's not push people to something greater, let's just kind of accept everything as it is, because this is as good as it's going to get, and maybe get a little bit better, but this is pretty much it.

That's an underrealized or underdeveloped eschatology. It's the same mistakes that the people in Thessalonica were making and Paul is saying, cut it out. Just live in the tension. The answer is not an overrealized eschatology or an underrealized eschatology, the answer is a realistic one. And the realistic one is Christ is king, He has triumphed, He is coming, but you live in a world in which you have an enemy who is going to resist you until that day comes. And so go forward, sober, clear-eyed, awake to what's going on so that you can overcome it.

By the way, eschatology, because it's a $10 word, it just means study of the end times. You're thinking about how things are going to play out in the end. The best way to think about it is to think of it as stages of development. You know how human beings we have stages of development. So unborn human life in the womb, you know, a human looks a certain way. A six-week-old baby does not look the same as a sixty-six-year-old baby—or human being. They both have wrinkles, but they're not the same kind of wrinkles, not for the same reasons, right?

A thirteen-year-old is different than a thirty-three-year-old. The differences are based on the stage of development. That's true when it comes to salvation and the kingdom. You hear scholars talk about this. When it comes to salvation, you know, I got saved when I was seven years old. I was saved. But I'm also being saved right now. Just ask Audra. She'll tell you he's not all the way there yet. He's got some, he's got a ways to go. I'm being saved. I'm becoming who God's made me to be. But the Bible also says that I will be saved one day.

When Christ comes again in glory, there will be a glorification, a finishing out of what's in process right now. So I was saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved. Which is it? It's all three. It's a stage of development. Where are you at in the stage of development? The same thing is true of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God has come. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God. He said, the kingdom of God is among you. So when Christ came, he inaugurated the kingdom. But it's also true that the kingdom is coming right now.

Through the Holy Spirit, the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit to advance the kingdom of God. We are overtaking darkness. We are advancing the gospel. We are doing good. We are bringing the fullness of the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. It's a process. It's a past act. It's a current process. And it's a future glory. The kingdom will be established. The mystery of God will be completed. The fullness of the kingdom will be on earth as it is in heaven one day. It's a stage of development.

And if you can think that way about the kingdom of God, it will keep you from getting depressed about the Christian life. It'll keep you from despairing over your problems that you can't seem to get over. It'll keep you from giving up on things that you feel like throwing in the towel about because well, God won't fix it, and obviously it's not God's will. Maybe it is

God's will. Maybe you're just experiencing a little bit of opposition right now, and you need to have a realistic eschatology that it is a kingdom in tension.

And because it's a kingdom in tension, the most important thing you can learn to do as a Christian is to wait, is to know how to wait and to wait well. Jesus talked about the end times in Matthew 24, and right after that in Matthew 25, he gave these parables about how to wait. And one of the parables he gave was about ten virgins, five that were wise and five that were foolish. And the only difference between the wise virgins and the foolish virgins was the wise virgins knew how to wait.

They prepared themselves to wait a long time, which means they had a lot of oil for their lamps to keep burning until the master came. And Paul's basically saying the same thing to these Christians in Thessalonica. I know you want him to come yesterday. I know people are saying he's already come now. Neither one is true. He may take a while, and you need to live in the tension to learn how to wait. And here's how you can do that. And then he goes on about this man of lawlessness and the mystery of lawlessness.

And basically says you need to be awake so that you can see the man when he comes and the mystery that's at work right now. Now when it comes to the man, this antichrist figure, you know, a lot of people get all fanciful about this, and, you know, I don't necessarily want to do that. The Bible describes this man, gives us a lot of his characteristics, but it does not say when he's going to come or who it's going to be. Notice some of the descriptions though in verse 4, he opposes and exalts himself above every other object of worship.

I got these on the screen if you want to take a pic. He sits in God's temple proclaiming himself to be God. He presently is being restrained by something or someone until God says stop. He's brought to power and he's animated by Satan's working. So Satan's not like God. He can't be in all places at all times. He's a singular created being, but that doesn't mean he can't be in one person. So this person will be uniquely inspired by Satan himself, not some demon, not some lesser evil force, Satan himself.

So kind of a Hitlerian like figure. His rise to power will be assisted by miraculous signs and wonders. They'll be able to do amazing things that look supernatural, that are supernatural. It reminds me of the Red Skull. You guys remember Captain America? Red Skull was able to do some crazy, crazy stuff. Well, similarly, this evil indwelling will enable him to do supernatural signs and wonders. That's one way you know it's not Hillary Clinton. She wasn't able to do anything miraculous. These miraculous signs and wonders will serve the lie, advancing his agenda and deceiving many.

And then he's doomed to destruction by the Lord Jesus Christ in verses three and verses eight. Now again, some people, unfortunately— and I just made a joke. I probably shouldn't have said that. I'm going to get a letter. I'm going to get an email. Some people foolishly say,

well, I think Hillary Clinton's the antichrist, or I think it's Barack Obama, or I think it's Donald Trump. I actually thought it might have been Donald Trump at one time because he was so egotistical. But it's like I think it's this guy, I think it's that guy, and it's not.

These things don't fit those individuals, but these things will fit the future individual who is the antichrist. So even though we cannot know in particular who he is, we can know what he's going to be like. And the way to think about it is that these descriptions—Paul's not coming up with them out of thin air. He's pulling these from types of antichrist that he has experienced either because of his knowledge of history or in his own lifetime. And there's actually two in particular. One we've already looked at when we were looking at the book of Revelation, it was a Syrian king[1] named Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

In Daniel chapter 9, Daniel chapter 7, he's talking about this guy, what did I say his name was? Antiochus Epiphanes. It's third service, I'm sorry. He made it illegal to own any part of the Old Testament. He made it a capital offense to be a priest. So somebody like me, a preacher—see ya. He engaged in genocide against the Jews. I mean like a Hitlerian level genocide of the Jews. And it got so bad that they mounted a counteroffensive, and that counteroffensive is what's known as the Maccabean Revolt. First and Second Maccabees in the Catholic Bible.

I would encourage you to read it. It's really interesting. It was the Jews through guerrilla warfare mounting an offensive against this type of antichrist. And they ultimately won. And that's why we celebrate, I say we, I don't celebrate Hanukkah, but that's why the Jews celebrate Hanukkah today, because of that type of antichrist that was overcome. That's some of what informs Paul's description; another part of what informs Paul's description is a type of antichrist who was about fifteen years before the writing of this letter. He was a Roman emperor by the name of Caligula.

He actually looks very similar to Antiochus, right? It's very interesting. Antiochus had his nose missing. This guy's got his nose on. Fifteen years before Paul's letter, he was considered crazy, a madman. And the reason they thought he was a madman is because it was really common for Roman emperors during that time. After they died, it was very common for them to be divinized or thought of as gods. And so you could go to a Roman emperor temple and worship the prior Roman emperors because they were thought to be gods. This guy thought, well if it's good to be a god after I die, it's even better to be called a god while I'm still alive.

So he just said, I'm a god. And he didn't just divinize himself, he divinized his horse as well. Because why not? If you're going to call yourself God, you might as well make your horse a god. And everybody was like, this guy's crazy, but he's got all the guns, what are we going to do? And they just kind of played along, but because of his hatred towards the people of God

and the Jews, he said, I'm going to establish my picture in the middle of the temple. Now, in the middle of any temple is the ground of the universe.

And it was considered— the thing that sat in the middle of a temple, whether it's Jewish or Hindu or Buddhist, doesn't matter. At the middle of the temple is the most important thing. It's the thing that needs to be worshipped, the thing that inspires awe. And this guy said, I want to be at the middle. So let's remove the Ark of the Covenant, let's remove the worship of Yahweh, let's remove the sacrificial system, and let's have me instead. And he tried to do that. Mercifully, he died before that order could be executed.

Otherwise, you would have had a mass bloodbath. Maccabean Revolt, version two. And eventually that did happen with the destruction of the temple in seventy AD. So this is informing Paul's mind. These are types of antichrist, this kind of egotistical, God hating, people of God hating, self-centered glory hungry person. Some people read this and they go, it's not the Roman emperor, it's not the Syrian king,[2] it's going to be the Pope. Because he sets himself up in the temple and the temple is the church, and so he's going to set himself up in the church.

And a lot of the Protestant reformers thought that the antichrist was going to be the Pope or was the Pope. And some Christians today think it's going to be a future Pope. I don't buy that, but that's a theory. I don't know who he is, and I don't know how you can necessarily for sure identify him. What I want you to understand is to know how he thinks to know the spirit that animates him, because the spirit of lawlessness is what's going to enable him to rise to power. And the thing that he thinks, the personality trait of the antichrist, is he thinks it's all about him.

The center of the universe is him. He puts himself in the middle of God's temple. It's all about me, it's all about mine, it's all about number one. Me, my, mine, what I think, what I like, what I know. It's all about me. Okay, that's what you need to know. You may not know him as an individual, but you can know his mindset. I don't have time to talk about this, but Friedrich Nietzsche, I mean, he predicted this. He was an atheistic German philosopher. He saw postmodernism coming. He saw our culture coming.

He realized that through guys like Darwin and— who's the psychologist guy? Freud. We basically killed God in the West. There is no God, therefore there will be no truth. There are no absolute moral values. We are reeling right now because of those philosophical pillars that were established back then. But Nietzsche basically said God is dead and in place of God because every human has a God complex, they have a hunger for God. They're going to basically bring to power a godlike figure. They will find some human being who embodies the ideal of what a human being should be.

Nietzsche called him the Übermensch, or the overman. He'd basically be worshipped by the masses or elected to the highest political office because he was the epitome of what a godless human being in a godless culture would look like. And this is why you saw the rise of totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century. Whether it was Mao's China or Stalin, or Hitler. Hitler perverted Christianity to basically say, you know, there is no God, there is no real sense in which we need to love one another, love our neighbor, all that stuff.

Jesus said— no, we need to use it for power. Might makes right. And I'm going to be the— what did he call himself? The Führer, the Führer. He was like, he was the overman, and that's what the spirit of the antichrist is. And we have seen that spirit bring untold bloodshed in our current history, and we will continue to see it insofar as that spirit remains alive today. So not only do we need to know the man, we got to know the mystery. Look at verses 6 through 8 of 2 Thessalonians to get an idea of what's behind this mystery.

He says, you know what currently restrains him so that he will be revealed in his time, the antichrist. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but the one now restraining him will do so until he is out of the way, and then the lawless one will be revealed. So what do we know about this mystery of lawlessness? We know for one thing it's being restrained by something and a lot of people make a lot about this restrainer. Who is the restrainer? Some people think it's the church. Some people think it's the Holy Spirit.

Some people think it's America. Some people think it's Israel. Some people think it's Michael the Archangel, some people think it's the West, some people think it's Western values, the Enlightenment. There's all sorts of theories. And I need you to know that I went down that rabbit hole this week and spent I don't know how many untold hours trying to figure out who the restrainer is. And I still don't know. I'm more confused now than when I went in, but I do know this. In verse 6, the description of the restrainer he uses what's called a neuter gender to describe it, meaning it's not masculine or feminine, it's kind of an impersonal force.

But then later he uses a masculine gender to describe him. So it's basically a neutral force or a power that is enacted by an individual or a person. And while I don't know who the person is necessarily, I do believe it is supernatural because it has supernatural power to resist this supernatural evil in the world. And for whatever reason, God is letting this happen now, but at a certain point in history, he's going to say, okay, time to stop. The road has been paved, everything's in place. It's time to bring the end.

And he's going to remove him, and then the man of lawlessness will come to power. So more important than understanding who the restrainer is, I think we're better served to understand what the mystery is. And it's a mystery of lawlessness. Now think about that. The mystery of lawlessness. This man and this spirit is not a lawbreaker. It is literally without law, meaning there is no law. There is no truth. It's not someone who says there is a law, but

I get to break it. He's not a lawbreaker. He's someone who arises out of a culture which has decided for themselves there's no such thing as law.

And it's a brilliant plan by Satan to preach an anti-gospel. The nature of this mystery is similar to the nature of God's mystery, which means it's religious in nature. Because every human has a God craving. And so they're going to use our craving for God, but it's going to insert a lie that says God is not the center of the universe. God is not at the middle of the temple. Man is the measure of all things. Okay, that's the spirit, that's the mystery of lawlessness. Man is the measure. There is no law.

You decide what's right and wrong. Does this sound familiar? It's about my truth. Your truth is your truth. My truth is my truth. I need to speak my truth. Please hush while I speak my truth. You see it all over universities right now. That's a relatively new philosophy. The foundations were laid with guys like Nietzsche and Derrida and postmodernism and critical theory and all that stuff. It's all been paving the way, but we see it in front of our very eyes right now. If you've got a teenager, they're being brainwashed with this mindset right now.

It's true for me because I decide— I feel it's true. I would never personally get an abortion, but I'm not wanting to say anything about anybody who decides otherwise. It's kind of my moral code. Sex before marriage is wrong because I feel it's wrong. I would never push that on anybody else. And you probably already feel it in your own gut, like there's a reservation for you to say, no, there's an absolute standard of truth and it doesn't matter who feels or doesn't feel. What's his name say? Facts don't care about your feelings.

It is what it is. There is an objective standard. That used to be universally agreed to until relatively recently. Thank you for turning them lights on, Taylor. Those are the mood-setting lights. No, I'm kidding. About the nineteen thirties, nineteen forties, this philosophy creeped up. It's the spirit of the antichrist. Now I'm not saying antichrist is on the way. Well, no, not necessarily, but I'm saying the spirit that paves the way for the antichrist is all over the place. And what this does, this mindset, there is no truth, no such thing as truth, deconstruct truth, let's deconstruct the power structures that exist, and let's liberate the victims and all that stuff, that brings chaos to any culture.

It's bringing chaos in our culture. And enough chaos in a culture, finally somebody comes to the top and says, this is madness. Somebody needs to put it in order. Put me in charge and I'll put it in order. And that guy, the man of lawlessness is who this text is talking about. Now, the next person who does that, is he the antichrist? I don't know. It may be another reset, another cycle of the same thing that we've seen throughout human history. But Paul is saying be aware, because it's not just going to happen outside the church, it's going to happen inside the church.

There's going to be an apostasy, a corruption within the church. And you're going to have Christians who say this nonsense of there is no right and there is no wrong. It's all about what I feel. And do not be led astray. So, which mystery is captivating you? That's what we need to end on. It's not enough just to identify the mystery of God or the mystery of lawlessness out there. You've got to be able to identify the mystery of lawlessness in here. Because we're living in this culture. And we watch it on Netflix and we read it on the news, and it's all over our universities; it's in our educational systems.

The cultural authorities are piping it into our psyche. So can you spot the mystery of lawlessness in here? Because if you can't, you're going to be one of these people that Paul says is blinded to the truth and that God's going to send a delusion because you refuse to love the truth. And it's kind of like this. It's not that God maliciously misleads you. All God does is show you the truth. And for people who do not want to hear the truth, when they hear it and don't like it, they harden their heart against it.

They say, no, sir, not for me, not true. And the more they hear the truth, the more they harden their heart, the more blinded they become. And we're going to see that happen in our culture. It's going to happen in the church. It's going to happen outside the church. There's going to be a hardening of heart. And the love of many will grow cold. May it not be said of you. When you hear the truth, would you say, God, open my eyes? If this is coming from you, help me to hear it and to respond to it.

Help me to love the truth. It really boils down to what's at the middle of your temple. The antichrist puts himself in the place of God. There's a temptation in every human heart to put yourself on the throne. I'm the measure of all things. I decide what's right and wrong. I decide what's true and false. Resist that urge. And resist the urge to believe the anti-gospel. I heard Tom Holland— actually, I heard Tim Keller quote Tom Holland describing this idea of what's at the middle of the temple. Did you know that at the middle of the Jewish temple there wasn't a picture of Yahweh, there was a piece of furniture.

It was the Ark of the Covenant. And in the Ark of the Covenant were the Ten Commandments. And on top of the Ark of the Covenant was this golden slab called the mercy seat. And that was at the middle of the temple, which means the middle of the temple communicates the most important reality of the universe. And for the Old Testament Jews, the most important reality of the universe was an object of furniture that communicated substitutionary sacrifice, mercy, and grace. Because the high priest would come in, he would sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed animal, and it would pardon the sins of God's people.

And what he gave to the Israelites is what he's given to us. Except it's not a mercy seat, it's not a golden slab, it's a cross with a man, a perfect man, God in the flesh who died on the cross and screamed out the most important reality of the universe is me laying my life down

for you, my life for yours. You saw it in the Old Testament, you see it in the New Testament, my life for yours. The mystery of God can be summed up in those four words, my life for you.

The antichrist, the mystery of lawlessness, says the opposite. It says that's weakness. That's foolishness. Better for you to say your life for me. Might makes right. I got to use people, I got to abuse people, I got to do whatever it takes to get mine because this world is nothing but cruel, pitiless indifference. There is no God, man is the measure, and I am going to exert my will over the will of others. Now nobody would ever say that out loud, at least only the sociopaths among us, but that spirit animates a lot of people in our day and age.

So which mystery captivates you? Is it my life for you? Is it the cross of Christ shouting out the most important reality of the universe? It's my life for you. That's at the heart of every awesome marriage, my life for you. That's at the heart of every awesome church. A group of people saying to one another, my life for you. It's not about me, it's about you. This is what every mother says to her child. It's the ground of creation. For a child to come into this world, there has to be a mom who says, my life for you.

My nine months of independence and normal body for you. For a toddler to become mature, there has to be a mom or a dad who says, my independence for you, my convenience for you. My ten minutes, my money, my everything for you. It's the ground of creation, it's the ground of redemption, it's the most important reality of the universe. And you can either have your life shaped by it and controlled by it and transformed by it, or you can believe the lie that it's your life for me, that it's me and it's mine.

It's the spirit of Christmas or the spirit of the Grinch. So as we respond, I want to put that in front of you and ask you to really wrestle with the spirit that animates your heart. And to be honest about it, because we all have ego, we all have pride, we all have a little bit of the spirit of the antichrist in us. And so let's use this time to ask the Holy Spirit to drive that spirit out and to bring the Spirit of Christ alive in us individually and in our church corporately.

All right, let's pray together. Father, we thank you for this time. We thank you for this text that . . .

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "a Syrian governor"; Antiochus IV Epiphanes was the king of the Seleucid (Syrian) Empire, not a governor. Source: 1 Maccabees 1:10; Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Antiochus IV Epiphanes." ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "the Assyrian governor"; Antiochus IV Epiphanes was the Seleucid (Syrian) king. Source: 1 Maccabees 1:10; Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Antiochus IV Epiphanes." ↩