

Series: **Confident Hope**

Today's Title: **"The Lawless One"**

July 10, 2022 – 2 Thessalonians 2:6-12 – Sermon 24 of 28

---

**Objective:** To help Christians be confident in God's power over evil and His plan for history.

---

**11:00 Service:** Comments about having the Next Gen Kids with us in the worship service during the month of July.

**Turn to 2 Thessalonians 2:6-12** – p. 989

In our passage we find ourselves in one of the primary N.T. passages that give information about the future person referred to as The Antichrist.

Today will not be a deep dive into the details of the Antichrist, but we will cover some of that territory.

In the context of our passage, the Apostle Paul is doing 2 things:

- 1) He is correcting their false views related to the Day of the Lord and the Antichrist.
- 2) He is trying to comfort them – calm their fears – give them hope of the future, not fear of the future.

Even in our day – there are so many ideas floating around about the end of the world.

Some believe it will be from Climate Change. Back in the 1970's 'science' believed it would be from the impending ice age.

Now it's Global Warming – the melting ice caps –  
destruction of the ozone layer – CO<sub>2</sub> gasses.

Some believe the end of the world will be a result of deadly  
pathogens or some destructive bacteria.

**Christian...listen...**what we know for sure is that the end of  
this world will come when God decrees it!

The end will come – this world is not eternal – but it will come  
when God decrees the time for it to end.

By what means will the Lord use to end the world?

We have some descriptions in the Bible – but we really don't  
know.

Read Revelation and the various judgments are going to be  
horrific.

- Some are natural disasters – earthquakes, fires, etc.
- Some are by war
- Some are by pestilence and disease
- Some are clearly supernatural judgments.
- Some are too foreign to even put into a known category!

The point is...God will decide when – and He will decide  
how.

**He is the Creator – He alone is sovereign – He alone is over  
all and omnipotent (all-powerful) over all things.**

As far as a timeline – or order of events...

We believe the rapture of the Church – which Paul describes in **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** – will happen before the 7-year Tribulation period – which will be a time of God’s judgment – His wrath – against the evil and sin in the world. This is referred to as the ‘Pre-Tribulation’ view.

The Rapture occurs...then, after a period of time – either months – or maybe years – the events of the Tribulation will begin.

The Tribulation is the beginning period of time referred to as the Day of the Lord.

The Day of the Lord is a future period of time where God will judge the sin and evil of this world.

There are numerous things which the Bible says must happen prior to the Day of the Lord, some of which Paul mentioned in our verses last Sunday.

**2:3-4**

“For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.”

We see these same events in **Daniel 11:31, 36**.

There is a slew movies and books which try to predict – or simply attempt to portray what this end of human history on this planet will be like.

If you like to watch that stuff – just do yourself – and all of us a favor.

Don't forget that the Bible is the primary - and the only source of truth on this topic.

Don't put Hollywood's version or some author's version on the same level as Scripture.

Ok...

Let's take a look at our passage today. **Read vs. 1-6**

The first thing we see is:

**God's control over evil.** vs. 6

“And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.”

This is a difficult truth for many Christians to understand and embrace.

However, this is one of the primary reasons believers can have peace and joy in the midst of pain and loss!

***God is not only in control of evil – but He uses evil to accomplish His good, and perfect will!***

There is nothing – not even the Devil himself or a legion of his demons – that can keep God from doing what He wants to do.

**Job 42:1-2**

“Then Job answered the LORD and said: “I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.”

**Isaiah 46:10**

“My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all My purpose...”

**vs. 6** tells us that the Thessalonians – probably due to Paul’s teaching when he was with them – they knew what / who is the restraining power Paul is referring to.

For every Christian since then, we have tried to figure out what / who Paul is referring to.

*Remember why Paul is writing – remember what his purpose was in this letter.*

- It was not to give us all the details about the future and about the Antichrist.

- It was to give the Thessalonian believers comfort and hope about the future Day of the Lord.

- To comfort them and give them hope – that they would not be present in the Day of the Lord – that believers will be raptured prior to the Day of the Lord.

We’ll discuss the identity of the restrainer in the next point – but the important thing to note here is there is a restrainer!!!

**God is in control over evil.**

Now, we must understand that Paul uses a personal pronoun here (“him...he...his”) – referring to a person who is being restrained.

This is the same person he refers to in **vs. 3** as “the man of lawlessness...the son of destruction...”

## **This is the Antichrist.**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing to note is there will be a time when the Antichrist will be revealed - he will not always be restrained.

There will be a future time in which the restraining will stop – and the Antichrist will be revealed.

He won't be revealed as the Antichrist – or as the man of lawlessness or son of destruction – or any other negative title.

He will be revealed on the world stage – and be celebrated by the world!

**Ezekiel 38:2** – He is called “Gog of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal...”

**Daniel 7:8; 8:9** – the little horn in Daniel's visions

**Daniel 9:26** – “the prince who is to come”.

**Daniel 11:3** – the king who does what he wills.

**Zechariah 11:15** – the uncaring shepherd

The world will see the Antichrist as a great ruler – a great military leader – someone who promises to provide what they long for.

People will worship him – he will worship himself and set himself up as a god to be worshiped!

**Daniel 11:36-37**

“And the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods.

He shall not pay attention to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all.”

### **The Holy Spirit's restraining of evil. vs. 7**

“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only He who now restrains it will do so until He is out of the way.”

Let's look at the first ½ of the verse.

“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.”

What is “the mystery of lawlessness”?

In the N.T., a “mystery” was not some secret teaching or some mystical, dark magic secret.

This term simply refers to something previously unknown, but now revealed.

Hidden by God, but now out in the open.

This phrase can be better understood if we have a fuller translation: *‘the mystery which is lawlessness’*.

In Paul's writings, ‘lawlessness’ is often a synonym for ‘sin’.

The “lawlessness” which Paul is talking about here is much broader than a rejection and rebellion against the Law of Moses.

In context, this term refers to a world-wide lawlessness – worldwide sin and rebellion against God which is

“unobservable to unbelievers but revealed by God to believers” – taking it out of the category of ‘mystery’.

(Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, by Jeffrey A. D. Weima, p. 530)

This phrase is a parallel to one of the titles Paul gives to the Antichrist in **vs. 2** – “the man of lawlessness”.

So, the “mystery of lawlessness” is world-wide sin and rebellion against God.

Paul says this “is already at work.”

Does this mean the Antichrist is already here?

No.

It means the rejection and rebellion of God is already here.

**1 John 2:18**

“...it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.”

**1 John 4:3**

“...and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.”

So, the “mystery of lawlessness” – this rejection of God and rebellion against God “is already at work” in the world.

Let’s look now at the 2<sup>nd</sup> 1/2 of the verse.

“Only He who now restrains it will do so until He is out of the way.”

“lawlessness” is already here – but not on the scale it will be when the Antichrist is “revealed” – because currently this “lawlessness” is being restrained.

This restraint will be removed – it will get “out of the way” – but right now, it’s working to limit – to restrain the extent and the expression of evil.

*That’s quite a thought on its own!*

*The evil we see right now – the rebellion and rejection of God – is being restrained!*

The question most people ask is: *‘Who is the restrainer?’* Over the centuries of Church history, many have offered an answer to this question.

- The preaching of the Gospel...
- The presence of the Church...
- The Roman Empire...
- Human governments (Rom. 13) that promote righteousness...
- General morality...

None of these things are sufficient to restrain the power of Satan.

Only a divine, supernatural power can restrain Satan.

The 2 most credible answers to this question that I have found are...the restrainer is:

- Michael, the archangel of God

- The Holy Spirit (Omnipresent, so He is always present, but He has a special ministry of restraining the evil of Satan until the appointed time in God’s providential plan.).

Knowing the identity of the restrainer is an interesting pursuit, but the most important thing to know in **vs. 6-7** is that Satan and his superman – the Antichrist – will be restrained – until the proper time in God’s plan. God is in complete control of Satan and the Antichrist. Nothing will happen until God allows it to happen.

**The lawless one’s power and limits.** vs. 8-10a

When you read about the lawless one (Antichrist), he can seem all-powerful – invincible.

It can seem as if he will do whatever he wishes – without any regulation.

But everything he does will be according to God’s plan. God will use the Antichrist – just like God has used every world leader throughout history – whether they were good or evil – promoting goodness or terror.

**Romans 13:1b**

“For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”

In today’s passage, the Apostle gives some details about the Antichrist and his time of power.

1. The Anti-Christ will be revealed. (vs. 6b, 8)

Even when he appears on the world stage and rises to power, he is under the control and timing of God.

**vs. 6b** - “...so that he may be revealed in his time.”

**vs. 8** - “And then the lawless one will be revealed...”

The timing of his rise to power will fit God’s timetable and fulfill the purposes of God.

We see the same sovereign, divine control of time in the appearance of Christ.

**Galatians 4:4**

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son...”

We see it in Joseph’s life – and the evil committed toward him by his brothers.

**Genesis 50:20**

“...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

When Israel entered the Promised Land – it was according to God’s sovereign control over history and His justice for the people of Canaan.

The Antichrist will be revealed and begin his reign of power and evil only when God removes His restraining power – and allows him to walk onto the world stage.

2. Jesus is sovereign over the Antichrist. (vs. 8b)

The deity of Jesus means that nothing is over Him. Jesus – a member of the Triune God – is omnipotent – all-powerful over everything in the universe – and nothing can compete with His might.

**8b** - “...whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of His coming.”

Jesus’ appearance alone will destroy the Antichrist.

“...kill with the breath of His mouth” – Wow!!!

**Revelation 19:15**

“From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations...”

These are metaphorical statements about the mouth / breath of Jesus.

They are not literal descriptions of His bad breath – or a literal sword coming out of His mouth.

In the creation account we read of God breathing into Adam the breath of life.

**Genesis 2:7**

“...then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”

**John 20:21-22**

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.”

And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Just as the breath of God gives life – He can also bring death.

Whether this is describing Jesus breathing on the Antichrist or pronouncing judgment on him – the main idea here is the sovereign power of Jesus over the Antichrist.

3. The Antichrist is the agent of Satan. (vs. 9-10a)

“The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing...”

The work of the Antichrist will be Satanic in nature – and in its power.

It will be “by the activity of Satan”.

Paul describes the details of his work.

It will be powerful.

He will be able to perform supernatural things: “false signs and wonders”.

Much like Pharaoh’s magicians (Exodus 7 & 8) were able to perform similar wonders that Moses did, there was a point where they ran out of power. They could not keep up with the supernatural power of Moses – because the power behind Moses was God – not demons – or even Satan himself.

The “signs and wonders” of the Antichrist are “false”.

The Greek word here is ‘*pseudos*’.

The signs and wonders will be a lie.

The “wicked deception” of vs. 10.

The “signs and wonders” will give the deceptive impression of unbounded power, but his power will be limited.

**Mark 13:21-22**

And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it.

For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray...”

The “signs and wonders” are “false” because they will be used to make people believe he is a god – he is good – when in reality he is evil – possessed by Satan – intending to kill – not to save.

He will try and destroy Israel – but he will not succeed because Jesus will show up!

**God’s judgment of deluded unbelievers.** vs. 10b-12

The “mystery of lawlessness” in vs. 6 which is the rejection of God and rebellion against the things of God will not last.

God will judge people for their rejection, rebellion, and sin.

But they won’t be able to blame anyone else for their decisions and actions.

They will not be able to say, *'The Devil made me do it!'*  
vs. 10b - "...because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."

They already rejected God – rejected the Gospel – and embraced their sin.

**This is important to note.**

God didn't delude them – and then they rejected God.

They rejected God first – "refused to love the truth".

This is not passive rejection – but active rejection.

But it was more than mere rejection or unbelief.

They embraced darkness instead of light.

They didn't just refuse "the truth" – they "refused to love the truth".

Implication – they chose to love evil – to love the darkness!

**John 3:19**

"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

**See Romans 1:18-32**

18 - "...men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

21-22 - "For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him...and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools..."

24-25 - "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie..."

32 - “Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”

Paul says “Because” they rejected God – rejected the Gospel and embraced the darkness – evil...

11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,

12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

God seals them in their decision.

He seals them in their rejection of the Gospel – and their embrace of the darkness.

He does not cause their unbelief, but He seals them in their unbelief.

***Apply it...***

1. God is sovereign – and He uses evil for His good.  
Don't be fearful of what you see in the world.  
Don't be fearful of the future.  
God is in control.  
He is providential over history and nations.  
He is moving history toward its rightful, just end.
2. Rejecting the Gospel and rebelling against God is more evil than we think.  
We tend to minimize sin.  
We make excuses – we justify – we compromise.

But sin is not only rejecting God – its embracing evil.

God is just in His response to sin.

He judges sin – and His judgment is always just, holy, and righteous.

If we have a strong reaction to God’s judgment – if we think He is too harsh, it’s because we don’t understand the evil and darkness of sin.

### 3. Right now, God’s desire is to save.

Jesus came to earth – to save.

He came to “give His life as a ransom for sin.”

**Ezekiel 33:11**

“Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live...”

**1 Timothy 2:4**

“...God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

**John 3:17**

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

Are you saved? Have you put your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin?

*Closing prayer*