



Christ Has Not Returned Yet

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ 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. 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. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?

Whether it's a birthday party, free Twins tickets, or a scholarship deadline, none of us like to miss out on something big and important, and if given another opportunity, we would do all we could to be included. Now imagine that someone told you that you had missed out on the most monumental event in human history: Christ's return from heaven. He came, and you missed it. If you actually believed what you heard, you too would undoubtedly be devastated and desperate and do whatever you could to be included.

Evidently some false teachers were using this very lie to throw the Thessalonian Christians into a spiritual tailspin. They even tried to substantiate their lie by claiming to have authoritative teachings and letters from Paul or the other apostles saying that Christ's Second Coming had already come and gone. Now exactly why they had concocted this deception, we don't know. Was it to gain followers for themselves or to get people and their possessions under their control or simply to spread chaos and fear in the church?—it could have been any or all of these.

Unfortunately, false teachings about Jesus' return are neither infrequent nor new. Ever since Jesus ascended into heaven, the devil has again and again used lies and distortions to sow confusion and unscriptural expectations among God's people. However, when we hold on to God's clear and true Word, given us by Christ and his apostles, we possess all the details we need to be fully prepared for the Last Day. In a nutshell we should expect for Jesus to return once more from heaven, suddenly (Mark 13:33), visibly (Rev. 1:7; Acts 1:11), bodily (Acts 1:11), and audibly (1 Thess. 4:16) with great glory accompanied by the angel hosts and the souls of all the saints (Matt. 25:31; 1 Thess. 4:14).

In Matthew 24 Jesus himself tells us what signs to look for as we anticipate his coming: false prophets, false Messiahs, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, the spread of the gospel to all the world, and the falling away of many believers. In these verses Paul expands upon that last prerequisite saying, "that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed." Before the end would come there would be a great apostasy within the church; Christians would turn away from the true faith of salvation by grace in Christ and go after their own works. Since this had not happened as of the time of Paul's writing, he assured the Thessalonians that Judgment Day had not come. In addition, the man of lawlessness had not yet been revealed either. This person is identical with the Antichrist of whom the Apostle John speaks in his first letter (1 John 2:18ff) and the book of

Revelation (13:11ff; 17:3ff), and about whom the prophet Daniel also wrote (7:8ff; 11:36ff). While there are many antichrists, who will attempt to take Jesus' place in the New Testament age, there is ONE who is the most prominent and prototypical Antichrist.

Paul gives this description by which the Thessalonians (and we) would be able to recognize him: *He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.* Contrary to popular opinion, the Antichrist is not a world leader or a military power, rather he seeks to make himself equal to and superior to God, rising up from within God's temple (that is the church) and claiming to be God. We will further investigate Paul's identification of the Antichrist next week, but for now let's ask ourselves: who within Christianity claims to be equal to God, to speak for God, and even claims the authority to overrule and contradict what God's Word says? Based on these descriptors and the additional details Paul mentions in the coming verses, we will see that there is no doubt as to the Antichrist's true identity.

In the meantime, let's remember why Paul reveals this mystery to us: not to frighten us, but to prepare us, so that we know what to expect as we wait for Jesus to come again. The Biblical doctrine of the Antichrist may not frequently take center stage in our teaching and preaching, but it is none the less vital to our faith, something that Paul saw fit to include in his initial instruction of the Thessalonians and a teaching we dare never let go of to our own peril and confusion.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, there are so many fantastic notions and false teachings that surround your second coming. Help me to hold on to the simple truths of your Word so that I may not lose heart nor be deceived by error, but instead can look forward to your return and my final redemption. Amen.