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A1123 – June 5, 2011 – 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2
Error That The Day Of The Lord Had Come

If you'd turn to 2 Thessalonians 2. This is one of the most important chapters on eschatology, which is the study of last things or things to come. There are actually some unique eschatological teachings in chapter 2 of Thessalonians. As Dr John Walvoord says, "No other chapter in the entire Bible covers precisely the same points of revelation that are given here." In particular it gives us one unique point that is taught nowhere else, the initial events of the day of the Lord.

To introduce this chapter we want to recall Paul's earlier teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Thessalonians 5. 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 are the doctrinal portion of the first letter Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul teaches the doctrine of the rapture and in 1 Thessalonians 5 the doctrine of the day of the Lord. The doctrine of the rapture was a new doctrine, never revealed before until the NT; the doctrine of the day of the Lord was an old doctrine, revealed numerous times in the OT. He teaches the doctrine of the rapture first in 1 Thess 4, then the doctrine of the day of the Lord second in 1 Thess 5. That order is not merely incidental. I have tried to show numerous place in the NT where both of these events are imminent. Imminent meaning they can occur at any moment. At the moment the rapture of the church occurs the day of the Lord begins for the world. There's no other way for the two events to be imminent than that they occur at the same moment. Why not? Because if one of the events must precede the other one then one of them cannot occur until the other one occurs. And that would mean it's not imminent. So if two events are imminent then they must occur at the same time.

And we learned, or Paul taught at least, whether you learned it or not, that the rapture of the church will occur at any moment to save the church and at

that simultaneous moment the day of the Lord will begin to judge the world. So we have the doctrine of judgment/salvation. And the doctrine of judgment/salvation is a doctrine we've seen before. We first see the doctrine of judgment/salvation at the Flood of Noah where God judges the world outside of the ark and he saves those inside the ark. Always when God is judging he is saving. Those are twin truths. And you always want to keep them together. Don't break them apart because you'll distort salvation. God never just saves, God always judges when He saves. So when God is saving his church out from the world what does He do to the world? He judges it. Along with the doctrine of judgment/salvation we usually make five sub-points. Let's just capitalize on a few of these points. Point 1 under the doctrine of judgment/salvation is that grace precedes judgment. Always God gives grace, which gives man opportunity to repent, before judgment falls. God doesn't just lower the boom and judge people. He graciously gives them an opportunity to respond to his grace. What's the period of grace today? Let's review. The Church is often called the dispensation of grace, and for good reason. What happened was Jesus Christ came in His first advent and He offered the kingdom to Israel. Everything was Israel, Israel, Israel, go not unto the Gentiles, go only to the house of Israel. Israel was looking for the restoration of their kingdom that would far surpass that of David and Solomon. And yet when the King of that kingdom offered Himself to the nation, preaching that they should repent for the kingdom of God is at hand, they rejected Him and so what happened was Israel's kingdom program was put on hold until a generation of Israel repents. In the meantime we have the King depart at the ascension and He takes His seat at the right hand of the Father in Session. The day of Pentecost comes and He sends the Holy Spirit. This begins a new age or parenthesis in which God is forming a new organism called the Church which is not the kingdom but is a preparatory period for the kingdom. This preparatory period is the dispensation of grace. God is giving grace and has been giving grace for almost 2000 years now. Now is the time of repentance, today is the day of repentance. So the present age is characterized by grace when men still have an opportunity. But the gospel goes out with urgency because the period of grace could end at any moment and immediately the day of judgment will fall. So under the doctrine of judgment/salvation we have point 1, grace before judgment. Point 2 of the doctrine is Perfect Discrimination. What does this mean? This means that when this moment comes and God saves the church and judges the world He will perfectly discriminate between those who are the saved and those who

are the unsaved. In other words, there's not a fuzzy boundary when God judges and saves, rather there is perfect surgical precision in separating out the saved from the unsaved. And that's the point that at the rapture the saved will be removed, there won't be a few believers left behind, and there won't be any unsaved somehow accidentally caught up at the rapture. There is perfect discrimination. Now we could go on to points 3, 4, and 5, Point 3 of the doctrine of judgment/salvation is one way of salvation, namely the cross work of Jesus Christ, point 4 is the appropriation by faith, salvation is always by means of faith, and point 5 deals with man and nature. But we're interested mainly today in points 1 and 2, that when God judges and saves there has always been Grace before Judgment and when God judges and saves there is Perfect Discrimination between the saved and the unsaved.

Now if you do not have this doctrine straight then when you come to 2 Thessalonians 2 you will be caught in the same error that the Thessalonians were caught in, namely that some of the saved had entered into the period of judgment and there was not perfect discrimination. They've got the saved missing the rapture and going over into the day of the Lord. That basically is the error that Paul has to correct in chapter 2. So if you read verse 1 he says, **Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, ²that 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.** So the error was that the Thessalonians had not been saved at the rapture but rather had entered into the period of judgment referred to throughout the Bible as the day of the Lord. This was a false teaching because Paul had already taught them in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Thessalonians 5 that they were not destined to enter the day of the Lord but for salvation at the rapture, where we are gathered to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air. Paul had taught them that the church at any moment would be taken out of this world by the rapture and simultaneously the world would be under divine judgment in the day of the Lord. Now a few months later the Thessalonians are confused because of some false teaching and their idea is that they are already in the day of the Lord and they had missed the rapture. And Paul is very strongly correcting this error because it makes a big difference in how you live your life. This is a deception. The idea that any Christian could enter into the day of the Lord is a lie from Satan and they are deceived.

So to correct this error Paul, in v 3, lays out for us the initial events that began the day of the Lord. And the reason he lays out the initial events of the day of the Lord is so that we will understand that because these things have not happened we could not possibly be in the day of the Lord. That is Paul's whole point. The church cannot be in the day of the Lord because the church cannot see the two initial events that Paul says occur in the beginning of the day of the Lord, namely the apostasy and the revealing of the man of lawlessness. And the reason we can't see these two events is because we will have already been gathered to the Lord.

Now we mentioned over and over **the day of the Lord** and we want to review this doctrine so we are clear on what the day of the Lord is. This is a major doctrine of Scripture. It is not the tribulation because the Bible does not talk about any period of time known as the tribulation. That is an invention of man that is read back into the Scriptures. The Scriptures speak of believers facing tribulation, yes, but it does not speak of a period of time called the tribulation that lasts 7 years. That period of 7 years that comes from Dan 9:24-27 is called the 70th Week of Daniel, not the Tribulation. The Scriptures also speak of a period called the *great* tribulation, over in Matt 24, but it refers only to the second half of the 70th week of Daniel. But as far as the Tribulation is concerned, you cannot show me in the Bible where this time period exists. So what does exist is the 70th week of Daniel, the great tribulation and this period known as the day of the Lord. These are all distinct times and they all have distinct starting points. Each one starts with a distinct aspect of Antichrist and we're interested in the day of the Lord because that's Paul's topic in 2 Thess 2.

There is extensive revelation in the Scriptures about this period of time. The Old Testament mentions it over 70 times and so this is a doctrine that has deep roots in the Old Testament and is carried forward into the New Testament. In the ancient Old Testament world a day of the Lord was a day when a mighty warrior king would consummate an entire military campaign in a single day. So it's a military term for a mighty warrior king, so great that he could complete an entire war in a single day and it came to be applied to God and His military campaign to exterminate sinners and establish His kingdom. The day of the Lord does not refer to a strict 24 hour day. Some people think it refers to the day of the second advent. But that's not true and

we want to show then why it is called a day if its not a 24 hour period. Why is it called the day of the Lord rather than a period of the Lord or a campaign of the Lord? The use of day was used for two reasons. One, to emphasize the greatness of the warrior king. If He *could* complete an entire military campaign in a single day then he was surely great, not that He would, but that He could. Second, because of the two phases of a day. Each 24 hour day consists of a darkness phase followed by light phase. This is rooted in the days of Genesis because there the days begin with what? Light and then dark or dark and then light. Dark and then light. Always the day begins with darkness and each day of Genesis closes with the expression evening and morning, always it's evening and morning, day one, evening and morning, the second day, evening and morning, the third day and so forth. The Hebrew people adopted this from Genesis and so their day begins at evening not morning. So first we have evening, a period of darkness and then we have morning, a period of light. And when the Hebrew authors went to express God as a great warrior king carrying out His military campaign to exterminate sinners and establish His kingdom they thought of the fact that each day begins with a dark phase and ends with a light phase. That seemed to capture what God revealed regarding His end times program in the day of the Lord.

In all the day of the Lord lasts 1007 years plus, it begins as the church is removed at the Rapture, it covers an unknown period of time between the Rapture and the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel, it continues through those 7 years and also includes the millennium which lasts for 1000 years. So the day of the Lord is this whole period of more than 1007 years. The first phase is light or dark? Dark, just like the days of Genesis, just like the Hebrew day, it begins with darkness and ends with light. So the first 7 years plus this unknown gap of time up front are the period of darkness and the 1000 year millennium is the period of light. So it's called the *day* of the Lord because Jesus Christ is a warrior king who could carry out His campaign in a single day and it begins with a dark phase and ends with a light phase just like a normal day.

So putting this all together, when the OT authors began to apply the term day of the Lord to God as a great warrior king they meant that He would catastrophically intervene in the course of human affairs to exterminate

sinners (in the dark/judgment phase) and establish His kingdom (in the light/blessing phase).

So let's look at verse 1, **Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,**²that 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. So the subject is verse 1, a request is being made, **Now we request you, brethren,** and that formula in the Greek text is a transition from what Paul has already been saying about the day of the Lord in 1:6-10. He had already discussed the complex of events occurring in this day in chapter 1 and now he is going to deal with a specific problem related to it,¹ namely the timing as it relates **to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him.** What is the Christian's relationship to the day of the Lord? Now two things are mentioned in verse 1, **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him.** It should be clear by now that the **coming of our Lord** for the second time occurs in three phases. So let's review these three phases. If your idea of the second coming is simply that narrow 24 hour day when He returns to earth then you have a very narrow view of the second coming. The second coming is actually a complex of events that culminates with that day. But it has two prior phases leading up to it. Phase one is the rapture of the Church and the rapture is a private coming of the Lord Jesus Christ because only those He comes to rescue will see Him. Not every eye will see Him, only the eyes of believers will see Him. Phase two is the judgment phase of the day of the Lord and this is a public coming of the Lord Jesus Christ because He comes in judgment upon the world and Rev 6 says that everyone will know that He is the one sending these judgments. Finally, phase three is the narrow, 24 hour day of the Second Coming, and this is a public and global event, every eye will see Him and they will mourn with great mourning.

So he says in verse 1, as to **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,** that is, as to this complex of three events, and specifically **our gathering together**

¹ Thomas, R. L. (1981). 2 Thessalonians. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 11: Ephesians through Philemon* (F. E. Gaebelin, Ed.) (318). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

to Him that's phase one, the rapture of the Church. So he has in mind phase one of these three phases of Christ's coming, the Rapture, that is Paul's subject and the specific problem he's dealing with is the relationship of the rapture to the day of the Lord.

What did we learn about the Rapture in 1 Thess 4:13-18? We learned that the Thessalonians were grieving as those who have no hope because a number of believers had been persecuted unto death and they were unclear about their resurrection. Would they be partakers in the blessed hope of the rapture or would they miss the blessed hope. Paul answered that not only would they not miss it, but their bodies were presently only asleep assuring them that they would be woken up, and that in the meantime they were fully conscious in the presence of Jesus. At some unknown, undatable time the Lord Jesus would descend from heaven with a shout, the voice of the archangel would sound and the trumpet of God would be blown, at that moment the dead in Christ would rise first. Then those of us who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Following immediately on the heels of this gathering to Him the day of the Lord would begin. That much Paul taught in the first letter. But apparently now we have confusion because the Thessalonian's were facing increased persecution and someone has used their persecution to deceive them into thinking that their persecutions are day of the Lord persecutions, and therefore they missed the rapture.

So Paul is writing to correct this error, they had not missed the rapture, they were not in the day of the Lord. So Paul requests what? Verse 2, **that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed.** The Greek says **that you be not quickly shaken from the way of thinking...**it's a word of thinking, *noos*, and has to do with the reasoning processes in the mind, our way of thinking. And Paul says don't be quickly or abruptly shaken from it. See, the Bible says there is **the way of thinking** with the definite article there and it means there is only one way of thinking. You can think other ways, yes, but when you think other ways you're deceived, verse 3. There is only one way of thinking properly about history because God wrote history and God controls history. He controls whatsoever comes to pass and so there is thinking His way, taking thoughts captive to Him and then there is thinking our way, imagining the world, making up what we think history is. Based on what has happened in our imaginary

history we predict the future, but it's all vanity, speculation and futile because we're in no position to understand the world left to ourselves. And Paul is saying don't be quickly shaken from the real way of thinking about history because there is only one real way to think about it. From God's perspective, not man's. Then he says **or be disturbed**, that is, don't be troubled by people who come along with these vain imaginations and try to pawn them off on you.

We'd say today, just to give an example, do not be quickly shaken from the truth of creation and don't be troubled by what's in the public school textbooks about evolution, the grand universal history accepted by the academic elite, don't let that bother you because that's vain imagination, that's somebody's dream world that doesn't exist. That is all in their head and they are blind, they profess to be wise but they are fools. And Paul would tell us today, don't let that disturb you, that may be the official, government sanctioned pagan myth, but you stand firm on the truth of the actual, God ordained universal history.

But the issue here they should stand firm on was the truth of the Rapture and its relationship to the Day of the Lord. When does the Rapture occur with respect to the Day of the Lord? Answer, Paul had taught them that the Rapture is what sets off the Day of the Lord and therefore no Christian could possibly enter it. But someone had told them otherwise. And Paul mentions three possible sources from which they had heard this deception, **either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us.**

Let's take these in turn, first, **either by a spirit**, this is one who claimed to have a prophetic utterance, there were people who claimed to be prophets in the first century and there are people who claim to be prophets today. But they all have to be tested according to the standards of Deut 13 and 18. They may be able to do all kinds of miracles, signs and wonders but that is not the test, false prophets can do signs, miracles and wonders. Notice down in verse 9 that the Antichrist, who's coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, will come with all power and signs and false wonders and yet they are deceptions of wickedness. Just because someone does great signs and wonders does not mean they are a true prophet of God, that's what most people like, but the Antichrist will do signs, miracles and wonders that are counterfeits and will lead people astray. So signs, miracles and wonders, the

things that get people all goo-goo eyed, prove absolutely nothing, by themselves, prove absolutely nothing. They always have to be accompanied by what? Orthodox teaching. Is the person speaking orthodoxy? Does he have orthodoxy coming out of his mouth. So it's never what can the person do but what words are coming out of the mouth of the person. Are they orthodox? Do they line up with prior revelation? After that we can talk about signs, miracles and wonders.

For example, case in point right here, how did Paul know that these utterances made were sourced in a false, deceptive spirit and not the Spirit of God? Because they taught that the day of the Lord had come and that was patently false, that is not what the word of God declared. The word of God declared that the day of the Lord was a day of God's judgment and wrath and that Christians were not destined to enter God's judgment and wrath. The Rapture occurs before and so the first source of error were those who made prophetic utterances that they were in the day of the Lord and they may have done great miracles to get a following, we don't know, but since that is contrary to previous revelation then it was a false spirit, a false prophet.

Now it is my suggestion that they were a little fearful of despising prophetic utterances because Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20 told them "Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances." Earlier they had quenched some of the genuine work of the Holy Spirit, particularly the spiritual gift of prophecy and therefore they were not listening to the Spirit of God. So Paul had commanded them to stop doing that. Now, three or four months later they have this fear of despising prophetic utterances and they weren't following through with verse 21 where Paul had told them to examine prophetic utterances carefully, meaning subject them to the standards of Deuteronomy 13 and 18. So instead of testing them they had just opened the door to all prophetic utterances and this is equally destructive as rejecting all prophetic utterances. It's easy to accept it all or reject it all, but what is hard to do is to examine someone carefully, because you have to listen to everything they say and you have to measure everything they say by what has been previously revealed. And that takes work. Nobody wants to work so they just say, he did a great thing, he did a sign and they go after him and become deceived. Sort of like those who went after Harold Camping who dated the rapture to May 21, 2011, and they did all sorts of stupid, stupid things. They built their whole edifice on what Harold Camping said and he's

been saying this for a long time so say family had built up \$464,000 in savings account and down here they have dated the end of the world. What do you think these people did with the \$464,000? They said we have X number of years until the rapture and therefore we will divide \$464,000 by that number of years and on the day that we are raptured we will purchase our last McDonald's cheeseburger and be out of here. And now these people are still here and they don't have any money for McDonald's cheeseburger. And this happened...so this is not just speculation. You have got to test the spirits, whether they are demonic or whether they are from God.

Second source of the deception, **or a message**, literally “a word,” this is an oral speech, someone who gave a lecture or something, someone who was standing in the pulpit as an authority figure using the pulpit to mislead the Thessalonians. That happened then and that happens now. There is nothing new under the sun. People use the pulpit to bully people around and lead them into error on purpose. This is often calculated and when it is it normally accrues to their benefit somehow or another. So they not only had false prophets, but they had false teachers. And you can see that Satan is working overtime to destroy these believers.

And third, **or a letter as if from us**, this is a forgery, someone wrote a letter in the name of Paul and Silas and Timothy to try to mislead the Thessalonians. See, Paul, Silas and Timothy had credibility with the Thessalonians and so people who wanted to influence others would forge letters in the name of those who had credibility. People did this commonly in the ancient world and they still do it today, mislead through some e-mail that someone sends that comes as if it's from some friend of yours and it's a complete forgery, they hacked into your e-mail or something and stole the e-mail addresses of your friends so you'll click on their link and you get a virus on your computer.

Now because this happened Paul started signing his own letters with a particular mark at the end of every letter, there was something about the way Paul wrote and it became his distinguishing mark at the end of each letter. Paul wrote a certain way and nobody else could write like Paul so Paul started putting his mark on his letters to authenticate that this was his letter and not some forgery.

So now we have false prophets, false teachers and false letters that had influenced the Thessalonians and Paul says **we request you, brethren, that you not be quickly shaken from the right way of thinking or be disturbed by false prophets were false teachers or false letters as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.** Don't worry, they're all lies.

And we should point out at the end of verse 2, the expression **has come**, if you have the King James version says "is at hand," which would communicate that it was about to come, but it wasn't there yet. That's a poor translation, the word means it "has arrived," it has come, and it's in the perfect tense which means past, completed action with ongoing results. So the idea propagated by the false prophets, false teachers and false letters was that the day of the Lord had already begun with the effect that they were in it.

Now, why would someone, why would Satan, want to distort the true way of thinking about the rapture and the day of the Lord? Let's close with this. Why would Satan want believers to think that they would enter into the day of the Lord? I think it is for one major reason. And I think this reason is a very, very important difference so far as living a successful Christian life. And here it is. Let's say the rapture occurs before the day of the Lord so that no Christian will enter into the day of the Lord. In that way of looking at the world, if that is your belief system then who are you looking for? You are looking for Christ coming. You are focusing your eyes on Jesus Christ. But let's say the rapture occurs after the day of the Lord begins so that all Christians will enter into at least a portion of the day of the Lord if not all of it. If that is the way that you are looking at the world, that is your belief system and who are you looking for? You are looking for Antichrist. You are focusing your eyes on the beast of Revelation. Now is that where we are supposed to be focusing our eyes? If we are focusing our eyes on Antichrist who is it down in verse 9 that energizes Antichrist? Who are our eyes really focused on? They're really focused on Satan. And Satan wants your focus, Satan wants your worship. Now this is such a fundamental difference as far as daily focus is concerned. I really know of no more basic difference. And it saddens me that most of the church rejects what Paul teaches here in 2 Thessalonians 2 regarding this fundamental difference. If I held to any other position than the day of the Lord rapture then I personally would be

vigorously searching for Antichrist to try and identify him and to prepare in this world to live under his rule. How am I going to survive in his kingdom? If I'm not going to take the mark of the beast and have 666 stamped on my forehead or on the back of my hand so I can go down to the local supermarket and purchase goods, then how am I going to survive in his kingdom? How am I going to make myself self-sufficient so that I don't have dependence on the normal means of economic commerce? See, a whole series of questions that are very disturbing and very troubling in mind began to surface when my belief system says that Christians must enter into the day of the Lord. If, however, I am holding to what Paul very clearly taught regarding the Christians patient expectation of Christ, and my eyes are focused on Christ and looking for Christ coming, then I have a whole different set of questions that I am asking. Namely, how am I going to prepare in this world to live under his rule in His kingdom. How can I safely use my spiritual gifts in preparation for his kingdom? How can I suffer persecution well in order to prepare to serve in his kingdom? How can I distribute the gospel with great urgency that others may be called out of this world to be inhabitants of his kingdom? So there are a whole different set of questions that I am asking when I am looking for Christ than if I were looking for Antichrist. And it is most certainly a Satanic deception to get our eyes off of Christ and on to Satan himself. Satan wants our worship and he vies for it doctrinally. He's not stupid like so many Christians who believe well, it doesn't really matter what you believe it matters how you live. If Satan believed that he wouldn't go to the effort to send false prophets, false teachers and false letters to deceive believers with false doctrine. Satan knows that what matters is what you believe because it determines the way you live. And so he distorts, he twists truth, he nuances because he wants our worship. That's why I have to say, I am bound to say by the words of the living God, that any other position as far as eschatology is concerned is a deception. And he removes the central focus of the Christian away from Christ and onto Satan. It really doesn't bother me one bit to say that and I'd be willing to stand toe to toe with any individual in the whole world on this issue. Because there simply is no grammatical-historical evidence to the contrary. The Bible consistently teaches this truth and it does so clearly. You, if you are a believer, cannot enter the day of the Lord. Therefore do not be looking for Antichrist, be looking for Christ, be living as if He is coming for you, and be prepared so that when He comes you will have confidence and not shame.

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