*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 7 - 12

Letters of Paul

**Monday, February 7 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2**

“Let us clarify some things about the coming of Jesus Christ”

 The main topic to which Paul now turns is stated clearly: “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him.” Paul goes on to reveal his specific point of concern: At least some of the Thessalonians have become unsettled or alarmed by a claim to the effect that the Lord has already returned. In other words, at least some in the congregation had come to the conclusion that the resurrection that Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 spoke of as yet future had already taken place.

 Their conclusion was apparently based either on misinformation or on a misunderstanding related to Paul’s previous teaching on the subject. It may have come via the claim of a prophetic vision, or a message or teaching, or a letter supposedly received from Paul (the claim that Christ had already returned was so far removed from anything he actually taught that the possibility of a forged letter crossed his mind). But Paul’s primary concern is not with how the claim reached them, but with its content, which apparently had been attributed to him.

*There will be misinformation about your return, Lord, so give me clarity. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 8 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4**

“Don’t be fooled by what they say”

 With respect to this misunderstanding, Paul emphatically denies both its attribution to him and its content. Any claim that the Lord has returned is false, he insists, because certain things that must happen first have not yet happened. These things that must happen first include (1) the occurrence of the rebellion, and (2) the revealing of the man of lawlessness. Paul says nothing further about the rebellion (taking for granted that his readers know what he means – see verse 5). Similar to other New Testament writers, he probably has in view a time of dramatically increasing wrongdoing and widespread opposition to God.

 The leader of this rebellion is described as a man of lawlessness. Paul further characterizes this individual as one who not only opposes God but also exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped. The result and climax of this arrogant and audacious self-exaltation is the attempt by this person to usurp the very power and position of the one true God and to declare himself to be God.

*Evil opposes you, Lord, and seeks to replace you. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 9 2 Thessalonians 2:5-8**

“The Lord Jesus will destroy him at his coming”

 The basic structure of what Paul says in these verses is as follows: (1) The secret power of lawlessness is already at work, but (2) it is operating in a manner that is somehow restrained or held back. (3) At some future time, however, the lawless one will be revealed, at which point (4) he will be overthrown and destroyed by the far greater power and splendor of the Lord’s return. Evil is currently at work in the world (as evidenced by the persecutions the Thessalonians are experiencing), but it is nonetheless in some way limited or hindered.

 What or who did Paul have in mind as the restraining force? Many suggestions have been put forth, and at the very least we can declare that it must be a force for good. If it is not God himself, it must be something or someone who does his bidding. But, in the end, we must confess that we do not know what or who Paul means. Regardless, the day will come when the restraining force is taken out of the way and the lawless one reveals himself. However, once revealed, the Lord Jesus Christ will destroy him.

*Though evil is powerful, Lord, you will overcome and destroy it. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 7 - 12

Letters of Paul

**Thursday, February 10 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12**

“He comes to do the work of Satan”

 The counterfeit signs and wonders of the lawless one exercise their deceptive effect on those who are not part of the community of faith. While true miracles and wonders reveal the glory of God, these counterfeit signs and wonders are the work of Satan. Those who are convinced by them are headed toward destruction specifically because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved. When they could have believed God’s truth, they instead delighted in wickedness. (One need only review the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 3 and their acceptance of the snake’s deception rather than God’s command, to understand how Satan works. Convinced by and acting upon Satan’s lies, they are excluded from God’s presence.)

 An implication is that those who are part of the community of faith will not be deceived by the false wonders, for they love and accept God’s truth. This implication functions as an exhortation to remain faithful: Those who do love the truth should not be deceived by the counterfeit miracles and wonders.

*I will resists Satan’s deceptions, Lord, and follow your truth. Amen.*

**Friday, February 11 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15**

“Stand firm”

 In contrast with those who are headed toward destruction because they delight in wickedness, Paul gives thanks to God for those Thessalonian brothers and sisters who are loved by the Lord and who from the very beginning were chosen by God for salvation. Paul’s major goal is to reassure the Thessalonians regarding their fate (salvation), in contrast to that of those opposing and persecuting them. Regardless of the efforts of the coming lawless one to deceive them, their salvation is in God’s hand who has given them the Holy Spirit. He, in turn, makes them holy and causes them to share in the future glory of Christ, although for a time they share in his suffering.

 The reason for why God ought to be thanked becomes the basis for further encouragement. They are to “stand firm,” a command that serves as the positive counterpart of “do not become easily unsettled or alarmed” (verse 2a). Moreover, Paul wants them to hold fast to what he and his fellow missionaries have taught them, not what someone is claiming or alleging that they taught (verse 2b).

*In spite of evil, Lord, I will not be unsettled or alarmed. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 12 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17**

“Comfort and hope”

 Having sought to comfort and strengthen the Thessalonians with his words, Paul now prays that they be comforted and strengthened by God himself. In verse 16, Paul has in view two gifts of God. The first is eternal comfort, that is, comfort that will outlast the afflictions of this age, comfort that sustains us until we experience eternal life in its fullest. The second is wonderful hope in which hope is not based on an individual’s own behavior but on God’s gracious love, thereby providing a solid base for genuine optimism about the future.

 Paul goes on to express his desire that the inward comfort and hope that God gives in the face of external opposition be accompanied by godly behavior in whatever Christians say and do. As this chapter, which has focused on the future coming of the man of lawlessness, comes to an end, it is worth noting that talk about the future ends up serving the present in light of what God has done in the past. Future trouble leads to prayer for present encouragement based on God having loved us and given us his grace.

*Your love and grace encourage me, Lord, to face present and future trouble. Amen.*