

## **When All Hell Breaks Loose**

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And Then The End Will Come Series

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

I mentioned last week that I had the privilege a week and a half ago of being invited to participate in a wonderful meeting on faith and politics at Yale University. The meeting brought together politicians and theologians, religious leaders, and a couple of pastors like me to talk about the current state of affairs between politics and faith. It was an extremely stimulating time and I was very glad to be able to participate in those roundtable discussions and on panels for Yale students and faculty.

But while I was there I heard two very encouraging bits of news. There was a document issued recently by 138 leading Muslim scholars and clerics from every part of the Muslim world – from Morocco to Indonesia, involving Sudanese, Shiites, and Sufi scholars – titled “A Common Word.” It was a signed open letter by all of these top Muslim clerics and scholars reaching out to the Christian community across the world for the sake of reconciliation and peace with the Christian community.

And one of the most extraordinary things about this document that all of these Muslim scholars and clerics from across all Muslim traditions said was that we have a basis for peaceful coexistence with the Christian community based on the common foundation of Christianity and Islam. And the way they described the foundation of Islam was this – in the words of Jesus:

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We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

They said that these two great commandments can form a foundation for a huge relationship between the two great religious communities in the world – the Christian community and the Muslim community. Many people are saying that this Muslim document may be the most important inter-faith document in the last 40 years since Vatican II.

Some people at Yale have put together a Christian response warmly communicating on behalf of the Christian community a desire for peace and reconciliation based on these two great commands. The response from the Christian community is going to be printed in a full-page ad in the New York Times – probably by this next week. I was asked if I would sign this response and I said that I would be honored to sign it. They are planning a meeting of top

Christian leaders and Muslim leaders sometime in the Spring. We can only pray that where politics has utterly failed and where sociology offers no answer, perhaps the two great commandments of Jesus can build a bridge between our Christian community and the worldwide Muslim community.

And then there was another very encouraging development in the last few weeks. The UN Secretary General just met with top evangelical leaders in Washington. Now, this is historic in and of itself because a generation ago evangelicals suspected that the UN Secretary General might be the antichrist. And now there is this meeting in Washington between the head of the UN and the head of evangelical churches and agencies across America. And guess what? The new Secretary General of the UN is himself an evangelical Christian. His name is Ban Ki-Moon. He is a South Korean and he said to this assembly that the world is looking to the Christian community for global leadership on a range of issues from human trafficking and torture to the Darfur and global warming. The Christian leaders present in Washington warmly accepted the challenge of leadership.

And here is a third bit of encouraging news. Did you know that around the world that more people have been lifted out of grinding poverty in the past 25 years than in all the previous millennia of human history combined? Back in 1980 it was accurate to describe the world in terms of a pyramid. We had the wealthy 1 billion and the impoverished 3 billion. But in the last 25 years the world has radically changed. We have now the wealthy 1 billion, the middle 4 billion, and the bottom billion. Countries like China, India, Bangladesh, are lifting themselves out of grinding poverty. Billions of people around the world who previously had barely enough to eat are now getting educations, finding access to global markets, getting medical attention – there is still a bottom billion, 70% of whom live in Sub-Saharan Africa; there are still a billion people on planet earth who live on less than \$2 a day. But the news regarding global poverty is, in fact, hopeful.

Three extraordinary bits of news in the last two weeks. Of course, you probably didn't hear about either one of them. They are not nearly as important as Ellen Degeneres' dog custody problems, or Brittany Spears custody issues with her two children, or Marie Osmond fainting on Dancing With The Stars.

And, most importantly Lance Armstrong has hooked up with Ashley Olsen, the girl from Full House. One source says that she was sitting on his lap; another said that they were hanging out and seemed to be having a good time together. Important news...

The positive signs that I mentioned just a moment ago – this letter from the Muslim clerics and the Christian community's response with a planned future meeting; these positive signs might prove to be false hopes; maybe nothing more than another letter and another meeting that accomplishes absolutely nothing – like all the previous Mideast Peace Conferences, the bright hope from this recent

opening might prove to be an illusion. And maybe Christian leadership at the United Nations might not produce anything more than anyone else's leadership.

And it is, as I said, still the case that there are a billion people on planet earth living in abject poverty. Of course, we continue to hear a steady drumbeat of other bad news...

There is evidence of global climate change; Iran is working to obtain nuclear weapons; there are transnational terrorist groups.

What will the future be like before the Lord returns? Will it be really good? Or will it be really bad?

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the dominant view of Christians was very optimistic. Christians in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries believed that despite the attempts of Satan to thwart God's purposes whether through seduction or persecution, the people of God would be successful in completing their mandate. Christ will reign over the world through his obedient church and as a result, the world will enjoy an era of peace and righteousness prior to the coming of Christ. That view was called post-millennialism.

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Post-millennialism

The world would increasingly come under the ruling reign of Christ before he returned.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a real shift in Christians' view of the future. In light of WWI and WWII and global communism, 20<sup>th</sup> century Christians were decidedly pessimistic as they looked at the days preceding Christ's return. Unlike 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Christians who saw the days growing brighter and brighter, 20<sup>th</sup> century Christians saw dark days ahead. To 20<sup>th</sup> century Christians, despite all of our attempts to convert or reform the world prior to the end, the antichrist will emerge and gain control of human affairs. Very few people will likely be converted. Only the catastrophic action of the returning Lord will bring about his reign in this world. That view is called:

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Pre-millennialism

So will the future before the Lord returns be really good, or really bad? According to scripture, I see both. I'm neither a complete optimist nor a total pessimist. As I look at the future, I am what you could call a biblical realist.

SLIDE  
Biblical realism

The last days, according to the scriptures, are both incredibly encouraging and very discouraging. I see the universal spread and global triumph of the gospel. But I also believe that there are real limits on what we human beings can achieve apart from the radical intervention of God through the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. And today we are going to look at the negative edge of the future – the belief that before the Lord returns the demonic opposition to God that is already present in this world in a restrained way will ultimately reach a peak and be incarnate in a person who will lead a massive antichrist, anti-Christian movement. As I continue in this series on what the Bible teaches about the end times, I've called today's talk, "When All Hell Breaks Loose." Let's pray.

SLIDE – 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 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. 4 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. 5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, 10 and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

So let's read vv. 1-3

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:1-3

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 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.

Apparently, there was false teaching about the end times that was coming into the Thessalonian church. We don't know exactly what that teaching was. There is a statement in v. 2 that some were saying:

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:2  
...the day of the Lord has already come.

There is a modern version of this view that Christ has already come among Jehovah Witnesses. Their founder, Charles Taze Russell, first taught that the world would end in 1874. And then he revised his calculations and said that the world would end in 1914. After that year passed without the Lord returning, his successor, Judge Rutherford, asserted that Christ did, in fact, come on October 1, 1914. But he came invisibly and on that day he exchanged an ordinary seat at the Father's right hand for the throne of his Kingdom.

And so the coming of Christ is no longer expected, it has already taken place. Whatever the teaching was, Paul warns the Thessalonians not to become easily unsettled.

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:2  
not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come.

That phrase literally means:

SLIDE  
Shaken in your minds

The word picture is that of a ship that is ripped away from the dock during a storm.

Unsettled. When I think about who gets unsettled by end times teaching, it is usually new converts, it is usually young believers who are super-enthusiastic, but whose roots don't run very deep. When I came to faith in Christ in the early 1970's every teenage Christian and every Christian in their early 20's was totally confident that we were going to see the return of the Lord within a few years, if not within a few months.

Paul is speaking to new converts. He is talking to young believers, who are always given to the most novel ideas they just read in a recent book on biblical prophecy. You always have new converts and young believers running around saying, "Hey, I just heard this amazing teaching online from some guy from

England. He proved that if you add it up, the Greek equivalent of the letters of Vladimir Putin's name turns out to be exactly 666." Do you know that Iran is making a deal with China for nuclear technology and there is an obscure verse from Ezekiel 38 in this book that I'm reading [that wrenches the verse totally out of context] that predicts the exchange of nuclear technology – isn't that incredible?

Paul is concerned not only about young and enthusiastic believers being shaken in their minds, but he is also concerned about people's emotions. It says in v. 2,

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:2

not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come.

Jesus says the same thing in Mark 13:7

SLIDE – Mk. 13:7

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

What he is talking about are the folks who hear end-times teachings and they start fretting. They get really agitated. If you get really agitated as you think about the future, if you get jumpy and worried, that is precisely the emotion that the Bible tells you not to have.

What is the response that we ought to have to end-times teaching? We read in v. 15,

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:15

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

Instead of being easily unsettled, handing out bits of new cool information, or the most recent Left Behind novel, or prophecy book, or some online teaching, Paul urges the response of stability.

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Response...Stability

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:15

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

Stand firm, be stable, is something we want in every area of life, isn't it? Governments want a stable economy; builders want to build stable houses; ships

and aircrafts have stabilizers to counteract turbulence and the ocean's movements. And there is something really wonderful about being around another person who is stable, who has a stable personality and stable character and stable convictions. One of the marks of maturity, emotionally and spiritually, is that you are stable. You are not running all over the place looking for the will of God everywhere, everything in your life thrown up in the air; your emotions going up and down like a roller coaster, blowing in the wind like a reed, but instead you are stable.

Friends, would you say that you are a stable person? Stable in your convictions, trustworthy, solid, someone that other people could really rely upon? Psalm 1 describes the stable person.

SLIDE – Psalm 1:1-4

Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, 2 but who delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on his law day and night. 3 They are like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers. 4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

Friends, unless your roots go down deep into God's Word, unless you put yourself in a setting or situation where you are systematically learning the Word of God digging deep into it, reading and meditating upon God's Word day in and day out; listening to really healthy sound Bible teaching; reading healthy sound Christian books that explain the Bible to you in a healthy way, you are just going to be blown around with every novelty, each fad, every interesting new idea.

What is supposed to happen before the Lord returns? Paul says 2 things: a certain event must take place, and a certain person must appear – v. 3

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:3

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.

What event must take place?

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:3

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.

The Greek word translated rebellion here is

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## Apostasia

It is where we get the word “apostasy” from. Before the Lord returns there is going to be a great revolt, there is going to be a great rebellion. Now it could be a political rebellion against civil government, or a great rebellion against God, a massive defection of many people from the Christian church. Or it might be a combination of the two. That’s what I think. Civil anarchy and spiritual apostasy.

Just incidentally, back in the 1830’s there was a man named James Nelson Darby, who believed that he got fresh insight into the meaning of this word “apostasia.” He said that this word ought better be understood as a departure not from the faith, but a departure from the earth. And so he saw in this verse a secret rapture of the church before the Lord returned. Most scholars believe that Darby’s view of v. 3 is highly unlikely. Apostasia never in the Bible means a secret departure from the earth, a rapture, it means a falling away from the faith, a rebellion against government and against God.

You should expect, before the end, that there will be a turning away from Christ on the part of many people. People in the church who are walking beside us as brothers and sisters will turn away. Jesus predicts this in Matthew 24:10,

SLIDE – Matt. 24:10

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,

So what should our response be to this prediction of defection from the Lord? Our response is loyalty.

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### Loyalty

Developing loyalty to Jesus Christ is a really big deal. See, Christian discipleship is not primarily a matter of what you know about God. Christian discipleship is primarily a matter of obedient following of Jesus. Jesus’ charge to his disciples was not “read about me, think about me, put bumper stickers on your cars mentioning me” – Jesus’ charge to his disciples was “follow me.”

You know, it is interesting in all our talk about the problem of Christian leaders today there is very little discussion of followership. You cannot be a great Christian leader without being a great follower of Jesus. When you look around our city or our state and you see pastors and Christian leaders who have failed, the issue is almost never that they lacked the skills to be good pastors, or good worship leaders, or good small group leaders. When we think of failure by a Christian leader, what we really mean is that that leader has stopped being a good follower of Christ. They’ve broken ranks with him in their thought life, in their private life, in some self-serving attitude, in some relationship. There is



some secret life that is going on. The person believes that they have a better idea than Jesus in the area of money, or sex, or work, or marriage.

Let me put it this way: What we are going to be like in the end, we're sowing the seeds of right now. The end is just reaping what you are sowing right now; what you've been sowing for years.

Let me make this really personal. Do you see yourself sowing the seeds of disloyalty to Jesus Christ right now in your life? Because, brothers and sisters, if you are denying Jesus now at your job; if you can't be open about Christ right now in your classroom, or with your family; if we can't be open about Christ in a situation of mild opposition, how in the world would we think that we will be able to confess Christ if we are arrested? If you can't follow Jesus when it is easy, how will you follow Jesus when it is hard? If you aren't loyal to Christ right now in simple things, following him regarding your spending of money, or tithing, or forgiving others for small things, what you do with your free time, how will you be loyal to Jesus and follow after him in hard things?

Before the end, Paul says, an event will occur – a great revolt. The seeds of which are being sown by Satan into your heart right now. Do you see that?

Not only an event will occur, but a person will be revealed. Paul gives four labels to this person that must be revealed before Christ returns in v. 3,

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:3

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.

First of all, he is the lawless one. Second, in v. 3,

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:3

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 is the doomed one. And in v. 4 we read,

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:4

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.

He is the opposing one. And...

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:4

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.

He is the lawless one; he is the doomed one; he is the opposing one; and, he is the worshipped one.

Now, let's look at these in turn.

The apostle Paul never uses the word "antichrist." That word "antichrist" is only found in the books of 1 and 2 John. We read this in 1 John 2:18,

SLIDE – 1 John 2:18

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrist's have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.

Even though Paul doesn't use the term antichrist, that is the person he is describing with these four labels. Let's take these in turn. He is the lawless one. Three times he is called lawless one. In verse 3,

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:3

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.

And in v. 8,

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:8

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

In v. 9,

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:9

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie,

And then in v. 7, we read

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:7

For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.

This is a person who is opposed to civil law; that is, he is opposed to government and government regulation of life. And this person is also opposed to God's law. He is opposed to all moral standards. The spirit of antichrist is the spirit of someone who hates rules, who hates standards. Where there is a rule, they just want to smash it. The spirit of antichrist is a spirit of rebellion; it is the spirit of license. It is the person who says, "I want to be able to indulge every desire, every whim, and every lust in my life. I'm going to give vent to everything without restraint." We ought to be able to be as nasty as we want to be.

The spirit of antichrist is seen in societies that unleash fallen human appetites and silences and shames someone who says, "You know, there ought to be some moderation; there ought to be some restraint on human appetite." We can't raise healthy children without putting some boundaries on our appetites, particularly the sexual appetite.

We are so schizophrenic regarding the raising of children in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, aren't we? On the one hand, we are obsessed with trying to keep our children safe from sexual predators. There was just a front-page story this week about an attorney in town who tried to pick up a 14-year old girl in the Statehouse. We are obsessed as a society with people who are preying upon our children.

But does our obsession with sexual predators mean that we are consistently, as a society, attempting to protect our children? Are we really, as a society, really trying to carve out a period of innocence for our kids to live securely and safely as children?

Of course not. In every other way we are ramming sex down our children's throats. How many of you moms struggle to find anything that you find is appropriate and modest for your daughter to wear that doesn't call undue attention to their bodies? How many of you parents or grandparents have had the experience of watching television with your child or grandchild and then suddenly been rudely interrupted by some over the top advertisement for a new show?

A dear friend of mine was telling me that she was watching TV the other day with her 6-year old grandson. They were watching an innocent show together and then there was an advertisement for Tila Tequila's new show, "A Shot At Love" which is apparently a kind of "Bachelor" type show in which participants line up to compete for the affections of Tila Tequila. Only this particular show not only has a line-up of men, but also a line-up of woman. And before my friend was able to find the remote and click it off, her 6-year old grandson watched a woman not only French-kissing a line of men, but French-kissing women.

What is the response to this lawlessness? I don't think the response is for Christians to simply organize themselves to petition the FCC or to write to your congressmen. I am not opposed to that, if that's your calling, but I think there is a deeper call to the Christian community than simply a legislative response. I

believe the call to the Christian community in the face of massive self-indulgence, is first of all a response of self-denial.

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Response: Self-Denial

When the Christian community is watching this kind of stuff, when we as followers of Jesus have so indulged our own appetites and there is scandal after scandal in the church, where do we Christians get off trying to morally reform the rest of the culture? We need to first get our own house in order. When the Christian viewing of pornography is no different than the rest of the world's, and the statistics regarding abortion are no different in the Roman Catholic Church than in the larger society, and no different than in the evangelical church than in the larger society, where do we get off attempting to regulate other people's behavior?

The answer to lawlessness is not more law. The answer to lawlessness is self-denial.

SLIDE

Response: Self-Denial

You know, brothers and sisters, when people restrain themselves, they don't have to be externally restrained by law. The only reason why we need contracts that are 200 pages long is because we human beings can't trust each other's handshake. Jesus said, "Let your yes be yes." We don't need a lot of laws.

What we do need, however, is to teach our children to restrain their appetites and to learn to delay gratification, to learn to say "no" to themselves. And we as adults have to learn how to say "no" to our flesh, no to our appetites, no to our cravings, no to our secret habits.

The antichrist is not only described as the lawless one, but also as the doomed one.

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:3

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.

And the response to this is:

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Response: God wins

In the book of Revelation, John in part, takes us into the future. We see the world in the light of heaven, and John enables us to see the present in light of the future. In John's day many Christians were suffering persecution at the hands of Rome because they wouldn't worship the Emperor. They wouldn't give the Emperor the title Lord and God. Christians refused to take part in Roman pagan festivals. John's revelation offered persecuted Christians comfort.

But it wasn't the comfort of a promised escape. He doesn't say, "Persecuted Christians, don't worry. God would never allow you to experience any pain." He doesn't say to persecuted Christians, "Don't worry; you are going to be transported to heaven before any of you are ever martyred." He doesn't say to persecuted Christians, "Don't worry; the Lord would never let anything horrible happen to his children."

But what the book of Revelation does say is that even though right now you are experiencing conflict, in the end you will conquer. Even though now you are wounded, in the end you will win. Even though you are now being victimized, in the end you will be victorious. The book of Revelation is not an escapist book, but it is an incredibly hopeful book. The book of Revelation says, "Christians, you may be suffering injustice now; you may be persecuted now; you may be abused now; but, take heart! the end of the story is that God wins and you also will win if you remain faithful to him."

In other words, fill your heart with hope. God wins and you win

And the antichrist is described is described as the opposing one and the worshipped one in v. 4.

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:4

He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Now there is a lot of debate about what it means by "he is going to take his seat in the temple." Some people are looking forward to the rebuilding of an actual temple in Jerusalem. Some people say that it is possible that he is talking about the Christian church taking up residence in the place of the worship of God. Leon Morris had it right, I think, when he said, "No particular temple is in mind, but the motif of sitting in the temple and claiming to be God is used to express the opposition of evil to God."

He is claiming deity for himself. The essence of antichrist is the desire to play God and to demand worship as if antichrist was God. We read in Rev. 13:8 these words:

SLIDE – Revelation 13:8

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

The spirit of demanding worship is going to find its ultimate expression in the last days in the antichrist. But there are, as John tells us in his letter, many antichrists that have already gone out into the world. You know, governments love to play God. They demand loyalty, obedience, unconditional allegiance that belongs to God alone. Many, many governments throughout history have required their subjects to actually worship them as deities. This was the state policy in Pharaoh's Egypt. It was the state policy in Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. In Rome Emperors such as Julius Caesar, Augustus, Claudius and Titus were pronounced divine by the Roman Senate after their deaths.

The most outrageous claim to deity was made by the Emperor Domitian at the time of the writing of the Book of Revelation. Domitian demanded that he be addressed by the title, "Dominus et Deus" – Lord and God.

In this century, Hitler, as the so-called Fuhrer, demanded an oath of loyalty by pastors and bishops in the German church that was total and unreserved. The oath of loyalty demanded that pastors' actions, thoughts, and comments be completely submitted to this one man, who as the incarnation of the German people, was subject to no law or power superior to himself. Almost all German pastors and bishops and seminary students were willing to take an oath of loyalty binding them outwardly and inwardly in their thoughts and consciences to Adolph Hitler.

We've got the same demand of worship of the government in places like Turkmenistan and North Korea.

So, what is the response to this antichrist self-exaltation? The response is to worship God.

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Response: Worship God

In Revelation 14:6-7 we read these words:

SLIDE – Revelation 14:6-7

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. 7 He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

You know, one of the great protectors from the spirit of antichrist from false loyalties, false attachments, from the demands of governments for oath of allegiance, oaths of loyalty, is to regularly practice worshipping the Lord. The half hour we spend each week in public worship; if you come on time and enter in saying, Lord, I need to deeply connect with you. How will you not be drawn along into antichrist worship? Because now you are sowing the seeds in your heart of passionate worship of God.

Who is this person? Certainly there were aspects of this person in Paul's day in the person of the Emperor. Throughout history there have been various identifications of antichrist in the corrupt Popes of the middle ages, Napoleon and Kaiser Wilhelm, Hitler and Mussolini, and Stalin. There are multiple forerunners because 1 John 2:18 tells us,

SLIDE – 1 John 2:18

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.

But there will be an ultimate antichrist, someone who is the very embodiment and incarnation of evil in this world. What is our response as we think about who this person might be? Our response is humility and self-examination.

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Response: Humility and Self-Examination

Humility, in that we know so many have gotten wrong before labeling this or that person as antichrist; and self-examination. Here is the deal brothers and sisters. We should never simply externalize evil and project it out there and say: I know this is the evil government; it is there in Iran. It is there in Russia. It is there in North Korea. There is evil – out there. Whenever you hear about evil and disloyalty to God, lawlessness, self-exaltation, our response ought to be the same response as the disciples who were told by Jesus at the Last Supper, "One of you will betray me." It says in Matthew 26:22 these words:

SLIDE – Matt. 26:22

22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely not I, Lord?"

Is it me, Lord? Do I have evil living in me? Am I a betrayer of you? Am I disloyal? Am I self-exalting? Do you examine yourself before God?

And then in vv. 6-12 we see all hell break loose, the restraining influence of evil being removed. It says in vv. 6-7 these verses:

SLIDE – 2 Thess. 2:6-7

And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.

The identity of antichrist ought to be done with humility because so many have gotten it wrong. Approaching this question of what is the restraining influence that will be removed ought to be approached with even more humility. In fact, someone much closer in time to the writing of the apostle Paul, namely the great St. Augustine, said about vv. 6-7,

SLIDE

*Frankly, I haven't a clue what the apostle Paul meant here.*

There are over a dozen suggestions concerning what the restraining influence is. Is it the power of the gospel? Is it the Spirit of God working through the church? I do not think that this is a veiled reference to a secret rapture. I think that the best guess regarding the obscure language of the apostle Paul is that he is writing in this coded language because he is talking about the Roman civil government, the power of the state. This is what the early church generally believed what Paul meant by this language. The natural restrainer of lawlessness is law and Paul, for wisdom reasons, reasons of tact, would have used veiled language in talking about the removal of the state of Rome and civil government from the scene.

Today, unfortunately, in many places in the world, we see what happens when government is swept away. What happens in failed states like Somalia or in Iraq. Anarchy and violence; and, the horror that results when there isn't some government, some order over sinful people.

William Yeats, the poet, talks about what happens when restraint is removed. He wrote this:

SLIDE

*Things fall apart: the center cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.*

What is the response to the loosing of forces of wickedness in this world? There is but one response: Love Jesus now more than you love anything else.

SLIDE

Response: Stay in love with Jesus



Jude 1:21 says this:

SLIDE – Jude 1:21

keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

If you want to be able to stand in the day of evil, ask God while there is still time, to make your heart burn white-hot in love for Jesus Christ. Cause me to be passionately in love with you, Lord. May it be that there is nothing that I wouldn't do for you. Let me love you, Lord Jesus. Amen.

## **When All Hell Breaks Loose**

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Rich Nathan

November 3-4, 2007

And Then The End Will Come Series

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

### ***I. What will the future be like?***

Response: Bible Realism

### ***II. What is the danger of end-time teaching? (2 Thess. 2.1, 2)***

A. Intellectually

B. Emotionally

Response: Stability (2 Thess. 2.15)

### ***III. What must happen before the Lord returns?***

A. An Event (2 Thess. 2.3)

Response: Loyalty

B. A Person

1. The Lawless One (2 Thess. 2.3, 8, 9)

Response: Self-Denial

2. The Doomed One (2 Thess. 2.3)

Response: God Wins

3. The Opposing One and Worshipped One  
(2 Thess. 2.4)

Response: Worship God

***IV. Who is this person?***

- A. In Paul's day
- B. In history
- C. Today

Response: Humility and Self-Examination

***V. What does it look like to have all hell break loose?  
(2 Thess. 2.6-12)***

- A. Absence of restraint
- B. Counterfeit miracles

Response: Stay in Love With Jesus