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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Title of Sermon: Anchored by the Truth
Series: Living in the Light of His Coming - #2

2 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.

Let's jump into this text -- what a great text. What a gift from God. Why? Concerning the coming of our Lord.

I remember when I was a kid -- I didn't want the Lord to come back. Oh, I did, but just not yet. I wanted to get some things done, you know -- get my driver's license, get married, have children, have a mid-life crisis. I just had some things I wanted to do. And I've had all those. I'm done, I'm ready for Him to come back. But around that whole thing is always going to be, as Paul says, a whole lot of -- what? Speculations, deceptions. He wasn't the only one. Jesus said there will be many -- in Matthew 24 -- there will be many who come to deceive you. They will spread rumors. There's nothing worse, in many ways, than just a flat-out good rumor. They can be so destructive. They're not true. They're speculation. Sometimes people pass on things because, to be quite honest with you, they just are ill-informed. They haven't taken the time to study something. They haven't taken time to look into something. How many times have people -- maybe an office that you work at -- spread certain rumors about layoffs or spread rumors about other things. And it caused all kinds of just difficulty and accusation and anger.

There have been plenty of times where marriages have been deeply affected and wrongly affected by rumors. "Hey, I heard your husband went out with somebody, you know, of the opposite sex, and" -- you know -- they don't know anything about it. The next thing you know, they're spreading rumors and now there's a fight and there's all kinds of issues. Where did it start? It started with somebody with loose lips. Churches -- sadly, they've been the bastions of rumor mills. They have been. Over the years, churches, they've spread all kinds of things. There have been rumors of -- not just in churches, but international missions -- years ago there was a rumor that a great work of God was going to happen in India and we needed to be in part of it, and if we weren't a part of it, we had no interest in world evangelization. Fact is, the whole thing was baked and they were just stealing a bunch of money. Rumors. That's what was happening here. "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you brothers not to become uneasily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy or report or a letter." In other words, honestly, Paul was saying, he's not really sure where all this stuff's coming from! People said that there was a prophecy, there was a letter that Paul wrote. There were all kinds of things. And what

was the rumor? The rumor was this -- Christ had already returned and taken His beloved church, and you were left behind. Now, if you've ever seen that sadistic movie from Chick Publications or somebody, you know, "Left Behind," or the whole thing, that stuff is crazy. But -- the reality is, that's what was going on. In the whole church. It had huge implications. We'll look at it in Chapter 3. They were quitting their jobs, they weren't paying their bills, they were going out with their Visa cards, and they were racking up all kinds of things. They were going on vacation and deciding in themselves, "I am gonna go to Home Depot, buy a really nice refrigerator -- I won't get it for 10 months" -- at least, that's what happens now -- "and we're gonna do all these things. I'm not gonna pay for it." Why? Because, it's like the end is coming. And they were spreading all kinds of crazy rumors. What was the net result? They were losing their minds.

And Paul exhorts them, when it comes to this issue of end-times mania -- and I've been a pastor now for 30-some years, grown up in the church -- so, for 59 years, we through the church in the US -- and by the way, around the world. It's not just the US. Don't somehow think that, "Wow, we've got a handle on eschatological craziness." It's all over the world. But in my time, watching it, we've had multiple seasons. We had -- 1972 was a big year. 1988 was a big year. 2000 years -- in the year 2000, remember Y2K? That in the church -- if you were a pastor, or you were a person attending in the local church, if you were a leader in the local church -- let me tell you, that was a circus-ville. We had that thing ratcheted up in scores of ways. And tragically, in each one of these, we have discredited the name of Christ to the watching world. And that's the reason why Paul says, "Don't lose your mind on unsupported speculation." Don't. It's a choice. It's a choice that you make by chasing after things, by yearning for things, by falling in love with timelines. By listening to people who give you exact timelines and dates and all kinds of fig-leaf-reading things -- that just sets you up, and Paul says don't do that. Don't lose your mind. What wording does he use in this text? They were unsettled, he says. They were literally shaken from their minds. They had lost their minds.

Now, this is not the first time that Paul had talked to them about this. He'd talked to them before -- 1 Thessalonians. This letter is approximately -- they guess -- I would land in the guess that it's about six months after 1 Thessalonians. So, he had already talked to them about it, and not only that, but it is my conviction that what he had talked about is what Christ had given to us in Matthew 24, and I'll give you more reasons in a minute why I believe that. He's talked to them about it, and what's happening? They've lost their minds. What exactly does he say it's about? It's about the coming of our Lord and our being gathered to Him -- number two. And about not becoming uneasily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy about what? The day of the Lord.

Now, what's Paul talking about? Because he's actually given us three words. Is he talking about three separate events? Is he talking about one event that he uses three different words? If you go into Matthew, he -- Paul -- has taken three words that Jesus uses. So, this is my conviction -- because of Paul's use of three words, and one of them is used nowhere else in the New Testament other than by Jesus Christ, what Paul is doing is taking Matthew 24 -- that's Christ's commentary on the end times, and Paul is unpacking that. What's he talking about? The *perusia* is the first one. What's that word? That's the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We get from that word the Latin word *advent*. The first coming of Christ was the first advent, the second coming of Christ is the second advent. So, what Paul's talking about here is, the first word he uses is the *perusia*. It describes the personal arrival of Christ. The second word he uses here, or second phrase, he says, "Being gathered to him." It's the same word that Jesus uses in Matthew 24:21. It's the assembling together of a group of people. So it's the return of Christ to gather a group of people. And then the last word he uses is the day of the Lord. What does that mean? It means the end of God's age.

You've got a couple of options. You have three words or phrases. A lot of people will try and take that center one, the gathering together, and say, "Well that's the rapture." Well -- that's always a possibility. The problem is, then you're saying the Lord comes, the rapture happens, and then the Lord comes. If

you're trying to put that in some kind of sequence of time, that just doesn't make sense. But if you look at it as one event of which it is the coming of the Lord to gather His church and to judge the world, then what Paul is talking about is an event that has multiple aspects to it. Now, why would I fall in that latter camp? It is the coming of the Lord to gather His church, to judge the world -- why do I fall into that camp? Because it simply fits into the context of chapter 1. What was chapter 1 about? Chapter 1 was about a group of people who were saying, "Are we suffering for no good purpose? It seems, Lord, unfair that we would be suffering, being, if you will, judged by this world harshly, and, if you will, we're not getting anything out of it!" Remember it? Let's go back just for a short second. He says, "With this in mind," he says, "all of this is evidence that God's judgment is right." What's Paul's summary of chapter 1? "It is true that you will suffer, but God will" -- what? Make up for it, consider you worthy, and in the end, hold all people accountable.

There is going to be judgment, and God will judge people, and he will reward you for your faithfulness. Now, concerning this time, this time now where Christ comes back to gather His church, to bring judgment to the world -- Paul says, "Don't lose your mind about that. Don't panic about that, don't fret about that." Because they believed somehow that they had missed it. And Paul says, "I don't want you to live with an unsettled mind." And how does he attempt to solve it? He goes on. "Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until two things occur. That day -- the gathering of Christ, the coming of Christ and the gathering of the believers all together, and the judgment of the world -- that day will not come until some things have happened. Don't lose your mind about this."

What are they? There are two things that are going to occur. Number one, there's going to be a great rebellion. Number two, there's going to be a man of lawlessness that is going to be revealed. And all the way through this text, he says this person is going to be revealed. It's not going to slip out. You're not gonna guess who he is. He's going to be revealed by someone else. Who is that? The inference, from my perspective from Paul is, it is from God. Later in the text -- we'll deal with this in a minute -- God is going to pull something, something is going to be pulled out, and this man is going to be revealed. In other words, Paul is trying to tell the church -- "My dear friends, don't lose your mind over this thing. God is in control. God is the one calling all the shots. You will see rebellion and think the world is going in a horrible out-of-control way. God is in control. You will hear about a man who rises up in lawless rebellion, and in fact, desecrates the holiness of God, and you're gonna think -- wow, our world is gone! God is in control." He's so in control that He tells you -- just like Jesus says, there's going to be leaves on the tree and you'll know the signs of the time. And Paul says, there are two things that will happen. Number one - there will be a great rebellion. The text specifically says, "Don't let anyone deceive you in that way. That day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed."

Now -- church historians will tell you that there are more people who have been martyred for the name of Christ in the last hundred years than in the totality of all human time up to that point. And some would argue, "Well, it's the season." Well, the text tells you, it's an article, THE rebellion, indicating that anything that we have experienced up to this point, Paul would say, is not what this text is talking about. Anything that somehow comes to describe the horrible -- there are going to be ebbs and flows. There are going to be seasons in the church's life all the way around the world, and because we have the internet now and because we have computers, we have access to information long before we used to.

I remember when I was in Pakistan, and -- this is a number of years ago, and I went downtown, and I was just tootling around Karachi -- which was probably a stupid move, but -- anyhow, I was -- and no less than a few minutes after I left a given area, there was a truck that pulled up, a bunch of guys jumped out with machine guns and leveled everyone around, right in front of the police department. In less than an hour, an event that I personally was within blocks of came to my phone on text. "Did you hear about....?" And this was from the United States, from Salem, Oregon, and somebody had heard about it in less than an hour. Of an event that I was just blocks from when it occurred! So what's happening in our day is, we've become aware of things going on, we are aware of pastors who are going to prison in Canada,

we are aware of a pastor who was beheaded a few months ago in Africa -- we're aware of those things like never before, but Paul's indication is -- there's going to come a season in our history that there is going to be a massive rebellion. It will not be the ebbs and flows, it will be global. It will be beyond the ups and downs. And because Paul has borrowed from Matthew 24 in three distinct issues, it only makes sense that maybe we turn there for a moment to look and ask the question, what does Jesus say about this period of rebellion? So, if you would, turn in your Bibles to Matthew the 24th chapter, and I want to look at verses 9 through about 13. "All these things beginning the birth pains," he says, in verse 8, and then in verse 9 he says, "Then you will be handed over and persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me." So, number one is -- this is not geographically limited, this is not something, the rebellion that is happening in Morocco as we currently are experiencing. This is not something that is happening in Yamen as we are currently experiencing. This is all the nations have gathered together to do what? To hate that which is of God.

At that time, many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. So, you have two things -- you have a massive increase of wickedness and you have an apostasy of the church. Understand -- wickedness doesn't grow cold. It is cold. Wickedness is cold, it's not hot. It's not in love with Christ. And so, he's talking about two things. One is, there will be massive wickedness all over the world, and the believers that are there, they are going to what? Decrease in their affection for Christ. Many, it says, will grow cold. "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world." So, at this point, another reason why we know this hasn't happened -- it's not the ebb and flow -- is because, at this point, I would suggest that world evangelization has absolutely occurred. Virtually the entire world has heard the gospel. Or he wouldn't be able to say this. "You know the second coming of Christ has not come, you know you haven't missed it, you know you haven't been deceived by a prophet" -- why? Because the entire world has yet to declare their hatred for God, world evangelization has yet to occur, and we are beginning to see wickedness rise at a level like we've never seen and sadly, in many places, including the US, the heart of the church is growing colder. Yes.

Are we, as Jesus says, in the birth pain of it? There's a ton of speculation. I tend to be on the side -- yes. Number one -- "The reason why you can settle your hearts that you haven't missed the return of Christ is because you haven't seen the great rebellion." That's what he says. And secondly, "The man of lawlessness has yet to be revealed." Now again, I've been a Christian for 59 years, and we've been playing the game -- "Pin the anti-Christ on the tail of the donkey" for 59 years. I mean, I would imagine we could have a lot of fun. You come up afterwards, after the service is over, and tell me every person that you have been told was going to assuredly be the anti-Christ. I bet we'll get at least ten. Right? I mean -- the pope gets it about every five to ten years. Obama got it for the church in a lot of years. Clinton was surely going to be the anti-Christ, because remember when he was playing for the position in the UN, and the UN was absolutely going to be the ten tribes that was going to rebel, and so, we knew Clinton was going to be the anti-Christ. I mean, we have been going on that one forever!

What characterizes this person? There are a number of things in this text. And you do have to ask the question -- why was Paul -- I mean, he's given us, I believe, you can count them, and hopefully my memory serves me from the earlier week of study, is -- I think there were seven characteristics that he gives us of this person. Why does he give you these seven characteristics? It seems to me specificity is given to us for a reason -- he doesn't want you to miss it. I will tell you -- you're not gonna guess it. You're never going to guess it, so get over that. Why? Because the text says he's going to be revealed. He's not going to be discovered by us. We're not gonna know. He's going to be revealed.

What are the characteristics? Well, let's just go through them. Number one is, he's a man. I know some people say, it's a force. A lot of people in a period of time thought it was going to be the New Age

Movement. The reality is, I tend to take Scripture kind of simply and literally, unless I'm forced to take it in another genre. The fact is, Paul tells us. What does it say? It says, "Don't let anyone deceive you -- that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed." Now, you can come to any point you want to on that one; I think it's silliness to say that it's something other than a man, when the Scripture says it's gonna be a man of lawlessness. And the characteristic is, he's gonna be lawless. What does that mean? It means he is anti-law. It means he is above the law. It means he doesn't adhere to the law. It means that he is an individual who disregards the law, who shuns it, and thirdly, it's a person who ultimately claims to be God. That's what the text says. "He will exalt himself over everything that is called God." What he is going to say is in some form, "I am God. I am the ultimate power." What he will say is, in some form, there is no one who is more powerful than him. "I rule the world." And because this man of lawlessness will desecrate the holy temple of God -- we'll talk about that in a minute -- he will be an individual who claims a level of divinity. Why? Because he claims to be God and he is a person, yes, born for destruction, but he's empowered by Satan.

The text goes on -- verse 8 -- "And then the lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth." Let's go back up. "For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so." What is this secret power? Well, he comes, the text says that he comes in the DNA of Satan. So he's a representative, born for destruction. A representative of hell. With, by the way, supernatural powers. Now, I think the NIV translates this in a way -- and I'm a pretty good fan of the NIV, but I don't like what they translate in this point when it says in verse 9, "The coming of the lawlessness will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles." When he comes, he's not going to be a good magician. He's not gonna be a trickster. The counterfeit, he says, is that they are real miracles but they're not legitimate, they're not miraculous in the sense that they honor God -- they are miraculous in the sense that they come out of the pit of hell.

Remember in Matthew when Jesus says there's gonna be a group of people who stand before Him and say, "Did we not do this in your name? Did we not do this in your name? Did we not do this in your name?" Go back and check that. What did they do? They did miraculous things. So, if you're a person who's utterly fascinated with miracles, and you believe that every time you see a miracle it is an authentication of the reality of God, be careful, because you're absolutely set up to be deceived by the enemy. I'm not suggesting for a moment that we become cynical to miracles. God will still do miracles, but don't think that every miracle you see is an authentication that God is behind that. Why? Because this person is going to do miraculous things. One of them will be a miraculous healing. He has supernatural power, and he has an unparalleled ability to deceive.

Look at verse 10. "And in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and be saved." Let's go back for a moment and look at Christ's words. He says in this text, verse 21, "There will be a great distress unequalled from the beginning of the world until now. And," he says later, "there will be false Christs and false prophets who will appear, and there will be great signs and miracles to deceive EVEN the elect, if that were possible." It's not. But the point is -- when the man of lawlessness comes, he will be a man. He will be a person who hates laws, claims to be a god, born for destruction, is a man empowered by Satan, and he has supernatural power, and he will deceive many. In fact, Christ says -- were it not that God cut that time short, it would be like everyone got wiped out.

Now, Paul tells them this. Why? Because they had quit their jobs, they were racking up bills on their Visa debit cards, and they had no intention of paying them. And he said, "My friends" -- chapter 3 -- we'll get to this -- "get back to work. Get back to doing good deeds." Why? "We know that the return of Christ hasn't come yet, because these things are going to occur." Now -- did he write this to give them a timeline? No. He wrote this -- what? So they wouldn't be deceived. That's the issue. The issue is not so that we can have a timeline -- the issue is so that when the false prophets come, when the false miracles

come, when people come and claim to be Christ, you, the church, will not be deceived. "There will come a time," he says, "that this power" -- we don't know what it is -- back to 2 Thessalonians -- "There will come a time when the secret power of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so 'til he's taken out of the way." What is that? We don't know. Some people suggest that it's the church, and that the church is filled with the Holy Spirit, and when the church is raptured, they will be taken out of the way. The problem with that is, "this one" he speaks about is masculine, and you, the church, has always been referred to as feminine. So, to suggest that somehow the church gets raptured out of the way, and thus that unleashes, is to suggest that God is sloppy with His grammar. I don't think God's ever sloppy with His grammar. What is "this one"? Is it the Holy Spirit? That's possible. Given the fact, though, is how is the Holy Spirit who is God restrained or removed from the earth and God, a spirit, is still engaged because He's still controlling the earth -- He hasn't released it. We don't know. Could be an angelic power. That's probably been the orthodox position of the church, except for the last hundred years, when pre-tribulationalism has made a massive increase. But grammatically, to be quite honest with you, not to be a disappointment to you, but this is really virtually impossible to be speaking about the rapture of the church, or you would have to accuse God of somehow being sloppy with the use of a masculine term to refer to a feminine description. Who is this person? We don't know. What is this power? We don't know. What we do know -- and it could be God -- who God simply pulls back a restraining power.

I fall under the camp that it's probably not the church, and I don't actually argue necessarily for the Holy Spirit. I would say that God, either through an angelic being or simply the restraining presence of God -- as He put a hedge around Hosea, as He has put a hedge around the nation of Israel. All through time, God has said, "You can go this far." As He put a hedge around Job -- "Satan, you can do this, you can do this, you can do this. But here's my boundary with Job. And you're never going to cross that." So, what God has done throughout time is, He's put these boundaries around the church, and God's gonna pull that back, and Satan's gonna uncork. But giving us a timeline is not His interest. What is His interest? It's keeping you from being deceived. And how does that happen? What is the anchor of your life? Look at verse 13. "But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers, who are loved by God. And it is of this that you take your stand."

Why does God begin here as to this is going to be the very thing that keeps you from being deceived. It's because of this. What enables a person to be deceived? Verse 10. The affections they have for unrighteousness. It's not because they don't know the timeline, and it's not because they don't know the truth. What enables Satan to deceive them -- verse 10 -- is because they have a rejection of the truth -- not a misunderstanding of the truth, a rejection of the truth, and an affection, a love. In other words, they love what it feels like to be unrighteous. And how do we take our stand is when you learn of the love that the Father has for you. "This is how we take our stand," Paul says. "Brothers, when you discover how you have been loved by God." How is it? It's an expression of His love for us where He's taken an initiative. Inasmuch as while you were a sinner, Christ died for you. It's an eternal and unconditional love.

1 Thessalonians -- "Even when you were unfaithful, I cannot be unfaithful to you." Why? "Because you who have received the spirit of God and the salvation of Christ." Paul says, "I can't abandon you, even when you abandon me! Why? Because Christ is in you, and I can't leave Christ." It's a love that is unconditional, it is a love that is eternal, and it is a love that transforms my life. What is the anchor of my life that keeps me from being deceived? It's when I discover and am reminded that I've been loved by God unconditionally. And that as I learn to love the truth, I will be shielded against all deception.

Verse 10 -- "They perish because they refuse to love the truth and be saved." You don't prevent deception by having a good timeline. You don't prevent deception by being shielded by God. You prevent deception by God's love of you and your love of the truth. When you love the truth, it will shield your heart from all the lies that will come in the end times. When you love the truth, it will protect you from the miraculous that will occur right in front of you, but you won't be seduced by it because you love righteousness. What are Paul's words? Number one, don't reject truth if somehow you discover what it is.

Don't reject it. Love it, cherish it. Don't live your life without a pursuit of truth. To simply make it to retirement is not enough. To simply live to have a comfortable life is actually dangerous because it means that you're putting your love of ease above anything. Love truth. Accept truth. And love the Father. Don't let your minds be unsettled. How do we not do that, Paul? Love the truth, and grow a deep affection for the righteousness of God. When you do that, your heart will be steeled from anything that comes your way.

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