**The second coming of Jesus- error corrected**  25/2/24dkm

Read: Matthew 24:1-36, 2Thessalonians 2

Text: 2Thessalonians 2: 3-12

Psalms: 100old, 46c, 14, 72old

The day of the Lord was an important part of OT prophecy. The OT ends with Malachi saying, ‘The day of the Lord is coming’, ‘the great and dreadful day of the Lord’ (Mal 4:1, 5). This will be judgment day, the day the Lord will judge the wicked and save the righteous. This truth continues into the NT, with Jesus referring to the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory at the end of the age (Mat 24:30).

The disciples asked Jesus about this day. They asked when these things would be, and what will be the sign of his coming, and the end of the age (Mat 24:3). Jesus spoke of wars and rumours of wars, of famines and earthquakes, of tribulation and persecution of God’s people. He spoke of growing lawlessness and hatred, and the rise of false prophets (Mat 24:6-14). Jesus also picked up on Daniel’s prophecy of the ‘abomination of desolation’ being put in the temple. Many signs, but still no one knows the day or the hour when the Son of Man comes (Mat 24:36).

The signs serve to alert the people of God not to pinpoint the day or the hour. The signs given by Jesus are rather general; wars have been seen since the time Jesus spoke, and the apostle Paul faced false prophets. With regard to Daniel’s prophecy, Jesus seems to speak of this in regard to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD70, which was somewhat of a preview of the end of the age. Daniel’s prophecy in fact was seen as being fulfilled when the ruler Antiochus Epiphanies set up a statute of Zeus in the temple in 167BC. But Jesus was speaking of this prophecy over sixty years later with future reference so the prophecy must have multiple fulfilments.

Paul was writing before AD70 about the second coming of Jesus. He uses language reminiscent of Daniel, and of Jesus speaking in Matthew 24. He writes of global rather than local rebellion, and tribulation for believers. He writes of a ‘man of lawlessness’ appearing, an antichrist who opposes God and laws that restrain evil. He may have told the Thessalonians who he was referring to (2:5), but probably not. Paul would not have been specific about a person any more than he was of the day or hour- certainly not a person known to the Thessalonians, given that the end of the age has not come till today. So we need to be careful about trying to identify this person, especially as we look back at various men seen as ‘the antichrist’ or ‘the man of lawlessness’, men who are no more but the end has not yet come.

John speaks of ‘antichrists’ and we are speaking of multiple fulfilments of prophecy, so it is not necessarily wrong to identify men as antichrists as long, as we realise no one knows the day or the hour when Jesus will return, and don’t get trapped into saying he has already come!

In the church at Thessalonica, a church that was probably less than a year old, some were teaching that the day of the Lord had already come (2:2). Paul taught them about the second coming or ‘*parousia*’ of Jesus Christ as part of the gospel. When they had a question about this in relation to those who had already died, he answered this in his first letter. In this second letter Paul answers another question: some had been twisting or adding to his teaching and deceiving the people. Paul explains that the day of the Lord could not possibly have come because a time of apostasy or rebellion must come first, and the ‘man of lawlessness ‘must be revealed. Our third subheading is ‘Restrainer removed’ and our fourth, ‘Strong delusion’.

**1. Apostasy**

‘*That day will not come* unless the falling away comes first’ (2:3). Note the words in italics are not in the Greek but are needed to make sense. Also note the Greek word translated ‘falling away’ is ‘*apostasia*’ which is more like rebellion, a deliberate turning away. This happened at various times in Israel’s history and ultimately the Lord brought judgment upon them (Jer 2:19). Jesus spoke of love growing cold, of hatred and betrayal increasing, and many false prophets deceiving people (Mat 24:10-12). There is nothing here or anywhere else in the Bible suggesting a wonderful time of obedience to law, or of peace and prosperity for believers before the second coming of the Lord.

**2. Man of lawlessness revealed**

Jesus spoke about ‘lawlessness abounding and the love of many growing cold’ (Mat 24:12). Paul points to a man leading in this lawless rebellion being revealed before the day of the Lord. Before going on to describe the man and his evil ways, he also calls him the ‘the son of perdition’ or the man doomed to destruction. Jesus referred to Judas in the same way (John 17:12). We know how Judas rebelled and betrayed Jesus for a few silver coins. This ‘man of lawlessness’ will reject all moral or human values. All his thought and all his actions will be about himself, about pleasure and power and every form of evil.

The name ‘lawless one’ describes a man who thinks he is above the law, a man who is a law unto himself. We see dictators thinking and acting in this way, men who will do anything to gain power and stay in power. For such men laws are to be broken. Even if they make laws themselves they readily break these if circumstances change. There are no moral absolutes and no binding civil or society laws for this man. Anarchy and immorality are the mark of this man. You are probably thinking of men like this in history or even today, but there is more to this ‘man of lawlessness’.

‘He opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God’; he says that he is God (2:4). This man is an enemy of God and therefore an enemy of God’s people. He calls himself God. Not many dictators go this far, but some have; Roman emperors like Nero and Domitian demanded the people worship them, even Christian people. John was banished to Patmos during the reign of Domitian, when he wrote of the two beasts in Revelation 13.

When John says of antichrists, ‘They went out from us, but they were not part of us’ and then of them not confessing Jesus as come in the flesh (1John 2:19, 4:3), he is pointing to this religious, anti-God feature of the ‘man of lawlessness’. ‘That he sits as God in the temple of God’ (2:4), does not necessarily mean the physical temple in Jerusalem. Jesus knew this would be destroyed, as did Paul. Besides, Paul refers to the church as the temple of God in 1Corinthains 3:17.

So who is this ‘man of lawlessness’? Who did the Thessalonians think Paul was referring to, noting that the man was not yet revealed because the apostasy was not yet (2:3)? The Roman Emperor would have been Claudius, but Nero was in the wings. Years later the Roman emperor became a Christian so could not be seen as the ‘man of lawlessness’. Was Mohammed a contender for this title, or later on the pope in Rome? Early reformers like Wycliffe and Hus pointed to the pope, and our Westminster Confession of 1646 refers to the pope as, ‘That Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalted himself, in the church, against Christ and all that is called God’ (WCF XXV.6). The pope remains as a religious leader but not a political power.

Some political leaders have been particularly evil, both godless and lawless. But, like Paul, we must be cautious in identifying any with this ‘man of lawlessness’. Yet we must not turn away from this sign given in Scripture pointing to the day of the Lord. We rightly look for such signs in society and among rulers still today. We are, of course, living in the last days when Jesus can come at any time, but we are given these signs, and we are told that the gospel will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come (Mat 24:14). So let us be busy to hasten this day! (2Peter 3:12).

**3. Restrainer removed**

The day of the Lord has not already come because the apostasy and revelation of the ‘man of lawlessness’ must come first. After describing this man, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he had told them these things when he was with them, and his teaching had not changed (2:5). He also told them why this man had not yet been revealed. Something or someone was restraining him or holding him back (2:6). He would be revealed at the proper time. Verses 6 and 7 are among the most difficult to understand in the whole NT - so let’s jump over them, for a moment!

When the lawless one is revealed, ‘the Lord will consume him with the breath of his mouth, and destroy with the brightness of his coming (2:8). This is not a picture of a great end time battle, as some imagine will take place in the end. Now we know who the Lord is so we are back in familiar territory in terms of understanding what Paul is saying. The ‘man of lawlessness’ will not remain for long it seems because the Lord in his second coming will destroy him. Just as light destroys darkness so the brightness of the Lord at his coming will destroy this evil one.

Paul also says that what the lawless man does will be ‘according to the working of Satan’ (2:9). He will be an agent of Satan, his chief agent, doing the works of Satan. Jesus of course, did the works of his Father. This man of sin is spoken of in terms similar to the terms used of Jesus, but as using blasphemous words and doing evil works. Satan has the power to perform miracles, counterfeit miracles of destruction, not miracles for good. He is a master magician as it were, his works being lying wonders; yet effective in deceiving many humans.

The point is that God is sovereign in all things. If Satan is on a leash then this ‘man of lawlessness’ is also under the control of the sovereign God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, so we who belong to Christ have nothing to fear. Note that this man is not actually Satan, and that ‘the restrainer’ is not actually God.

So who is the restrainer? It is interesting that the first reference is neuter (2:6), and the second masculine: ‘he who now restrains’ (2:7- note a capital H in our version). So at the proper time this restrainer will be removed, the antichrist will be revealed and then Christ will come; this is the order but the time frame seems to be very small if at all. Some wonder why Paul is writing in such guarded terms, suggesting it was for political reasons.

Many think the restrainer is the Roman Empire; the emperor is a ‘he’ and the state is ‘it’. They say the empire was one of law and order that retrained anarchy and lawlessness- although some dispute this. B.B Warfield preferred the Jewish state because he like others (Henrikson, Stott) saw the Roman emperor as the ‘man of lawlessness’. Others point to Romans 13 and the state in general: ‘those who resist [the state] will bring judgment on themselves’ (Rom 13:2).

Another option is that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit and the work of the church. The ‘it’, ‘he’ scenario would fit this reference to the Holy Spirit, and our translators indicate this with the capital H for ‘he’ in verse 7. The Holy Spirit has been sent by Jesus into the world, into the hearts of believers and into the church, and is powerful to restrain all evil, including Satan’s agent. We might reflect on the few righteous people in Sodom whom God removed before destroying the city, and the eight righteous people on earth whom God removed in the ark. Imagine if there was no church and therefore no presence of the Holy Spirit in our society? Duncan concludes, ‘Where the restrainer of evil is, he or it is simply someone through whom God, the great divine restrainer, operates’.

**4. Strong delusion**

The ‘man of lawlessness’, as an agent of Satan, will work with the powers of Satan, performing counterfeit miracles and lying wonders. Many, namely those who ‘did not receive the love of the truth’, will be deceived and will perish like the lawless man, at the coming of the Lord (2:10). But those who hold to the truth will be saved. No one, not even Satan, can pluck the elect of God who believe the truth, out of the Lord’s hand.

Paul emphasises the truth because this is what distinguished the Lord from Satan, the liar (2:10-12). The doctrine of election stands behind the teaching that those who believe the lie do so because of a strong delusion sent by God (2:11). Men and women who turn away from the truth- Jesus is the truth- will be given up by God to vile passions and a debased mind because their foolish hearts were darkened (Rom 1:26-28). They will be deceived by Satan’s agent and destroyed along with him at the coming of the Lord. ‘Truth has moral implications and makes moral demands’; which do you choose?