



Bible Study

November 18, 2015

II Thessalonians 2:1-12

Luke 15:1-10

II Thessalonians 2:1-12 (NKJV) -

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Luke 15:1-10 (NKJV) – Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Jesus to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.” So He spoke this parable to them, saying: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’ Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Commentary -

In today's epistle reading, St. Paul speaks to us about Antichrist, the man of lawlessness, and those who, having not found it within themselves to love and follow Christ, have instead followed the delusions offered by Satan. We live in a culture and era which is extremely materialistic. We perceive the things, and even the events which take place in our world as essentially spiritually neutral, the result of blind chains of cause and effect, with no purpose behind them, benevolent or sinister. Things simply happen, sometimes they happen to us, and when we pray, much of our prayer is consumed with asking God to cause certain things to happen for us, or that He will not allow certain other things to happen to us. When we look at our fellow human beings, we evaluate them based on how they treat us. If they treat us at least benignly, we consider them to be good people. If they mistreat us or behave in ways that we don't like, then they are bad people, and we either avoid them, or do whatever we think we can to stop their unwelcome behavior.

What the Apostle is reminding us today is that the world is not spiritually neutral. Behind the people and events that unfold in our world every day, there are spiritual forces at work, both those spirits and people who serve and follow God, and those spirits and people who have rebelled against Him. We must never forget as Christians that there are spiritual forces at work in the world which seek to do us spiritual harm and even to destroy us. Those people who have chosen not to follow Christ, these spiritual powers are happy to lead astray through delusion, and lead them down the path that leads to condemnation and death without their awareness. Against us as Christians the world is more openly hostile, just as it was to the prophets of the Old Testament, to Christ Himself, to the Apostles, the Martyrs, and all those who seek to follow Christ to this very day.

The Scriptures teach us that Christ has already won the battle against these spiritual powers that seek to do us harm. He has already disarmed them by destroying their power of sin and death. The reality, however, that they are on the losing side has not led to the enemy surrendering, or seeking mercy from our victorious Lord. Rather, because they know that their days are numbered and their time is short, they thrash about all the more violently, harming and destroying anyone they can in the time left to them. As Christians, this requires us to be on our guard. It requires us to guard our minds, and to examine our thoughts and impulses, to practice discernment between them regarding which are good and guiding us toward the Kingdom, and which thoughts and impulses are seeking to lead us off of the path, and to a destination which we seek to avoid.

Just as important as it is to remember that we are engaged in this spiritual warfare, however, is that we always remember that our fellow human beings are never our enemies. Christ, as we said, has already won the victory. However, He did not win that victory by taking vengeance or punishing those in the world who opposed Him, who ultimately murdered Him. He did not fight back with the weapons of violence and death that the Devil used against Him and uses against us. Rather, when we were, to all appearances, the enemies of God and of His Christ, Jesus Christ died for us, to free us from bondage to Satan. Christ defeated Satan by binding him, and taking back from the Enemy what he had stolen, the hostages he had taken, we ourselves. Satan had deluded us into becoming God's enemies, Christ defeated him by reconciling us to God, and making us His friends.

We must take for ourselves, as followers of Christ, this same way of viewing our fellow human beings that our Lord possessed. The most sinful person we can find, the man or woman who has been most twisted to evil, within whom the image of God has become the most distorted, the person who despises Christ our Lord and we His followers the most deeply, the one who hates us the most, and wishes, or even does us the most harm: this is the person whom we must love the most, for whom we must be willing to lay down our lives, that that person may be set free from the delusion which holds him hostage to sin and death, and may find the same salvation that we have found. Our worst human enemies, the most wicked and vile of their number, are not truly our enemies, but rather soldiers fighting alongside us who have fallen in battle. As fellow soldiers, our duty is to seek their salvation,

not to further harm them or 'finish them off'.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us never forget that we are in the midst of a war, for the sake of our very soul. Our enemy, the devil, as St. Peter tells us, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. We must always remain vigilant over our thoughts, our impulses, and our actions to follow Christ on the way that leads to salvation. At the same time we must remember that our fellow men and women, no matter what they may do to us, are as precious to God, and should be as precious to us, as we ourselves are. To truly experience victory, we must do so together, watching over and protecting each other, and urging each other on toward the prize of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Questions to Ponder -

- 1) St. Paul speaks in today's epistle reading against the 'end times' hysteria that was already present in his own day. He reminds the church at Thessalonica of what he had already taught them concerning the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, what would happen in those days, and how they ought to prepare for His return, which could come at any time. In our day, too, it seems that every few years someone else is predicting the end of the world or the imminent destruction of society. We as Christians know our Savior, and know how to prepare for the day on which we stand before Him, either at our death or His glorious appearing. When 'prophets of doom' appear in society, do you find yourself returning to these truths and to Christ your savior, or do you find yourself being swept up in fear and anxiety? Do you worry about politics, the economy, and other current events, or do you rest secure in the knowledge that whatever happens in this world, our life is hidden in Christ?
- 2) In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is criticized for the people with whom He chooses to associate. Because He is concerned for the salvation and life of all people, He sought out and pursued those who were the most in need of God's grace and forgiveness. As someone whom Christ has entrusted with His Gospel, with whom do you associate? Do you seek to befriend and share your life and your faith with people who aren't like you? Do you keep to 'your own', or are you open and demonstrating God's love and acceptance to people of other races, cultures, economic statuses, and backgrounds than yourself? Do you go out of your way to befriend and assist those who most need your friendship and assistance, or do you seek friends who can do things for you?
- 3) Christ proclaims to us today the great joy in heaven that comes to be when a sinner repents. God desires nothing more than for one of His children who is perishing to turn and live. Often, we as Christians look at ourselves and our sins, especially the sins of our past, and despair that God could ever accept us after what we have done. This is the opposite of the truth. No matter how great our sins may be, what God most desires in His love for us is that we would return to Him, repent, and be healed. When you consider your life and the sins with which you struggle, does this drive you to come to confession and receive healing, or do you allow it to push you away from the Church and from Christ's Body? When you have confessed your sins, do you believe that Christ's promise as expressed in the prayers, that these sins are truly forgiven, is true? Does knowing that you have sinned motivate you to want to make things right with those whom you have sinned against, or do you allow it to turn into misery and resentment?

Questions or Comments? FrStephen@stgeorgecharleston.org

Note from the Author – No rights reserved. If you find anything good, or helpful, or worthwhile in these bible studies from week to week, feel free to take and use it as you see fit. I do not need credit.