

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
November 11, 2007

Our Gospel

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon this morning comes from the Epistle, which was read earlier.

In just a few weeks, we will come to the close of another Church Year. In these last weeks, we begin to look forward to the return of Christ. Paul, in his second letter to the church in Thessalonica. He begins by saying, *“Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him...”* He makes two very distinctive points in his opening line. The first is that Christ will come again. This was a very important point for Paul to make because there were those who were preaching that Christ had come the first time and He died; because He's dead, He won't be coming a second time. Paul makes it clear that Christ will come a second time and we will be gathered together to Him, which is His second point. We will be gathered to Christ. We will not be gathered to an earthly king. We will not be gathered to earthly things. Instead, we will be gathered to Christ and Him alone.

How easy must it have been for those in Thessalonica to just ditch the message of Jesus and adopt whatever message someone else was preaching in the synagogue or on a hill or in the marketplace. One could hear a pro-Christ and an anti-Christ message all in the same afternoon. The choices which one had at their fingertips with regard to Christianity were numerous.

Paul tells us that Christ will come again. But for that event to happen, another

event must happen first: rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.

The word “rebellion” here is not translated the best way. The Greek word is ἀποστασία, apostasy. It goes beyond rebellion. It means an abandonment of the faith, a falling away. When you look around at Christianity today, it's not a stretch to see that people have rebelled, have abandoned the faith or has fallen away from the faith. We don't need to go to church because we can watch church on television, or we don't need to go to church at all, just as long as I read the Bible. Well, if I don't read the Bible, then if I pick up *The Purpose-Driven Life* or *Become a Better You*, then I'm okay. We can find excuse after excuse why we don't go to church to hear the Word of God or to receive Christ's body and blood. We don't need it because we don't need it! We're good people, God is for bad people. Fortunately, we are not that bad, but we are deceiving ourselves into thinking that things other than the Word of God will reveal Christ to us and that the things of this world will sustain our souls like the Lord's Supper can.

Besides rebellion, the man of lawlessness will be revealed. The man of lawlessness does not merely come as does the apostasy. While he at first remains hidden, he at last is revealed, to show what he really is. Both of these revelations are undoubtedly opposites, for which reason we may speak of an Antichrist, although Paul does not use that term in his letter. Regardless of whether or not the man of lawlessness is the Antichrist, what is his purpose? His purpose is oppose and exalt himself “*against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.*”

Lawlessness such as this has never existed in the world. Men such as Pharaoh,

with all of his evil and ungodly ways, was never like this man. Pharaohs and Roman emperors were deified and claimed divine honors, but never for one moment did they do this “against” any of their pagan gods, temples, altars, etc. Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Jewish Temple, but he did it by erecting an altar to Zeus. Caligula, the Roman emperor, did the same by trying to have his own statue erected in the Jewish Temple, but even he was in no way opposing and exalting himself against the Roman gods and objects of worship. The very nature of polytheism permitted the addition of new gods and of deified human rulers. But the Antichrist shall be worse, must worse, than these deified rulers.

The Antichrist reveals himself as the Antichrist by this pagan act of seating himself in the true God's own sanctuary. He does not deny the true God, he is neither atheist nor agnostic; in fact, he worships the true God. But he does it by this pagan act, the climax of all anti-Christianity. He sits in God's own place as if he, too, were God and shows and exhibits himself to all Christendom with the claim that he is God, that no less than deity belongs also to him. The very idea of extending deity in this way is utterly pagan. The great apostasy accepts this claim and honors this Antichrist with divine honor. That is what constitutes this apostasy. When Paul wrote, the people of God had never seen an apostasy and an Antichrist like this.

Paul tells the Church that an Antichrist is coming, but he doesn't stop there. He tells them to stand firm in the faith which they have been given. They are the chosen ones of God. God chose them *“as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”* They may be misguided, but they are still sheep, loved

by the Lord and therefore to be loved and cared for by Paul, a servant of the Lord. Paul thanks God for them because they are “brothers” in the one true faith. Paul thanks God for them because God chose them before time began, elected them to be his adopted children, blessed them with the gift of his Spirit, and by the sanctifying work of that same Spirit set them apart from the rest of an unbelieving world to believe the truth of the Gospel and be saved. If they are so precious to the Lord, then they should be just as precious to his apostle. Paul clearly understood this, and so he thanked God for them. He was also setting an example for all of them to follow, for if he could thank God for them, they should be willing to thank God for one another and work to heal any hurts that may have developed in their church because of the false ideas that were spreading.

All of this is important for one reason and one reason only: *“To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* They were called through the Gospel. They didn’t make themselves believe. They couldn’t. They were *“dead in transgressions.”* No, God worked this miracle through the good news of a Savior from sin which the Apostle Paul, Silas, Timothy and others had been privileged to bring to them. The Gospel originates with God himself, but it becomes our own when we take hold of it through faith, given to us by the Holy Spirit. When that happens we also “share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” His resurrection victory becomes our resurrection victory, and we have life to the full, just as He promised.

This is “our gospel” as well. It is ours because God has given it to us time and time again. He gave it to us when He removed us from that Garden. He gave it to us in a Baby. He gave it to us on the cross. He gave it to us at our Baptism. He gives it to us in

the Lord's Supper. He has given to us the Gospel of His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ "*so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" He has given us the Gospel so that we may believe and not be led astray by Satan and all of his temptuous ways. He has given us that Gospel so that we may remain steadfast in His Word until the second coming of His Son, who will gather all Christians to be with God forever. Until then, we remain steadfast in His Word, trusting in the promises which He has given to us, never doubting that His Word will do what it says it will: give to all believers forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. In Jesus' name, amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, amen.