

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

Strengthened For Service

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 27)

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

2 Thessalonians 2: 1 As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. 4 He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. 5 Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you?...

13 But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good

hope, 17 comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

DIAGNOSIS: Choosing the Wrong God

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Standing Idle*

Paul preached about the coming of the Lord (v. 1), and the Thessalonian Christians began to expect it. So when the day didn't come quickly they must have wondered, Did we miss it? Has it already come? How opportune then to encounter a preacher (speaking on Paul's authority) who said precisely that: The day of the Lord is already here (v. 2). There stood the Thessalonian Christians, idly waiting to be gathered together to Christ, and it seemed the work was already complete. But if the Lord had already come, then (good news or bad) why not stand idle? One way or another, the judgment was final. Right?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Shaken*

Not so, says Paul. In fact, the Apostle is so disturbed by the Thessalonians' inertia that he "begs" them to act (v. 1). "Don't be too quickly shaken," he says (v. 2). It appears the Thessalonians had received some false information, words that upset them into inactivity. An impostor (or impostors?) had stirred up the congregation by acting as if he represented Paul's ministry ("as though from us," v. 2). Fear (or was it indifference?) had paralyzed them.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Deceived*

In less than gentle terms, Paul lays out the problem: You are being deceived (v. 3). Much will happen before that day comes, he explains. Yet these Christians already had misplaced their trust. Either they trusted the words of an impostor who clouded the gospel message, or they trusted their own sense of reality more than they trusted Christ. Not only were they idle, they

were worshipping “so-called gods” to the neglect of the true God (v. 4). And the end for such gods and their followers is destruction (v. 3).

PROGNOSIS: Chosen by the True God

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Comforted

The Thessalonians’ hope, Paul insists, is not in guessing the precise hour of Christ’s coming. Instead, their hope lies in the fact that they are “beloved by the Lord (v. 13).

God has chosen them to be saved through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Spirit has made them holy (v. 13), and called them through the gospel (v. 14). They are the first fruits for salvation.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Standing Firm, Holding Fast

And believing in this truth saves (v. 13) sinners from the coming destruction. More than that, it gives eternal comfort and good hope (v. 16) Believers can stand firm and hold fast to the good news they have been received (v. 15). The message that Paul delivered (“taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter,” v. 15), that Christ was crucified and rose again for sinners’ sake, will sustain believers.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Strengthened for Good Work and Word

In fact, such good news “comforts hearts and strengthens them in every good work and word” (v. 17). Even in the midst of waiting and wondering, Christians are strengthened so that they can “give thanks to God” (v. 13), and share this same eternal comfort and good hope with others who live in fear or inertia.