

# Gathered to Christ

2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

*Halifax: 11 February, 2018, 10:30 AM*

## **Introduction:**

Today, we have the privilege of welcoming three people as communicant members of our congregation.

- Allison, by profession of faith, as one who came to know Jesus Christ as Saviour only a couple of months ago...
- Joseph, also by profession of faith, but as one who has known Christ from infancy and was already a non-communicant member of this church...
- And Sharon, who grew up knowing Christ in a United Reformed Church and entered into communicant membership by profession of faith in that church and now comes to us by transfer because she has relocated to this area.

I had thought of possibly choosing a special text for this special occasion, but as it turns out, in God's providence,

- we have come to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 today in our regular sermon series, and it is a passage that speaks about our being gathered to Christ.
- It is quite suitable to this occasion, so I have no need to turn elsewhere.

I was actually wrestling with how far to go today in our text because we have come to what some have called the most difficult passage in the Bible to interpret.

- Perhaps part of this has to do with the fact that a lot of us modern people are uncomfortable with what it says...
- But it is also the case that it is a text that has some difficult prophecy with even what appears to be some veiled references.

All that to say that rather than taking on a large portion of this passage,

- in view of our welcome of our new members today,
  - I decided to focus only on the first part of this passage where it speaks about the coming of Christ and our gathering to Him.
- Nevertheless, I want to begin by reading the entire chapter to you and giving you a quick overview.
  - So please give me your attention as I read it to you—2 Thessalonians 2:1-17.

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-17:** Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? <sup>6</sup> And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, <sup>10</sup> and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. <sup>11</sup> And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, <sup>12</sup> that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. <sup>13</sup> But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren

beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, <sup>14</sup> to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup> Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. <sup>16</sup> Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, <sup>17</sup> comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

May the Lord add His blessing to His holy and infallible Word.

### I. Let me begin by giving you a brief overview of the whole passage.

A. You can see that the great burden of Paul is to keep the Thessalonians from being, as verse 2 says, **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.**

1. It appears from this that somehow, they had been exposed to a certain false teaching that the day of Christ had come!

a. It is clear that Paul is not referring to Christ's first advent that began when Jesus was born in Bethlehem and ended when He ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father...

- Nor is he referring to His coming in judgment, when He would raise up the armies of Rome to come and destroy Jerusalem because they rejected Him as their Messiah—an event that happened a little less than ten years after Paul wrote this.

- But he is talking about the second advent of Jesus, when He comes in the clouds of glory with all His holy angels to judge the entire world...

- to raise up the bodies of all from the graves...

- to cast the wicked into the outer darkness and to gather His people to Himself to live with Him in glory forever...

- It is what Paul calls in verse 1, **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him,**

- and what He calls in verse 2, **the Day of Christ or the Day of the Lord,** which is referred to in all of scripture as the day of final judgment.

- It is about *this* great Day.

b. And Paul does not want the Thessalonians to accept the nonsense, no matter how it may have come to them, that the Day has already come.

- He says, **either by spirit**—that is, someone claiming to speak prophecy...

- **or by word**—someone coming and speaking to them about it...

- **or by letter**—someone writing to them...

- And he adds, **as if by us...** suggesting that those who were speaking or writing were claiming that Paul supported this teaching that the day of Christ had already come!

2. Paul asks them not to be soon shaken or troubled by this false teaching...
    - The words “soon shaken” refer to confusion in the mind, and the word “troubled” refers to the emotional agitation that comes when you hear something false like this.
      - Paul is basically telling them that this is not even worth considering, and certainly not worth losing any sleep about.
      - It is clearly false.
  3. What is shown most of all is how desperate the enemies of Christ are to destroy the Christian’s hope about the return of Christ.
    - They hate this doctrine.
      - And that’s understandable.
      - Would you want to believe it or be reminded of it if you were an unbeliever?
      - It is their worst nightmare.
    - Here, with the Thessalonians, they were claiming that it had already happened.
      - They employ other tactics as well... they will mock you, scorn you, and even call you evil for believing it.
- B. Paul proceeds to remind them of something he had taught them when he was with them that should have prevented them from accepting this false teaching...
1. In short, he reminds them that before Jesus comes, there will be a great falling away (or *apostasia*—apostasy) of the church.
    - Not the falling away of the Jews that happened when Christ came...
    - Nor the falling away that occurred because of persecution from the Jews and the Romans...
    - But a falling away (*the* falling away) that would be led from within the church itself by one who claims to be God...
      - not just a cult rising up here or there...there were to be many such antichrists—persons claiming to be Christ...
        - but a great apostasy that would affect the church as a whole, led by *the* antichrist—*the* man of sin.
  2. Paul explains that many people in the church will be deceived and led astray with signs and wonders because they never really received the gospel...
    - As he says in verse 10, **they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved.**
    - As verse 11 & 12 says, God will **send them strong delusion** to judge them for **not believing the truth but instead having pleasure in unrighteousness.**
      - It will be a great judgment upon the church as a whole that will take place before Jesus comes.
- C. And then as might be expected, Paul encourages them in verse 13-17 to continue in the truth...
1. He expresses his certainty about them that they are among those that God has chosen for salvation and belief of the truth...that they might obtain glory...
    - God has saved them and will keep them from believing the lie.

2. And then from this encouragement, he exhorts them to stand fast in the things that he had taught them as an apostle (verse 15)...
  - with the result that they will be comforted in assurance of faith and established in every good word and work.

TRANS> Overall, Paul is calling them not to be sidetracked by the false teaching that the Day of Christ has already come.

- But now I want to turn our focus to this great phrase that Paul uses in verse 1...
  - **“our gathering to Him,”** that is, of course, *our gathering to Christ*.
  - Let’s take a little time to consider these wonderful words for our encouragement this morning.

## II. **First, I want to show you that gathering together to Christ [this final gathering] is the ultimate destiny for us as God’s people.**

A. Paul presents it this way in our text.

1. It is not something that happens gradually or that one is left to wonder if it has happened or not.
  - It happens when the Lord Jesus comes on His day—the Day of the LORD.
  - It happens at the end of all things.
  - It is at the end of the world and it brings us into the fullness of all that God has promised.
2. All we have to do is look back at what Paul has already said to the Thessalonians to see that His coming is impossible to miss!
  - a. In the first chapter of this very letter, he describes it as the day:
    - 1 Thess 1:7-8: **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God...**
      - This makes it clear that unbelievers will certainly know when He comes!
    - And in verse 10, it says: **when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe,**
      - Not at all a thing that can be unnoticed by believers either!
      - The whole purpose is for Him to be manifested and glorified.
  - b. And then we can turn back to Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians and see from 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 that His coming is by no means a secret coming!
    - **“<sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”**
      - Even people that have died long ago will not miss this incredible day.
        - They will be called up from their graves.
        - Every eye will see Him!

3. And notice how this is shown to be our ultimate destiny according the end of verse 17—1 Thess 4:17—
    - It says, **“And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”**
      - Once He comes, we will never know a day with Him.
        - The gathering will be permanent.
      - This is where God has purposed for us to end up.
        - It is not a step to something else—it is our final destiny to be with Him.
        - There is nothing greater that could be desired than to be with Him.
- I cannot describe it because it is indescribable to be in the presence of such glory...
- B. But I can tell you what our gathering together to Him will entail from what God has revealed to us in His Word.
- **1 Cor 2:9-10: As it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”**  
<sup>10</sup> **But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.**
  - So what has He told us and shown us it will be like to be gathered to Him?
    1. He has told us that we will see the glory Jesus has had with the Father from all eternity.
      - In John 17:24, Jesus prayed for this wonderful blessing of our gathering to Him. He said (Jn 17:24): **Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.**
      - The most awesome thing about seeing His glory is seeing this love that He has with His Father—we will be gathered to Him and we will see it.
        - You don’t want to miss this!
    2. Secondly, God has told us that when we are gathered to Him, we will live in this love that there is between the Father and the Son—
      - That we will be both love and be loved with this love.
        - As Jesus says, **that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.**
          - I can say the words, but I can’t dream of what it will be like!
          - The excellent person that you wish you were—you will be.
      - In 1 John 3:2, it says: **Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.**
        - The command to love one another as Jesus has loved us will be fulfilled when we are gathered to him.
        - Just think of it—you will be able to love like Him.
          - You certainly don’t want to miss this!
    3. Thirdly, God has told us in His word that when we are gathered to Him, our bodies will be perfected.
      - Jesus showed us this when He was here among us.
        - When dead people were around Him, He raised them up; lame people were caused to walk; the sick were made well; blind people were caused to see; lepers were cleansed; the hungry were given food; storms were calmed...

- When we are gathered to Jesus at the last day, we are promised in 1 Cor 15 that our bodies will instantly be made like His glorious body.
  - In 1 Cor 15:52-54, it says: **in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.** <sup>53</sup> **For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.** <sup>54</sup> **So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”**
  - Paul says that if this resurrection has already happened, then our faith is worthless and we are still in our sins.
    - You do not want to miss this!
- 4. Besides this, God has told us that when we are gathered to Christ, the whole creation will be perfected.
  - Our sin, the sin of mankind, has brought a curse on the earth so that the whole creation suffers—until we are gathered to Christ!
    - Romans 8:19-21 says: **For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.** <sup>20</sup> **For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;** <sup>21</sup> **because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.**
    - That means that paradise will be restored—no storms or food that doesn’t taste just the way it should.

TRANS> All of these things will happen when we are gathered to Christ on His Day!

- It would be very disturbing to think that this day had already occurred!
  - This is our destiny as heirs in Christ of His saving work.
  - He died that we might have this inheritance with Him—that we might be gathered to Him in glory.
    - Don’t let anyone cause you to be shaken in your mind or troubled about this!

### **III. As Christians, our identity is that we are gathered to Christ that we might be gathered to Him.**

- By that I mean not that we are gathered to Him in His church by faith, but that we are waiting for Him to come and take us to Himself to live with Him in glory.
  - This is to be our self-awareness—
  - We are a people that are destined to live with Him in glory.
    - Our identity is that of a people gathered to Christ in faith who are going to be gathered to Him in both body and spirit.

A. From the beginning, God has called us to be gathered to Christ.

1. With Abraham, God began to gather a people to Christ.
  - I don’t mean to suggest that no one was gathered to Christ before Abraham.
    - They certainly were—but it was with Abraham that this identity as a people called out and gathered to Him really began to take shape.

- a. In Genesis 12, God called Abraham to leave his home and come to a land where he would become a great nation...
    - He promised that he and this family that came from him would be His people and that He would be their God.
  - b. From this great nation would come a Son that would bring blessing to Abraham's family, and to all the nations of the world.
    - Abraham's family would find salvation in this son—they would be gathered to Him for salvation...
  - c. And not only that, but God told him that all the families of the earth would be blessed in this Son...
    - In other words, they too would be gathered to Him for salvation!
    - It would be through Him that salvation would come to the entire world.
2. From Abraham, God then brought forth the nation of Israel and gathered them ritually around Christ.
    - a. He redeemed them from bondage in Egypt and gave them an inheritance in the land of Canaan.
      - Here, they were to be identified as His people, the assembly of people in the world that were gathered to God and His salvation.
      - Understand how marvellous this was, because the whole world was lost in sin—but here God is gathering a people for salvation...He was starting something wonderful
    - b. He gathered them around a house where Christ the Saviour was ritually presented.
      - God had them erect a tent or tabernacle in the midst of their tents, to symbolise how they were gathered around Him.
        - When they settled in the land, the tent became a house—a temple in the midst of their houses.
      - And in this tabernacle or tent, Christ was set forth among them by priests who represented Him and also, amazingly, by sacrifices that also represented Him as the sacrifices that would be offered to atone for sin on the altar.
        - God showed them that they were gathered to the Son that He might redeem them by His own blood.
        - Forgiveness and eternal life and full acceptance were promised.
    - c. Three times a year, they had assemblies in which they ritually gathered to Christ at Jerusalem...
      - These were holy convocations.
      - And every week, they gathered locally as God's gathered people...
      - And each day there were morning and evening sacrifices at the temple which became times of daily prayer...
        - when they looked to Christ—or rather to the shadows that represented Him—and remembered that in Him they had salvation.
3. The promise of being gathered to Christ was later made even more explicit.
    - a. Isaiah made it clear that it was God's Son that would be born to them.

- In Isaiah 9:6: **For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**
- There is much to see in this verse, but what I want you notice in relation to our focus today is how this Son is given to us...
  - It is because we are gathered to Him, or rather that He comes to us who are gathered, that we are blessed.
  - He comes among us as God to save us, yet He is a Son born of us!
    - What a marvellous thing to be gathered to such a person!
- When this prophecy was given, though, God's people were becoming more and more wicked—
  - They became so wicked that God sent enemies to drive them from the land He had given them.
    - But instead of this being the end, it just became a platform for God to make even clearer promises that Christ would come to save sinners!
- b. The exile scattered the people, but God promised that he would gather them again.
  - For example, in Jeremiah 32:37, He says: **'Behold, I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely.**
    - You can see again the emphasis on gathering them—God gathers them to His Son for salvation.
      - He tells them the good things that he will do for them when He gathers them.
    - By gathering them to the temple, He ritually gathers them to the Son who is represented at the temple—but now the Son was to actually come.
      - God told them what would happen...
        - 1) He said he'd gather them and pour out His Spirit on them.
        - 2) He said he'd gather them and forgive their sins.
        - 3) He said he'd gather them and then bring the nations to them.
- All this would happen when the Son came.
- B. In the fullness of time, God's Son did indeed come to be born to His people.
  1. He came and brought salvation to His people.
    - **1 Tim 1:15: This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.**
    - He came among us for the purpose of saving us—and as you know,
      - He went to the cross to bear our sins—
  - Now those who had gathered around Him ritually in the ceremonies at the temple were called to gather around His person.
    - To be gathered to Him!
  2. He called them to come to Him (gather to Him) in faith for salvation.

- For example, in John 7:37, it says: **On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.”**
  - Again you see the focus of being gathered to Him.
3. He commanded them to gather the nations to Him for salvation.
- In Mt 28:18-20, He said: **All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.**
  - A disciple is someone who comes to a master to learn of him—and to be baptised is to come to Him in faith for the cleansing He promises through His suffering on the cross.
    - So again, we see that it is by being gathered to Him.
    - That is what characterises God’s people.
- C. Our identity is that we are His church (His gathered ones).
1. We enter His church by profession of faith and baptism (Acts 2:41).
- In Acts 2:41, it says: **Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.**
  - Notice how it says that they were added.
    - They became part of the church by faith and baptism—part of the people who were gathered to Christ for salvation and to wait for Him to come from heaven.
  - A person who does not receive the word should not be baptised, but everyone who does receive the word should be baptised...
    - And when they are, they become numbered with God’s people.
2. And then they are to join in the gathering of God’s people each Lord’s Day.
- You see in Acts 2:42 that this is what all of those who were baptised did.
    - **Acts 2:42: And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.**
    - They gathered faithfully to hear the word, to pray, to come to the Lord’s Supper because they belong to those gathered to Christ.
      - It is their identity now.
      - It is your identity if you are in Christ—you belong—no matter how you may feel, if you are trusting in Him, you fully belong.
3. And we are to gather in anticipation of being gathered by Him when He comes!
- Hebrews 10 brings out the association of our gathering with our anticipation of His coming...
    - Heb 10:21-25: **and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,**

**as is the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**

- **“So much the more as you see the Day approaching”**—that is the day when He comes and we are gathered to Him!
  - That is the day we eagerly wait for and should anticipate when we gather to Him at church in spirit and in truth.
  - Now it is a spiritual gathering, but soon it will be face to face!

**Conclusion:** What a splendid thing it is to be part of His church!

- We are not just gathered with each other—but most of all we are gathered to our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - How enthusiastic we should be to engage in His ordinances each week with our brothers and sisters—to hear His word, to offer up our praises, to pray to Him, to receive the Lord’s Supper—indeed to be blessed by Him until He comes.
  - Let’s go out and gather the world to Him!