

# The Falling Away

By Bob Vincent

**Bible Text:** 2 Thessalonians 2; John 21:17-23; 1 Timothy 4

**Preached on:** Sunday, September 24, 2006

## Grace Presbyterian Church

4900 Jackson Street

Alexandria, LA 71303-2509

Website: <http://www.rbvincent.com>

Online Sermons: <http://www.sermonaudio.com/rbvincent>

John chapter 21—page 1688—John chapter 21—page 1688—verse 20.

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"<sup>1</sup>

Now let's get this in the context. The context is this. Jesus has just told Peter that he is not going to live to see Christ's return.

Verse 17.

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"<sup>2</sup>

So there have been people who have known that Jesus would not return in their lifetime and Saint Peter was one of those people. He is told here that he would suffer for the faith. He is told here that he would be arrested and he would be put to death. He is told the kind of death that he would die.

We know by Christian tradition that Peter was crucified upside down. Oh, the Bible itself doesn't tell us exactly how he died. Christian history does fill in that gap that he was crucified upside down, that he said as he was told he would be crucified that he wasn't worthy to be crucified the way that Jesus was and so he asked that he be crucified upside down.

---

<sup>1</sup> John 21:20-21 (All Scripture references are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated).

<sup>2</sup> John 21:17-19

Now, Peter has just been told, “You are not going to see my Second Coming.” And he has also been given some very bad news, good news and bad news. The good news is, “You will live to be an old man.” The bad news is, “When you get to be an old man you will be captured, arrested and you will not like what is done to you.”

Well, naturally this sparks Peter’s question to Jesus. You know, you have more than one child. And one is getting something, you know, that is going to happen. He is going to be punished in some way. And we shouldn’t see this as a punishment, but he says, “Well, now, what about him? And I am going to miss out on this and this? What about him?” And that is kind of the question here in the context: What about him? Verse 21. What about John?

And this is what Jesus answers about John. And I believe, though people will not usually turn to this passage of Scripture that it is a key verse to understand the Second Coming of Christ.

Look with me if you will.

So now Jesus is responding to Peter’s question, “Hey, I am not going to live to see your Second Coming. It is not going to be pleasant for me when I get to be an old man. What about him?”

Ok. Jesus says in verse 22, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.”<sup>3</sup>

Now notice verse 23, the comment on that by John. “Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?’”<sup>4</sup>

I want you to meditate with me for a few minutes on this verse, what Jesus says, and on John’s comment. Jesus did not teach that the apostle John would be alive at the time of the Second Coming of Christ. But let me ask you a question. Did Jesus want John and those who heard his words to believe that that would happen or that it might happen? And the answer to that is yes. We have here a very important truth about the Second Coming of Christ. No matter when we are alive, even in the first century of the Christian era we are to live in the light of the truth that we may not die, that we may be the generation who is alive to see Jesus return, that Jesus will return and that we may be part of that generation that sees him return.

Now I ask you the question again. When you read John 21 and you read what Jesus says to Peter about the apostle John what is he saying? He said, “If I want him to remain until I come, until I return, is that your business?”<sup>5</sup> He is planting the thought that he would re-

---

<sup>3</sup> John 21:22

<sup>4</sup> John 21:23

<sup>5</sup> See John 21:21

turn in the lifetime of the apostle John, but he isn't teaching absolutely, clearly, directly and unambiguously that he would return in the lifetime of the apostle John.

This is a great truth!

I submit to you that there are three clusters of truths related to the Second Coming of Christ that are hard for us to put together. One is this truth. Jesus could come in my lifetime. He could come at 11:23 in the morning on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of September in the year of our Lord 2006. And if your theology doesn't allow you to believe that, something is wrong with your theology.

Immediately people say, "But look at 2 Thessalonians two."

2 Thessalonians two says the rebellion has to occur first and the man of sin be revealed before Christ can return. And it does say that.

And then there is a third cluster of truths that the Bible teaches that we will look at more, God willing, next week when we consider the question of the Jewish people. Scripture indicates that a majority of the Jewish people will embrace Jesus as their Messiah. That is a strand of biblical prophecy. And there will be a great and significant outpouring of the Spirit of God not only on the Jewish people at that time, but Gentiles will be blessed by this event as well. And I believe that strand of truth is fleshed out in Romans chapters nine, 10 and especially Romans 11.

So how do you put it together? How can you possibly believe that Jesus could return now in about four minutes if the Bible teaches—as it does in 2 Thessalonians two—that the apostasy has to occur first and the man of sin be revealed and there is revival among the Jewish people? And the answer to that question is: I don't know. But I am going to give you why it doesn't bother me that I don't know.

Here is why it doesn't bother me. If you were one of God's people living in Old Testament times and you were wrestling with biblical prophecy about the end of the age from a Jewish perspective in the Old Testament and you looked at the issue of the Messiah, you would have seen two clusters of truth about the Messiah in the Old Testament. And those two clusters of truth about the Messiah in the Old Testament are: The Messiah is coming as a king who will defeat our enemies, who will establish the throne of his father David and who will rule over all nations. Strand one.

Strand two. The messiah is the suffering servant who is going to be put to death in the place of God's people who will take the judgment that is due to God's people, the guilt and the consequences of their sin on himself and he will be put to death in a shameful death. He will be despised and rejected of people even of his own people.

So you are Jewish and you are living under Old Testament times and you wrestle with these strands of truth. How can it be?

And here is the tendency that we find with Old Testament believers and it is a tendency that is with us today. You minimize one truth in order to hold to the other truth. You reject one idea in order to hold to the other.

And the problem with most of the people living at the time when Jesus was revealed is that they had tended to reject the idea that the Messiah was as suffering servant and had accepted only the idea that the Messiah would be reigning king. What did they do with those prophecies about a suffering servant? Instead of believing that those prophecies had to do with the Messiah himself, they twisted those passages so that they believed that they referred to the sufferings of Israel under the Gentiles, particularly in the Babylonian captivity.

So what we find that Israel in the Old Testament did with these strands of prophecy is that they tended to forget the one in order to hold to the other. They distorted it.

I believe that Bible prophecy is a little bit like a jigsaw puzzle. Can you imagine getting a paper bag with the contents of a jigsaw puzzle in it but with no box cover? How difficult is that? Very difficult. But once you see the cover of the box in which the jigsaw puzzle comes, you can put it together a lot more easily. You see this color here and you know, “Oh, that, that is part of the ocean whereas this other color which happens to be also blue, but slightly different, that is part of the dress of the lady sitting in the boat as the man is rowing her towards the water.”

Once you see the cover on the box top the pieces fit together and you say, “Wow, this really does fit together.”

So here is what I am saying to you. It is an amazing thing as you read the gospels, the four gospels, that Old Testament prophecy fit together in a beautiful way. Jesus is both now King of Kings and Lord of Lords and he also is the suffering servant. And it fit together without any contradiction, without any tension whatsoever.

So I submit to you this. These three strands of truth revival, the Jewish people en masse coming to embrace Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, falling away and manifestation of the man of sin and the imminence—or, I should say, the potential imminence—of the return of Christ, when it happens just like looking at the cover of a box of a jigsaw puzzle, when it happens we will look back and we will say, “You know, that is amazing how it all fit together.”

Our problem is that we want to make it fit together before it happens so that we have got God and history and the future all figured out.

I submit to you that Bible prophecy is not given to us fundamentally so we can feel comfortable and know the future. But fundamentally Bible prophecy is given to us to motivate us in certain attitudes of the heart. The nearness of the return of Christ, what clearly the Lord Jesus is implying in John 21 is this. It is possible that while Peter would not live to see Jesus’ return—and that is clearly taught—that John the apostle would live to see

Christ's return. That teaches us a fundamental truth. In every generation of Christians we should be getting ready to go. In every generation of Christians whether you are talking about that first generation of Christians with the apostle John or whether you are talking about the Christians during the 10 great persecutions under the Roman Empire or whether you are talking about the Church in the early Middle Ages or the late Middle Ages or the Renaissance or the Reformation or whether you are talking about the Church as it encounters the terrible apostasy that began particularly with the French Revolution in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century or whether you are talking about Christians living in Russia when the Czar was murdered and when the Communists took over and when Christians were brutally persecuted or whether you are talking about Christians living in Mao's China under one of the most brutal men—perhaps the most brutal man—who has ever ruled in human history, Mao Tse-tung, every group of believers needs to believe what Jesus said to Peter about the apostle John, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"

Jesus could come today. Jesus could come this morning in another minute. He could. And we need to live in light of that. And what does that truth do for us? Well, it teaches us something. It teaches us not to have our roots down so deeply in this world that we are reluctant to go. It teaches us to have hope and confidence as we see things going on in the world. It reminds us that God's plan for the world is not to make the world a better place, that the dream of the United Nations is not going to succeed, that we will not fulfill Woodrow Wilson's dream to make the world safe for democracy, that we will not free the world from terrorism, that we will not end poverty and conflict, that the world that we live in is a world that is going to come to an end. And just before it comes to an end the Lord will return for his Church. The trumpet will sound. The archangel will shout. The Lord Jesus will call for the dead in Christ to rise first. And then you and I who are alive when Christ returns will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

That is a glorious truth. And it gives us great confidence. That truth gave confidence to believers 25 years ago when they were being severely persecute, 30 years ago, 35 years ago in the cultural revolution in China when there was bloodbath. That truth that Jesus is coming again and we may be the generation who are alive to see him return gave believers great hope and great confidence.

The idea that God still has a future for the Jewish people has a lot to say to us and we will explore that, God willing, next week, particularly in terms of the Middle East. The idea that that will result in blessing to Gentiles as well has something to say. This teaches us what? When things are bad don't throw in the towel. When things are bad don't get discouraged. Don't become a complete cynic. Hold on to optimism because the promises of God are true.

There are lots of people who haven't been saved who need to be saved. God still wants to send revival and awaken people and quicken people. God wants to draw lost people to Jesus and particularly the Jewish people.

The third strand of truth, the one that we have been on—turning back to 2 Thessalonians two—warns us not to trust government and the schemes of men. Every bad guy in his-

tory started out as a good guy. Every tyrant in history sold somebody a bill of goods that he was going to bring about a great society, a new world order, a new way of doing things. He was going to solve fundamental problems. And, oh, by the way, in order to do this you need to allow me to do this and this and this. It is the song of the tyrant always.

2 Thessalonians two warns us not to trust people, particularly people who come to us and seem to be Christians. We need to be careful.

Turning back, then to 2 Thessalonians chapter two we focused on the man of sin, the antichrist, an individual, not a system. The system is talked about there called the mystery of lawlessness. But there is an individual and we are told that individual will be destroyed at the time when Jesus returns.

Verse eight, 2 Thessalonians 2:8—page 1843, “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.”<sup>6</sup> But there is a second thing that takes place near the end of the age and that is the focus of today’s message. It isn’t just an antichrist, a man of sin being revealed. There is something else that is foretold.

He says in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, “Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs.”<sup>7</sup> Now the word that is translated “rebellion” literally is the word apostasy; well, we get the English word “apostasy” from it.

What is apostasy? It is to fall away. It is to fall away. And I want us to think about the meaning of that word for a moment through some New Testament passages of Scripture; apostasy, a falling away. Think of it more in terms of apostasy, a falling away, rather than rebellion.

Turn with me if you will to 1 John chapter two verse 19, 1 John chapter two verse 19. We’ll pick it up at verse 18. If you are using the pew Bibles you will find this on page 1900. May God help me to present this clearly in Jesus name.

1 John 2:18, “Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.”<sup>8</sup> John the apostle, taught by the Lord Jesus himself wrote those words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That is God’s own Word. It is true. It is infallible. It is without error. John lived in light of the blessed hope that he would be alive to see Jesus return. But he warns people of this. He is saying, “Look, let’s not get so hung up in prophecy that we fail to see what is going on in the world now.” He says, “You have heard about a future antichrist. Better open you eyes and see there are a lot of them around now.” Here is a basic truth. There is a final antichrist. There is an ultimate man of sin, but the principle of lawlessness has been working throughout history and there have

---

<sup>6</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:8

<sup>7</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:3

<sup>8</sup> 1 John 2:18

been many antichrists throughout history, many antichrists, but there is one final antichrist, one final man of sin.

So John says there are many antichrists. Now listen to what he says, verse 19, “They went out from us.”<sup>9</sup> What does that mean? That means apostasy. They went out from us. These antichrists were once part of the Christian Church. They once believed orthodox or true Christian teaching according to 1 John 2:19.

Then he says, “But they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”<sup>10</sup>

What is he saying? He is saying this. If you have ever been born again you can never be lost. If you have ever really been saved you can never be lost. You cannot lose your salvation. Look at what he says clearly in 1 John 2:19, “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us.”<sup>11</sup> If somebody is really saved, if they have really come to Jesus for the cleansing power, if they have been converted to Christ, if they have received the Holy Spirit and experienced the New Birth they can never be lost. So when we talk about apostasy or falling away we are not talking about individual Christians who are real Christians who have come to know God. You can’t lose your salvation.

But I want you to notice something else. There are people who look like real Christians. There are people who may think of themselves as real Christians. There are people who are part of the Christian Church, people who teach orthodox things, maybe great preachers or whatever who do depart from the faith. Do you see that? A real Christian can never fall away. But there are people who look like real Christians, people who are part of the Church who do cease to be part of things. And that is what he says very clearly in 1 John chapter two verse 19. “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”<sup>12</sup>

We find this distinction that theologians make between what is called the visible church and the invisible Church. What is the visible church? That is the church you and I see. It is what I am looking at right now. I look at the church. It is the church as a man can see. Man looks on the outward appearance. Everybody who has been baptized, everybody who professes faith in Jesus is part of that church.

I look across the street at Calvary Baptist and I see the same church, the visible church. I see hundreds of people there just as I see hundreds of people here, a few more hundred over there than here, hopefully temporarily, two services. Not trying to take anybody. I want lost people to come in, not other churches. So...and have two services.

---

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 2:19

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

But look. People who say they know Jesus, people who can give an answer when you say, “You know, if God were to ask you why should I let you into heaven?” And they say, “It is not what I have done, it is what Jesus did for me. I am trusting in what Christ did for me on the cross.” Those people. That’s the visible church. It is what you and I see.

But the fact of the matter is man looks on the outward appearance. God looks on the heart. So when we speak of the invisible Church we are talking about the Church as God sees it. God sees his saved, really saved, and God sees who is lost, but who for a season becomes affiliated with the Church for one reason or another.

The invisible Church...not one member of the invisible Church will ever fall away. The visible church people fall away from that all the time, all the time. And that is what he says in 1 John 2:19. That is called apostasy. To fall away is to fall back from what you once held to.

I’ll read it one more time and then we get back on. He is talking about these many anti-christs that were alive in his day almost 2000 years ago. And he says, “They went out from us. They were once part of the church, but they didn’t really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us they would have remained with us. But their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”<sup>13</sup>

Turn with me if you will to 1 Timothy chapter four, 1 Timothy chapter four. Apostasy, falling away, he is speaking about a final form of apostasy connected with the Second Coming of Christ—page 1848. Here we find this same particular Greek word used in 1 Timothy chapter four, 1 Timothy chapter four. Apostasy, apostasy, it is not, in this case, apostasy, but it is another form of the word. I’m sorry. Correct that. But he has the same concept here. 1 Timothy four verse one. “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.”<sup>14</sup>

So what is he saying? 1 Timothy 4:1. Paul is teaching that the Holy Spirit has revealed that there would come a falling away or a defection from the pure teachings of Christianity. It would occur in some future time. So when we think about apostasy we are not saying that any individual Christian who is really a Christian can be lost, but we are saying that the Christian Church can cease to stand where it once stood.

Now I want you to see something here. Is doctrine an important thing? Absolutely. What is the source of false doctrine according to 1 Timothy chapter four verse one? Demons. Demons. What are demons? Well, I believe that if you examine the biblical evidence you discover that demons were once God’s holy angels who turned their back on God and followed this chief angel who became known to us as Satan and these fallen angels now work in the world to deceive people.

Can you be deceived by a demon? Absolutely.

---

<sup>13</sup> See 1 John 2:19

<sup>14</sup> 1 Timothy 4:1



What is the best method to keep from being deceived by a demon? Be a person who reads the Word of God, studies the Word of God and who prays. Keep your heart right with the Lord. When you fall into sin—because every Christian falls into sin from time to time in one way or another daily and regularly at least in thought, generally in word and from time to time in deed—when you become convicted that you have sinned what do you do? Get it right with the Lord?

What happen if you don't get it right with the Lord? You get hardened in your heart. When you get hardened in your heart your spiritual sensitivity becomes dull and you become subject to deception.

Do I believe that it is possible that a born again Christian could have followed Jim Jones to Guyana and drunk that Kool Aid? Yeah, I do believe that. I believe that it is possible for a born again person to get involved with a cult. I believe that it is possible for a born again person to get deceived and to be in a place he shouldn't be religiously. Can't lose his salvation, but he can lose his life.

Remember, again, a real Christian can't lose his salvation, but he can be deceived.

So there is demonic influence—1 Timothy 4:1—that leads people who were leaders in the Church to teach false teaching. Said it again, 1 Timothy 4:1, “The Spirit clearly says...”<sup>15</sup> This isn't some mysterious weird thing vaguely taught, “that in later times some will abandon the faith.”<sup>16</sup> That is apostasy, abandoning the faith.

So there is such a thing as religious institution ceasing to hold to what it once held.

I want to look at another aspect of apostasy and for that I want to read to you from a book that generally is not accepted as part of Scripture, but I think is certainly valuable. And it is a book that is written during the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament and it is the book of 1 Maccabees.

Why would I read to you from 1 Maccabees? Listen to me very carefully. Last week I pointed out that if you look at Daniel chapter seven and Daniel chapter eight you understand that the lat great figure opposing God, the man of sin, has a predecessor, a foreshadowing in a man by the name of Antiochus Epiphanies. Antiochus Epiphanies is spoken of prophetically in Daniel chapter eight. He is the little horn that comes up out of the four horns of the Hellenistic Empire. And if you compare Daniel eight with Daniel seven you discover that there is a different varmint in Daniel seven than in Daniel eight.

In Daniel seven there is a little horn that comes up out of one of 10 horns.

This may sound all weird and mysterious because I am just giving you a synopsis of something. But here is the fact. The fact is that God has given us a lot of information in

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Scripture about the nature of the man of sin and the antichrist by giving us a good portrait of what he will be like by describing an individual who has already come on the scene of world history.

He was a Greek ruler by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes. And he enforced his Greek philosophy and his Greek religion on the Jewish people. So let me read you a little bit here because I believe this describes for us the kind of apostasy that is in view in 2 Thessalonians two. I am reading from 1 Maccabees 1:10 and down through verse 15.

From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of Antiochus..he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred and thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks...In those days lawless men came forth from Israel.<sup>17</sup>

Notice that word there, “certain *renegades* came out from Israel and misled many.”<sup>18</sup> That sounds a lot like 1 John 2:19. These are renegades. These are people...these are Jews who have turned aside from the Jewish faith revealed in the Scriptures. “...saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles round about us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us.”<sup>19</sup>

Verse 12, “This proposal pleased them.”<sup>20</sup>

1 Maccabees 1:13. “And some of the people eagerly went to the king. He authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles.”<sup>21</sup>

1 Maccabees 1:14. “So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom.”<sup>22</sup>

Verse 15. “And removed the marks of circumcision,[2] and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.”<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting that the word translated there “abandoned the holy covenant,”<sup>24</sup> is a translation of the Greek word that is the verb form of apostasy. They apostatized from God’s holy covenant.

Let me give you the essence of what I have just read to you. Around 175 years before Christ under the rule of the Greeks the Jewish people began to experience an intense persecution. They were being forced to become like the Greeks.

---

<sup>17</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:10-11

<sup>18</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:11

<sup>19</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:11

<sup>20</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:12

<sup>21</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:13

<sup>22</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:14

<sup>23</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:15

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Now we think of a gymnasium in a harmless way. We have a gymnasium over there. But the word gymnasium comes from the Greek word which means naked or nude. And a gymnasium in Greek culture was a place where people competed in athletic contests in the nude. They competed nakedly.

And so here is what the Greeks were doing. The Greeks set up a gymnasium there in Jerusalem and they wanted the Jewish males to compete in the Greek games which required them to compete in the nude. Well, there was one thing very obvious about those Jewish men that was not true of the Gentile men. Everybody knew when an athletic contest was taking place in a Greek gymnasium who was a Jew because the Jewish men had a mark on their body—called circumcision—that said that they belonged to God. Their parents had dedicated them to God. They were raised to follow the precepts of the Lord and the mark of God's ownership had been placed on them in infancy and that mark was an indelible mark.

And so as they exercised nakedly along with the Gentiles, it was immediately obvious who was a Jew and who was loyal to God's covenant. And the Greeks didn't like this. And so what we discover is that some Jews came up with a method—and I won't go into that, that is just not appropriate to talk about—they removed the marks of circumcision. There was a way to do that in the ancient world. So they made themselves look like they had been circumcised. And in this way they created an act of apostasy from God. They abandoned the holy covenant.

In other words people who were culturally Israelites and had the mark on their body of belonging to God rejected the God of the Bible, rejected his covenant. They committed apostasy and then they went out of their way to make the mark of circumcision appear no longer to exist.

It would be like a person saying, "I reject Christ. I renounce my baptism." That is what you are talking about if you look at it in New Testament context.

We read further in 1 Maccabees chapter two and verse 17. And this is the outbreak of the Jewish rebellion against the Greeks.

Then the king's officers spoke to Mattathias as follows: "You are a leader, honored and great in town, and supported by sons and brothers. Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the Gentiles and the people of Judah and those that are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons will be numbered among the friends of the king, and you and your sons will be honored with silver and gold and many gifts."<sup>25</sup>

1 Maccabees 2:19. "But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: "Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to obey his com-

---

<sup>25</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:17-18

mands,”<sup>26</sup> every one of them abandoning the worship handed down from their ancestors he says, “I and my sons and my brothers will live by the covenant of my ancestors.”<sup>27</sup>

Now let me see if I can sum up this. We have talked about apostasy and said that a born again person cannot fall away. We have said that there are a lot of people that are part of the church who can fall away and that involves a rejection of basic Christian teaching, a renunciation of that. And now we are talking about a cultural abandonment of the faith. And we see that particularly in this era before the Christian era when so many Jews were persecuted for their faith.

By the way, Matathias led a revolt—he was a priest—he led a revolt against the Greeks, actually defeated the Greeks and was able to go into the temple of God which had been desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes when he offered a pig on the altar of the Lord and dedicated to the Olympian Zeus. And as they dedicated the temple they could not find any consecrated oil to light the menorah. And they found only a small amount and they lit the menorah. And, according to Jewish tradition, that tiny amount of oil that should only have burned one day lasted for eight days and that is why the Jews celebrate Hannukah in December commemorating the revolt of these Jews against these Greek tyrants.

Let me see if I can distill all of this for you for a moment because you need to understand this. If we look at the world today I believe that we see that we are in the apostasy. And that means it is later than you think. That means that that which is prophesied not only is happening, but began to happen some time ago. We are in the apostasy. I believe that we are.

How do I see the world in which we are living? And I want to submit at the beginning of this and at the end in a couple of minutes I could be wrong. Because other people have looked at world events and drawn the conclusion that they were in it.

First let me ask you this question. As you look at the world you see a world that was once—in terms of the civilized world—dominated by Christianity, Europe and much of Asia dominated by Christianity; Russia, a Christian nation; Eastern Europe, full of Christian nations; Western Europe, full of Christian nations; North America—whether Canada or the United States, Central America or South America—Christian nations.

What do I mean by a Christian nation? Nations can’t be born again, but nations can be influenced by Christian principles. And I submit to you that the world is a far better place because of the influence of Christianity over all those nations than it was before the coming of Christianity.

It doesn’t mean that every individual in those countries is a Christian. It doesn’t mean that those nations govern themselves exactly according to the principles of Jesus. It doesn’t mean that people haven’t done terrible things in the name of Jesus. But it does mean this. It is a better place. I will submit to you and debate anybody anywhere any

---

<sup>26</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:19

<sup>27</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:20

time on this. The people of Mexico for all of the misery that Cortez brought were better off under Cortez than they were under the Aztecs.

I have been to the pyramids outside of Mexico City. One thing you can say for Cortez, he didn't eat them. He didn't skin them and wear their skin. And the Aztecs did that. And don't let anybody tell you that is not true.

You see, we live in a time, and it is part of the apostasy, we live in a time when it is unpopular to stand up for the good things that have happened in our world as a result of Christianity and where everybody wants to talk about all the good things that everybody else did. I want to tell you something that until the gospel came to those nations throughout the world they lived in total Satanic, darkness. Look, study world history and you discover something. Without the light of Christ having come to culture after culture, nation after nation, people group after people group, there were horrible things, horrible things that people did. Christianity—I'll say this again. I will debate anybody anywhere any time. Christianity has been a blessing wherever it has come.

And I'll tell you one group of people—and there are a lot of them here today with us—who have benefited from Christianity and who without Christianity have been held in abject servitude with very few rights. And what group of people is that? Women, absolutely. Wherever Christianity has come women have been lifted up. Women without the coming of the gospel were virtual slaves with virtually no rights in most cultures of the world. Christ has elevated women. Christ has elevated all kinds of things. The world was a better place for the coming of Christianity, but what did we see as we look at the world today historically?

We look at it beginning, really, with the French Revolution and the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But that was largely limited and it was restricted and all and did not spread very far. What you saw was the overthrow of Christianity affecting a culture and the establishment of immorality. And what did it lead to? It led to a blood bath. That, as I say, the French Revolution has limited—God in his sovereignty limited—its pernicious malignant influence.

But what do you see in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? I submit to you that the 20<sup>th</sup> century is, for all practical purposes, virtually without exception, at least among the nations that comprised Christendom at one time, an unrelenting defeat of Christianity out of the public life of nation after nation after nation. Russia falls to the Communists and then courtesy of leaders in your country and mine, at the end of World War II—never forget it—your State Department and my State Department, your president, my president, gave away much of the world to Joe Stalin. We gave Joseph Stalin who was a horribly evil man—a true antichrist, not the antichrist—we gave eastern Europe to him at the end of World War II and our State Department threw its weight behind Mao Tse-tung rather than cash my check...I mean Chiang Kai Shek. Chiang Kai Shek was the leader of the Kuomintang or the nationalist party in China. He was more loyal to us, but people within our own State Department allowed Mao Tse-tung to come to power. And the worst blood bath to the Christians in the history of the world as well as their own people in China occurred.

Look at the onslaught against Christianity in western Europe and what do you see? Christianity as a cultural influence in Europe hardly exists any more.

And what about this country? What about our neighbor to the north Canada? Canada is moving as fast as it possibly can to turn its back on the principles that made Canada a great and free nation. And that is happening in our nation.

Let me tell you it is not for nothing that America lost its first major war within the same decade that it officially forbade prayer in the public school system recognizing God and officially forbade the devotional reading of Scripture in the public school.

I think there is a connection. I think that when you say to God by Supreme Court fiat and the American people don't wise up in a Jeffersonian way—Jefferson said, “A little revolution is good for a government once in a while”—I think that when the Supreme Court by judicial fiat outlawed the reading of Scripture and prayer in public school system God said, “Ok, have it your way.”

And I look at America that is so different from the world I was born in back in the 40s. I look at a public school system that I started in back in the early 50s where there was prayer, there was Bible reading, there was the memorization of Scripture. We were taught the 10 Commandments, where the public schools were essentially Christian and they are not today. And if you look at what is going on in California you see what? Never forget there is no ultimate compromise between the light and the darkness. The forces of darkness in California are very great. There is legislation pending—that the Lord that their governor vetoed one of these things—that would basically teach and advocate sexual perversion to little children in the California public school system.

And anyone saying, “Well, that's not right,” is going to lose his job.

I am not making this stuff up. If you look at our nation what do you see but apostasy from God. I think God caused the defeat of America in Viet Nam. My brother was a B-52 pilot there. My brother almost got out of the Air Force even though he is an Air Force Academy graduate because he was disgusted at what the politicians did. It wasn't the guys on the ground that lost that war. It wasn't the pilots, American pilots that lost that war. Who lost that war? It was the political leaders of America. Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, two traitors. 58,000 boys, American boys died for nothing in Viet Nam because we tucked tail and abandoned those people. And we did so with politicians lying to us, Democrats and Republicans.

When I think of the two parties I often think of Louisiana's worst and greatest governor, Huey Pierce Long. He talked about [?] and [?]. He talked about a snake oil salesman came to town. He had two kinds of snake oil. One they took the bark of the tree at the top and went down to the bottom with it. That was [?]. And the other one they took the bark off the tree to make it starting at the bottom and going to the top. That was [?].

And he said, “You know, folks, that’s the Republicans and the Democrats. The one skins you from the top down and the other skins you from the bottom up.”

Now I am not saying there are not some differences in the parties, but I am telling you this. Johnson, Nixon betrayed our American soldiers and our POWs were left there. And they lied about it to us. We lost a war.

Am I optimistic about Iraq? No, I am not. Because I think America has turned its back on God. And to whom much is given much will be required.

You can’t spit in God’s face and expect God to bless you. You can’t keep kids from singing, “God bless America” in school and expect God to bless America. And therefore I think that we are increasingly becoming in a situation that is very deadly. What is that? There is no deadlier place in the world than to declare your independence from God. And we as a nation have declared our independence from God in our official decrees of our judiciary that have not been overturned by our legislative or executive branch.

In the past couple of weeks Navy chaplain found guilty because he prayed in the name of Jesus. You are supposed to have a Christian in the White House? Where is he?

Christians stand up to the name of Jesus. What do I see? I see the A word, apostasy. I see the nations that were once outwardly Christian, influenced by Christ ceasing to be Christian in nation after nation after nation after nation.

You know the only really bright spots on our globe today are places like Africa where the gospel is being spread with power. Korea, South Korea where the gospel is being spread with power. But the nations that were once part of what is called Christendom? We have abandoned the faith.

Lastly, the terrible religious apostasy of the American Church. I wouldn’t take my dog to church in most American churches. I sort of like my dog.

Do I think that Presbyterians are the only right way? No. Absolutely not. In fact, I wouldn’t set foot in most Presbyterian Churches. Why? Because the decisions of their General Assembly, not our General Assembly this past summer which allows people who abandon their wives and children and start to shack up with another man to be ordained as pastors of churches.

Hey, what’s wrong with that? What’s wrong with that is it goes contrary to the Word of God.

Am I anti gay individuals? No. I want...I want to hold out Jesus to everybody whatever their orientation. Jesus can forgive your sins. He can give you a new heart. Victory isn’t necessarily instantaneous and it is certainly not total, but there is significant victory over life dominating sins in Jesus.

But I am telling you I will not recognize anyone no matter how high falooting his title who is going to ordain unrepentant, sexually immoral people. That is true of the Episcopal Church as well.

What in the world is wrong with people that they consecrate as a bishop a man who abandoned his wife and children and chose to live in sin with another man? That is not Christian. That is what you call apostasy.

And so as I look at 2 Thessalonians chapter two and I think about the return of Christ I submit to you the apostasy has already occurred.

What's left? Well, there is more than can happen. But I am telling the apostasy...

What would happen if today at one o'clock there was a news broadcast and the president of the United States declared, "Because of extensive trouble with terrorists, the nations of Western Europe, Canada, Central America and the United States have decided to recognize Mr. Whomever, elected by a secret meeting of the United Nations this morning in New York to assume dictatorial power in the present crisis with terrorism"?

That would be the revelation of the man of sin. Could it happen at one o'clock today? I believe it could happen at one o'clock today. Do I think it is going to happen at one o'clock today? No, thank the Lord, I don't. But you know, at a time you think not...

So what is the strand of truth? The strand of truth is what? Be loyal to Jesus. Be loyal to the Word of God and have loose loyalties to everything else.

Let's pray.

*Lord, we live in a very dark time as we see the force of world history is the loss of Christianity throughout what was once Christendom in nation after nation after nation. And as we look at the Christian Church, Lord, we see apostasy there as churches that were once glorious bastions of the truth like the main stream Presbyterians here in America and the main stream Episcopalians in America, Lord, that their gold has become tarnished, their light is being extinguished as they embrace the darkness.*

*Lord, give us to wake up and to remember that it is later than we think, that Jesus' name is hated in high places even in our country. Lord, give us to be ready because there is nothing that I see in world history or in the Bible that tells me we couldn't have a broadcast this very afternoon in which the man of sin would be revealed. And, Lord, there is nothing that I see in Scripture that tells me that Jesus could not return before the sun sets today. I pray for everyone here to be ready as we see the force of history moving to a climax.*



*Lord, others have seen events and believed the same things and I confess that some of my conclusions can be wrong. But, Lord, sooner or later the world will come to such a thing as we see happening today in all likelihood. Give us to be ready for Jesus' sake. Amen.*