

November 9, 2025

Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost

“Apart From the Lawlessness”

2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, 13-17

I don't think that I have ever preached on our Epistle lesson before. I probably haven't done so because it brings up the antichrist, the “man of lawlessness” and people love to focus in on who this evil adversary is when the focus of a sermon is always supposed to be on Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins.

But just to kind of clear this guy off the table, yes, there is an antichrist. The literal text here is “the man, the lawless one” so clearly it is a singular human person who at some point, for a short while, will raise himself up above every god as god himself...and then Jesus will show up and destroy him. Who exactly is this guy? Don't know. Don't really care. If you try to point to any particular person, you're kind of wasting your time because the only confirmation of that claim will be Jesus showing up and wrecking him.

That said, St. John also refers to various antichrists, plural, and Jesus in Matthew refers to false prophets, plural, so we also understand there are many antichrists—anybody who blocks or preaches against the Gospel of free forgiveness through God's grace in Christ alone is considered an antichrist.

If you want to talk more on that it's probably going to come up at Sunday school this morning, so stick around after coffee.

What I want to focus on is that Paul says “*For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.*” This lawlessness is defined in this text with words like, rebellion, adversary, apostacy, and while Paul refers to it somehow being restrained from full force, it's still at work now. The (plural) antichrists are at work purveying lies. So what is this lawlessness?

The simple answer we give is to be without rules and norms, or without written-down laws or the ignoring of those. But in terms of God the law is really all about His perfect design of love for His creation; love of God and love of neighbor. Anything that goes awry of honoring our Creator's design for us, His creation, including His design of salvation in Christ, is sin and lawlessness.

And I've got to say folks; we may be at much more risk of this than all the generations that came before us. Prior to the last few centuries before our vast scientific strides all cultures simply accepted that there was a god or gods above and beyond them. Everybody assumed there was a design. Not so much anymore. More and more we're thinking that humanity is in charge; that we are in charge.

It used to be God in charge of if one had a baby or not. Now it's science, surrogates, frozen and implanted embryos, yes, birth control, abortion. Who do we consider is in control? It kind of seems we think it's us, apart from God. Medicine reflects this. Death, while not generally desirable, used to have to be accepted. Now our attitude is generally that the doctors should be able to fix it. I'm not joking. Y'all remember several weeks ago when Vladimir Putin was caught on a hot mic saying to Xi Jinping that science was making it so “people can get younger, perhaps even immortal”? Here in our own country assisted suicide is increasingly popular; folks saying it's my life and my decision how my days are numbered, not God's decision.

And that's just the world! Look at the Christian church today. In the West it seems that more denominations are proclaiming acceptance of sin than are calling for repentance from sin! Absolute lawlessness; a rejection of God's design. And it can't be any clearer than the latest foolishness of denying the obvious of being designed to be a man or a woman, and claiming “No; because I don't feel like it.”

And while y'all may agree with what I'm saying, I think we're all getting influenced by it. We are getting comfortable being the one in charge, having sway over what is and is not sin, over who is in control of our life, even over who should call the shots when it comes to life and death! We are tempted to create our own design for reality and count anything outside of that as evil. This can be our own personal lawlessness, because God's will for those who follow Christ is very often those icky things like suffering, humility and sacrifice that are never part of our design for life.

St. Paul encourages, *"God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter."*

God's good, true and wonderful design has been handed down to us. He is Creator and we are His created creatures, made for His purposes. He is the author of life and death. Christ Jesus is our redeemer who has purchased us from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil with His holy and precious blood and innocent suffering and death. This is all by design; His design. He reigns and He is in charge. The law of love, if you want to call it that, is to receive this blessed truth in faith as one purchased by Christ the crucified and to subjugate yourself to His blessed and loving authority.

The "mystery of lawlessness" might be considered that anyone could be tempted into rejecting this wonderful Gospel of grace. Yet it is indeed that very evil which is at work in the world right now; your world.

So my exhortation for you today is just what St. Paul says again and again in his epistles: Hold onto the Gospel that has been delivered to you. Christ is King and Creator. Christ is redeemer and Savior. Christ crucified and risen has purchased you for His own eternal possession, "that you may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness."

Resist the many temptations to step out from under His authority, His control of your life and being. That would be stepping into the lawlessness, and you know who reigns there...at least until Jesus destroys Him, and you certainly don't want to be joined to the lawlessness when that takes place.

Yet we all struggle against the temptation to think "It's MY life. I'M in charge of it." If that were true, well, it would just be another way of describing lawlessness—everyone being a law unto themselves, accountable to no one, and doing whatever they please. That was never the design and despite how things may look, that is never the reality. And that is a good thing, because the One who is in charge chooses to redeem you from your rebellion, your apostasy, your lawlessness and sin and the curse of eternal death that goes along with it.

*"God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Stop thinking that you being in charge of yourself is a good thing. It's a horrible thing. It's lawlessness. It's antichrist, because receiving the Gospel unto salvation is receiving Christ's lordship over all of you forever.

Surrendering to Christ and His wonderful authority to save is to partake in His glory. And He is coming back. He will destroy and condemn the man of lawlessness and all who belong to him. All that will remain that day is Christ's glory. And that glory is yours now by faith, later by sight, when you surrender to His design, repent of your lawlessness and accept Him as Lord of all.

Amen.