

Sunday 10th November 2019

3rd Sunday before Advent

Red or Green



Collect

Almighty Father, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of all: govern the hearts and minds of those in authority, and bring the families of the nations, divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin, to be subject to his just and gentle rule; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Man of Lawlessness

2 ¹ Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers,^[a] ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness^[b] is revealed, the son of destruction,^[c] ⁴ who opposes and exalts 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. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

Stand Firm

¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits^[d] to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

Footnotes: a. or *brothers and sisters*; also verses 13 & 15. b. some manuscripts *sin*. c. Greek *the son of perdition* (a Hebrew idiom). d. some manuscripts *chose you from the beginning*.

COMMENT: There is a debate about II Thessalonians as its eschatology differs from that of I Thessalonians; and the language and content of the second is so nearly like that of the first that it must be from someone who copied Paul's style to deal with a later situation. The date of the Second Letter is circa AD 100. The early church focused much of its attention on the subject of the Parousia or Second Coming of Christ with Apostolic teaching aimed at

preparing the first Christians for this event which they anticipated would happen very soon. The longer the passage of time between the resurrection and the Parousia, the greater became the uncertainty as to its imminence. Some scholars believe that this was the situation which the second letter addressed. Academic consensus has settled on the author dealing with a special situation which had arisen after Paul had first taught among these people. Apparently some of the Thessalonian converts had become convinced, perhaps persuaded by outsiders, that the Lord had already returned and they were living in the end time. This rumour greatly distressed the Thessalonian church. The author was uncertain whether this had been caused by Paul's first letter or a forged letter as suggested by verse 2. He sought to dispel this idea by referring to Paul's earlier teaching based on the traditional Jewish apocalypticism about a time of rebellion which must precede the promised day of the Lord (verse 4-12). The recently published collection of the complete Dead Sea Scrolls contains very similar ideas as do some of the apocryphal books of the Old Testament. The author had a very specific message for the Thessalonian Christians. Through their belief in the gospel as they had heard it from Paul and by their sanctification in holy living they had become the first fruits of the Spirit. They would share the resurrection glory of Christ himself. So they must stand firm in what they had been taught and what he had written to them in the first letter. Here the author is speaking from a background of a Jewish Rabbi familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures. It is possible if not probable that the concluding clause of verse 14, "so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" refers not only to the resurrection, but also to the *shekinah*, "the glory of the Lord" representing God's eternal presence. It also recalls the words of Ps. 146:5 "On the glorious splendour of your majesty and on your wondrous works, I will meditate." To Paul and those who accepted his teaching, there was no greater, more wondrous deed done by God's everlasting love than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The New Testament narratives of the incarnation, transfiguration, the resurrection, the ascension and Paul's conversion all featured shining light symbolising the active presence of God. So too did the Old Testament narratives of the theophany at Sinai (Exod. 24:17; 34:23-35), the manifestation of the divine presence at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:11), and the departure of "the glory of the Lord" in Ezekiel's vision of the chosen people going into exile and their return from exile in Babylon (Ezekiel 10:18-19; 43:2-5). How else could this passage end than with the moving prayer for the Thessalonians comfort and strength while they awaited the anticipated Parousia (verses 16-17)?

Luke 20:27-38 English Standard Version (ESV)

Sadducees Ask About the Resurrection

20²⁷ There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection,²⁸ and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man^[a] must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children.³⁰ And the second³¹ and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died.³² Afterward the woman also died.³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife."³⁴ And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage,³⁵ but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage,³⁶ for they cannot die anymore,

because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons^[b] of the resurrection. ³⁷ But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. ³⁸ Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.”

Footnotes: a. Greek *his brother*. b. Greek *huioi*; see Preface.

COMMENT: Belief in Resurrection grew over time as God revealed himself to his people. Originally the Hebrews believed with most people in ancient times, that after death everyone (both the wicked and the righteous) would have a shadowy existence in the underworld, which the Hebrews called ‘Sheol’. The idea of the wicked flourishing and the righteous suffering in this life, as the wisdom literature of Job and Ecclesiastes observed, and the idea of reunification of soul and body and the rebirth of the Jewish nation as found in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezekiel 37), gave impetus to the revealed truth of Resurrection. Later Jewish thought also took note of the Greek idea of immortality. In the 2nd Century BC the Book of Wisdom fully developed the belief that the righteous would be vindicated and live forever in God’s presence. The Pharisees who shared a lot in common with the teachings of Jesus (despite the reported conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees – often a good relationship existed i.e. Nicodemus, also Jesus was often invited for meals by Pharisees) accepted the belief of the resurrection and life after death. Alone among the dominant religious parties, the Sadducees rejected all belief in life beyond death and held to the traditional view of a shadowy existence in Sheol. This confused background coloured the incident reported in this reading. The Sadducees’ based their challenge to Jesus on the law of levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5-6. On the death of a husband, the man’s closest next of kin had authority and responsibility for the widow’s protection. The custom sought to maintain the continuation of the Jewish family and the legal succession of property. This had become important at different periods of Israel’s history as the propertied class prospered. It is most simply described in the story of Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 4:1-12). Aware of the trickery the Sadducees had posed in their riddle, Jesus replied that in a life where death is irrelevant, such a law was meaningless. Quoting from Exodus 3:6 he argued that quite apart from the Sadducees’ naive view of resurrection, the Torah did indeed imply a belief in eternal life beyond death. He said, in effect, that all life consists of a gracious friendship with God, a relationship which Abraham, Isaac and Jacob still enjoy because it is a relationship which death cannot end. In other words, Jesus used one scripture to veto another. To some, this may seem like clever casuistry. Not so. Nothing in the gospels is there for superfluous reasons. Luke strove to make this the crucial point in telling this story of the Sadducees attempt to entrap Jesus. The gospel of the resurrection had introduced a whole new concept of life beyond death quite beyond anything the Jews had previously imagined.

Psalm 17 *Exaudi Domine*

℟ I shall be filled, when I awake, with the sight of your glory, O Lord.

¹ *A Prayer of David*

Lord, hear a cause that is just,
pay heed to my cry.
Turn your ear to my prayer:
no deceit is on my lips. **℟**

² From you may my judgment come forth.
Your eyes discern the truth.

✠ I shall be filled, when I awake, with the sight of your glory, O Lord.

³ You search my heart, you visit me by night.
You test me and you find in me no wrong.
My words are not sinful ⁴ as are men's words. **✠**

⁴ My mouth does not transgress as others do;
on account of the words of your lips,
I closely watched the paths of the violent. **✠**

I kept from violence because of your word,

⁵ I kept my feet firmly in your paths;
there was no faltering in my steps. **✠**

⁶ I am here and I call, you will hear me, O God.
Turn your ear to me; hear my words.

⁷ Display your great love, you whose right hand saves
your friends from those who rebel against them. **✠**

¹⁵ As for me, in my justice I shall see your face
and be filled, when I awake, with the sight of your glory. **✠**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son,
and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning,
is now and ever shall be. Amen.**

COMMENT: The form of the prayer is that of a traditional lament: an appeal to God for help, then the reason for the petition, and finally the anticipated vindication. This reading includes only the first and the last parts of the lament. For those who question whether their prayers are heard, verse 15 offers some reassurance.

Post Communion

God of peace, whose Son Jesus Christ proclaimed the kingdom and restored the broken to wholeness of life: look with compassion on the anguish of the world, and by your healing power make whole both people and nations; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**

The Blessing

Christ our King make you faithful and strong to do his will, that you may reign with him in glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen.**