Unleashed and Undone

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Well, open with me, if you would, once again to 2 Thessalonians as we are making some progress now through this short three chapter New Testament letter.

Remember, we're looking here in chapter 2, picking up today in verses 6 to 12, around the theme of unleashed and undone.
Unleashed and undone. Just a word of reminder of what we looked at last week because this passage can be a bit confusing.
Remember, the church that Paul is writing this letter to, they were confused and they were frustrated because they had been wrongly taught, most likely by someone who had forged a letter claiming to be from Paul, that they were already in the day of the Lord.
That's confusing for them because Paul, who had been there with them to start that church, had taught them these things. And he had taught them that the church was not going to be there during these most extreme days of the tribulation.
[1:23] Someone has been leading them astray that they are already in that time period, which would mean that either Paul was wrong when he taught them or that they weren't true believers.

And that's why they were having to go through this time of suffering. As a response and a corrective to that, Paul writes what you and I would call 2 Thessalonians.
To remind them and encourage them of what he's already taught them about the day of the Lord.
So we looked last week in chapter 2, verses 1 to 5.
Let's pick up today, verses 6 to 12. It says, And you know what is restraining him now, so that he may be revealed in his time.
For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.
[2:28] And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders.

And with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and be saved. Therefore, God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
Paul is writing this to help clarify for them the details of the tribulation and of the second coming, and what difference that makes for the believer.
So as we look at this short passage that details a person known as the Antichrist, let's do so with three headings. First, restraining of Antichrist.
Comes right from verse 6. You know what is restraining him now, so that he may be revealed in his time. Understand that our enemy, Satan, would love to unleash the Antichrist, but he is, according to verse 6, being restrained.
[4:01] Even the Antichrist is under the sovereign rule of God. Now there's different views here and interpretations of verse 6. You know what is restraining him now.

There's some different ideas that commentators, interpreters have put forward of what that is. There's probably six or seven main ideas that people suggest could be in mind here of what is restraining the Antichrist.
If you take all of them and boil them down, though, we can think of them in two broad categories. This is either speaking of a human element, the government, perhaps, or some human entity, or it's

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speaking of the Holy Spirit that is restraining for this season.
I think the best way to understand verse 6, when it says, you know what is restraining him now, so that he may be revealed in his time, I think we're talking here about the work of the Holy Spirit.
It's the Holy Spirit who is restraining and holding off this final rebellion of evil.
[5:22] Now it's true that the Holy Spirit indwells every believer, so in that sense, wherever there are people who are doing right and upholding justice, in that sense, it is even through people that it's being restrained.

But remember in Galatians 4, it says of the birth of Jesus, that Jesus was born when? In the fullness of time. When the time was right.
According to who? Well, according to the sovereign decree of God. And you can look at several different factors, and you can put forward historically, why it made sense for Messiah to be born when he was, but ultimately the reality is, Christ was born when he was, precisely because that was the sovereign purpose and decree of God.
In the same way, the unleashing of Antichrist will not happen until it is the sovereign purpose of God.
So in that sense, the Holy Spirit is the one restraining the devil from unleashing the Antichrist.
[6:42] It's true that you could say that the ultimate restrainer in verse 6 is the will of God, the purpose of God, the decree of God, as that is being carried out through the Spirit of God.

Now look at verse 7. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.
There is a moment coming when the restrainer will no longer restrain.
And you're going to see, literally, hell unleashed on this earth like never before. You're going to see the prophecies that speak of what happens during those seven years we know as a tribulation unleashed and from the pit of hell and the strategy of the devil to try to completely undo all of this world.
Yet, even that is under the sovereign rule of God. says the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.
[8:08] In what sense? Well, the power of the devil, the desire of the devil, the ultimate goal of Antichrist, that is already at work.

The Antichrist himself has not yet been revealed because of the work of the restrainer. But the power, the evil, the desire, that is already at work.
1 John 2.18 says, You have heard Antichrist is coming, so many Antichrist have come. So there will come a day when the Antichrist will be revealed.
That will happen when the restrainer allows it, not one second before the sovereign decree of God, but when that Antichrist is revealed, it will simply be the epitome and the climactic end to what has already been happening as many Antichrists have come.
You might think of it in terms of the Antichrist, capital A, will come. Many Antichrists, small a, have come. Or you could look at it this way and say that the preview of what is to come is already being seen, the main attraction yet to be revealed.
[9:36] You know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time for the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.

That's the restraining of the Antichrist. And the main thing that I think we are to understand from this first point in these first couple of verses, I think the main takeaway for us is to remember that even when the world is dark and even when evil does what evil will do, even then our God is sovereign.
That's what you need to remember. Is there real evil? Yes. Is there a real devil? Yes. But even so, there is only one God.
And our God reigns supreme over all things. There's a second thing I want to show you here and that's the revealing of Antichrist. This makes sense logically. There's the restraint and then when the restraint is pulled back, there is the revealing.
Verse 8, And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.
[11:04] And then, after the restraint is removed, then the man of lawlessness, then the Antichrist will be revealed. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all the power and false signs and wonders.

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This is why we looked at Matthew 24. In the Scripture reading, speaking of this time, this is the pits of hell essentially emptying its chamber, throwing everything it has one last time, one final attempt to control the world.
And remember, what's happening in context here is that a false teacher has told the church the reason you're suffering and the reason you're facing affliction is because you're already in this time period.
And Paul says, you are being afflicted. You are being persecuted. You are suffering. That's true. And that's always been true of the people of God. But he says, I've already told you about this. I've already instructed you from the Lord on this. Don't think that just because you're suffering that the Word of God is untrue.
[12:31] Don't think that just because you're being afflicted that everything is somehow out of control and what you've been taught no longer holds.

I want to just make this personal for just a moment. It's easy when life is good to say that you trust the Lord and that you cling to His promise, but when your life unravels, let me remind you, every word of God is still true.
Do not think that your suffering or your affliction in any way negates a single promise of God to His people.
And so Paul says to them, I know that you've been being afflicted, not just in your suffering, but by the devastation of false teaching.
He says, I've already instructed you as He did in person and in 1 Thessalonians that the church will be caught up with the Lord before these events happen. The wording in 2 Thessalonians sounds just like the words of Jesus in Matthew 24.
[13:49] And He says, yes, your suffering is real, yes, your affliction is real, but my words from the Lord are still true. You're not going through the day of the Lord.

The church won't be here for it. But when the restraints removed, then the Antichrist is revealed and that's when these prophecies come to pass.
So what do we know about the Antichrist? We know he appears after the rapture of the church. He also, interestingly enough, when the Antichrist is first revealed, he's not going to be revealed as some evil, hated man.
Quite the opposite. At first, he will seem to be a man of peace. As Paul writes this, he's writing just a little bit after the words of Jesus as he spoke that in Matthew 24.
And if you went backwards just a few centuries, Daniel 9, listen to what Daniel prophesied. He shall make, speaking of Antichrist, he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, that's a week of years, and for half of the week, three and a half years, he shall put an end to the sacrifice and offering, and on the wing of abomination shall come one who makes desolate until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.
[15:23] Now, what in the world are we talking about? What he's saying is when the Antichrist is finally revealed after a restrainer pulls back, he's going to seem to make peace at first.

He's going to appear to work miracles. He's going to do things that seem to verify he really is divine. Now, when I was a kid, if you said to me as a young child that something would happen that all the world would be able to see at one time, I would have had no idea how that's possible.
We had three channels. We had a remote control, me. We had a television that weighed approximately 18,000 pounds.
And we had two TVs, as I recall, one of which was black and white. I'm that old. I was born in the 1900s. I would have had no idea how the whole world could see something.
[16:50] Fast forward a few decades. If I told a fourth grader today an event will happen, the whole world will see it, they'd say, sure. Just look at your wrist.

Look at your phone. Most of you have four or five devices where you could watch everything that's happening. That's how fast things happen.
If I would have said to you ten years ago that someone's going to be able to fake and through illusion appear to be completely convincing, even where you could watch it with your eyes but what you see isn't real.
Just a few years ago you just said, what are you talking about? Today, you've got to check every video you see because even though you see it with your eyes, does not mean it happened.

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Now, I don't think we want to ever be a headline theologian. Okay? I don't know when Antichrist is being revealed. I don't know when the tribulation is starting.
[18:12] It could be very soon. It could be far away. I don't look at a headline and try to say there it is because I don't know. I'm no prophet.

I don't claim to be. I don't get my theology from headlines. I get it from Scripture. But I do point those things out to let you know that what would have seemed utterly impossible today makes sense even to a child.
And at some point, verse 9, the coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders.
The Antichrist will be revealed after the rapture. He will begin as a man of peace. He will perform miracles. He will claim to be God and he will control the world's economy.
Eventually, politics and religion. Revelation 13. And then, here's the good news for the Christians that will be on the earth at that time that have been saved during the tribulation.
[19:26] Verse 8, when the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The Antichrist will be defeated and destroyed by the power of God.

You have the restraining of the Antichrist, you have the revealing of the Antichrist, and then thirdly, as I just read, you have the ruin of Antichrist. Revelation 17.
11, as for the beast, he goes to destruction. Jesus, with the breath of his mouth, just with his decree.
How powerful is our God? He needs nothing more than the word of his decree to accomplish his will. Jesus, with his word, overthrows the Antichrist, will cast him into hell, and will make an end, bring to nothing, abolish his works, and abolish his power.
Verse 10, and he puts an end to the Antichrist. he defeats him. Verse 10, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing because they refused to love the truth and be saved.
[21:03] Friends, that's the verse that should make you sit up on the edge of your seat for just a second. why is it that people will be cast into judgment?

Because they refused to love the truth. Do you love the truth?
Think careful this morning with me. Do you love the truth? That's a way of asking, are you certain you're in the family of God?
Are you certain you belong to him? Are you certain you are one of his? Some of you may be tempted to think, well, all of this is in the future.
Besides that, if we believe the church won't be here during this seven-year time, period, tribulation, what difference is this for us? Well, here's the difference it is for you right here because the Bible makes clear those who are judged are those who refuse to love the truth.
[22:10] I can't think of a more relevant question than to ask you today, this moment, do you love the truth? Do you belong to Christ?

Are you certain you are one of his? two days ago on Friday, I had a chance to go back to my high school.
I grew up in Moore, went to Moore public schools, kindergarten to 12th grade. I was in the first class that went all three years through Westmore High School.
We've got another Jaguar somewhere here in college, there we go, got a fellow Jaguar over there.
So I got to go back to my old high school. It was the Special Olympics area basketball on Friday.
One of our members here was a part of that. I got to go watch and cheer him on, had a great time getting to be there and walk around. And so I thought to myself, I want to go back and see.
[23:13] I've been gone from that area for 25 years. I want to kind of go look around the old high school. And so knowing that security in schools, rightly so, is very different than it used to be.

I went in and up by where the office is. And for me to get from where I was into the part of the old school where I used to go to class and have lunch and have my locker, that kind of stuff, I had to get past security.
So there was a man there and next to him was a police officer. And I said, hey, I pastor in Mustang. I'm here for the Special Olympics basketball game. I was watching that and so I used to go to school here and I'd like to just go and kind of roam the halls.
None of that doesn't sound real good in these day and age. That's what I want to do. I want to go roam the halls of the school. And he said, you went here when the school first opened. And I said,

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yes, sir.
And he said, what year was that? And I felt like it was kind of a test. Like, if you really were here, you ought to be able to say it quickly. So I said, I started here in the fall of 88, graduated in 91, first class all the way through it.
[24:22] I guess I looked trustworthy and so he and the police officer let me pass their little barricade thing they had there. And I went, walked around the halls a little bit, went and saw my old locker, the old library, the hallways.

It was crazy. I don't know how life is for you. That does not feel like I blinked my eyes and became old. That was like I was watching someone else's life I've read about.
It was crazy. But I thought to myself, so I think the guy asked me, what year were you here? Just to quickly test, do I really, did I really belong?
Do I really know? Was that true of me? And I thought for just a minute, there are a couple of ways if he pressed me on it that I could convince him, no, I really belong here.
I really am part of the family. I don't know if they do this anymore. I think they still do from those who have graduated recently, but when I was there, we had a little hand sign, a little hand signal.
[25:28] We were the Jaguars, Westmore Jaguars. So you took your fingers, you made a J, that was your Jaguar. If you stand next to somebody else and they make a J, you connect your pinkies, link your J's together, and two J's become a W for Westmore.

We were brilliant that way. So I thought I could say to the police officer, I know the secret hand sign. And he may say, yeah, but that's not convincing anybody can learn the hand sign.
And then I was going to say, well, maybe so, but I know the fight song. to this day, I graduated 34 years ago. Today, I could sing the fight song, no problem.
Stand up, heads back, shout loud and clear, I can do the whole thing. And he could say, yeah, but you know what, that fight song gets sung at football games and basketball games.
Anybody, if they go to enough games can learn the song. And I could say, yeah, but I know even the rare songs, I know the alma mater song.
[26:38] I think I only heard it twice in my life. But to this day, I could sing the alma mater song. The song that nobody, at least my age, no one knew.

And he could say, yeah, but people can learn songs. And to my surprise, because I thought this had been done away with, to my surprise, I walked by the trophy case outside the old gym, and there's a picture of the first basketball team at Westmore High School.
It looks something like this. This is when, I took this picture Friday. Do you see me? Let me zoom in on it.
There you go. There you 6'2", 115 of solid steel. There's one more here, just, yeah, yeah, okay, that's good.
And I could say to the police officer, if you're not convinced by my gestures, and you're not convinced by my song knowledge, there's actually still to this day on Friday a picture of me in the trophy case.
[28:02] That's pretty proof positive. I'm one of you. There's something there that gives it away. My picture's there, it shows.

I really do belong. Using that very same logic, think back with me to 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 10. Biblically speaking, what's the evidence you really belong? How would you give with certainty proof that you belong to the Lord?
you say, I come to church every Sunday. I go to Sunday school. I go to Elevate. I go to Awana. And those are all good things, but all that really is, is the old Westmore Jaguar hand gesture. It's just movements and gestures and what you do and where you go.
[29:17] Anybody can do that. You say, well, I know the songs. Just like I could sing the fight song, you know the songs. You may say, but today I sang along with all the songs.

And that's a good thing. I hope you did. Those songs are for a reason. They're very important, but that's not evidence you're a believer. Anybody can sing a song. You say, yeah, but I even know the old songs.
Well, I hope you know the old songs because they're helpful and meaningful, but anybody can learn and sing a song. Hand gestures, songs, recitation of stories, those things are good, but those don't give clear evidence that you belong.

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The picture in the trophy case in verse 10 is that you love the truth because those who are assigned to destruction are done so because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.
your picture in the trophy case is if you love the truth. You can't love a truth you don't know, so to say you love the truth carries with it that you know the truth, truth.
[31:02] But it's more than do you know the truth. Even the demons believe there is one God and they shudder. What's the difference between a believer and a demon? It's not merely knowledge, it's that you love the truth.

And Christ himself said he is the way, the truth, and the life. So to say you love the truth is to say you know the truth and you love the truth and the embodiment of truth is Christ himself.
This is to say that the evidence you really belong to God is that you love Christ. Christ. And so I want to ask you this morning, do you love Christ?
I'm delighted you're a church, but that's not evidence that you're a Christian. I'm blessed to hear you sing.
But your songs don't give evidence that you're a Christian. Your picture in the trophy case that shows you really belong here is that you love Christ.
[32:31] And if you don't have love for Christ in your heart, you don't belong to him. the ruin of antichrist and the ruin of those who follow him will come because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

verse 11 says, therefore God sends them a strong delusion so that they may believe what is false. They rejected the truth for so long they ended up believing what is utterly foolish. They rejected the truth so much that in time they convinced themselves to believe things that are absolute insanity. We see this every day. Because while the individual who will one day be revealed as antichrist now is being restrained, the power of antichrist is very much at work.
The people believed what is false because they did not accept what is true. Verse 12, in an order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
[34:13] One author summed it up this way, there comes a day that those who persistently reject the truth will be unable to believe it and abandoned by God to the consequences of their choice to reject the gospel.

I ask you this morning, do you love the truth? Do you love the one who himself said, I am the truth? Do you love Jesus? Jesus? I want to give you three brief applications of this for you this morning. Number one, be reminded of what Paul is reminding the church in Thessalonica, that all the events of their suffering, the events of the revelation of Antichrist, the events of the tribulation, the events of the day of the Lord, the events of the return of Christ, the events of the judgment of unbelievers, all of these things are under the sovereignty of God.
So take this truth away. God holds the future in his hands so trust. God holds the future in his hands so trust.
[35:50] That's true in the events of the second coming. That's also true in the events of your life. God holds your future in his hands. Your family, your health, finances, your career.

God holds your future in his hands so trust. Secondly, Paul is teaching them that suffering has a purpose even when it's not fully understood so follow.
There is purpose in your suffering even if you don't fully understand. We sang that in that last song, his glory and my good. There is purpose even in your suffering even if you don't fully comprehend it. So, follow. Trust him for the future. Follow him even in the days of suffering.
And then third, when all is said and done, we will be home with the Lord.
[37:07] That's what he wants the people that he writes this to to understand. That's what 1 Thessalonians 4 was about. We will be with the Lord. The dead in Christ are going to be with the Lord.

We're going to be with the Lord. That when it's all said and done, when all of these things have come to pass that must come to pass, here is the bottom line for every believer.
We will be with the Lord, so rest. Your future is in his hands, so trust. Your suffering is for your good, so follow.
And when it's all said and done, you will be with the Lord, so rest in that. obviously the primary takeaway from this passage is exactly what the primary meaning of the writing was when Paul wrote it through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which is to know that God has a purpose and design even for the end times, that right now the Antichrist is being restrained.

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! At some point, that restrainer takes his hand off. The Antichrist is going to be revealed. He will appear as a man of peace. He will break his covenant. He will seat himself and demand worship for himself.
[38:24] The Lord Jesus will return and with nothing more than his word and decree, he will defeat the Antichrist. He will defeat all who are opposed to him.

And the dividing line between those who belong to Christ and those who do not is not, did you go to church? And did you go to Sunday school? And did you sing the songs?
And do you know the secret hand gestures? The secret answer that shows you truly belong to him is that you love the truth.
You know it. You love it. And the embodiment of it is the person of Christ. Do you love Christ?
If in your heart you know all the songs and all the church lingo and all the events and you do not love Christ, you are no different than a demon.
[39:47] I don't say that to be harsh or ugly. I say that to use biblical language. Even the demons believe there's just one God.

And I long for you to know him and to love him and to live with the assurance that you are his.
Do you love Christ? If you have questions about that, let us know.
We'd love to help you with that. If you find yourself being committed to the church but not knowing Christ, my friends, don't make that tragic mistake.
If you find yourself banking your return on the fact that you know the hymns of the church, it's a tragic mistake. Believers know the truth and they love the truth.
[40:58] And it's demonstrated by loving the glory of Christ. My prayer and hope for you today is that you, by loving the truth and that you, by knowing the truth, will trust, follow, and rest.

Lord, we thank you for your word that truly does penetrate penetrate deep down into our soul to reveal truth from error. I pray, Lord, that you would help us even this day as we evaluate our hearts to make certain that we truly belong to you.
Your word says that we are to make our calling and election sure, that we would have the assurance that we belong to you not because of our works but because of trusting in yours alone.
Lord, we give you praise today for the good work of your son. In Christ's name.
Amen. Before you're dismissed, let me remind you tonight, for all of you who signed up, we have our Family Matters dinner tonight down in the gym. The official serving time is at 7, but we always have that ready about 4.45 at 7.
[42:25] Official time is at 5, but we start serving at 4.45. So if you want to come early, kind of help us spread the line out. Programming starts at 5.20 and will last till 6.30.

All right? So if you signed up, make sure you hear, we've already bought the food from the caterers, so please show up. We've already paid for it, so please be here. We'll start serving at 4.45.
We'll start programming at 5.20. You're going to hear some testimonies tonight about different ministries in our church, about a recent mission trip in our church. You're going to hear about some of the things that's going on in the life of our church.
You're going to hear from all of our pastors about some different things the Lord has been teaching them and doing in their life. It's going to be a fun, fun night. Our pastor's wives are going to be sharing a little bit too.
You're going to be able to hear from them. We've got a lot of things you're going to really enjoy tonight, so if you signed up, please be here. We'll start serving at 4.45. All right? Love you, church. God bless you.
[43:28] You're dismissed. Thank you so much for joining us via live stream this morning.

If you have any questions whatsoever about our church or the ministries that our church provides, please visit us at fbcmustang.org. We would love to follow up with you and get to know you better.
As always, we try to emphasize, if at all possible, if you could be here physically present with us, we would love that and that'd be a joy to serve you in that way.
But thank you again for joining us via live stream today. Have a great day. God bless you.
God bless you.

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