

Katamares: 2:1-17

2:1 *The Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ*

The Timing of the Resurrection Unknown.

Chrysostom: When the resurrection will be, he has not said: "It will come in due order"; he has said: "And our assembling to meet him." This point is quite important. Observe how Paul's exhortation is accompanied by praise and encouragement, for he makes it clear that Jesus and all the saints will certainly appear at that time with us. Homilies on 2 Thessalonians 3.1

A Correct Understanding of Time.

Athanasius: Now it is right and necessary, as in all divine Scripture, so here, faithfully to explain the time of which the apostle wrote, and the person and the point. This is so that the reader will not from ignorance miss either these or any similar particular and thus miss the true sense of the text. This was what the inquiring eunuch understood when he asked Philip, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet speak this? Of himself, or of someone else?"² He feared lest, having explained the lesson unsuitably to the person, he should wander from the right sense. And the disciples, wishing to learn the time of what was predicted, implored the Lord: "Tell us," they said, "when shall these things be? And what is the sign of your coming?"³ And again, hearing from the Savior the events of the end, they desired to learn the time of it, that they might be kept from error themselves. They also wished to be able to teach others, just as, when they had learned, they set right the Thessalonians, who were going wrong.⁴ When, then, one understands these points properly, knows properly these points, his understanding of the faith is right and healthy. But if he fails to understand, he immediately falls into heresy. Thus, Hymenaeus and Alexander and their followers⁵ were beside the time when they said that the resurrection had already taken place. The Galatians, too, were after the time⁶ in continuing to think circumcision was an important issue. Discourses Against the Arians 1.54.7

The Benefit of Not Knowing.

Athanasius: And further, not to know when the end is, or when the day of the end will occur, is actually a good thing. If people knew the time of the end, they might begin to ignore the present time as they waited for the end days. They might well begin to argue that they should only focus on themselves. Therefore, God has also remained silent concerning the time of our death. If people knew the day of their death, they would immediately begin to neglect themselves for the greater part of their lifetime. The Word, then, has

concealed both the end of all things and the time of our own death from us, for in the end of all is the end of each, and in the end of each the end of all is comprehended. This is so that, when things remain uncertain and always in prospect, we advance day by day as if summoned, reaching forward to the things before us and forgetting the things behind. 8 ... The Lord, then, knowing what is good for us beyond ourselves, thus stabilized the disciples in a correct understanding. They, being taught, set right those of Thessalonica, who were likely to err on the very same point. Discourses Against the Arians 3.49–50.9

Disagreements from the Beginning.

Origen: At least, when the apostles were preaching and the eyewitnesses of Jesus were teaching his precepts, no minor dispute in the church took place among Jewish believers about those of the Gentiles who were converted to the faith; the question was whether they ought to keep the Jewish customs or if the burden of clean or unclean meats ought to be taken away so that it would not be a load upon those Gentiles who abandoned their traditional customs and believed in Jesus. Furthermore, in the epistles of Paul, who was contemporary with those who had seen Jesus, there are some statements to be found which concern certain disputes about the resurrection, and about the view that it had already occurred, and about the question whether the day of the Lord was already present or not. Against Celsus 3.11.12

2:2 *Not to Be Quickly Shaken*

Warning Against Complacency.

Augustine: Therefore, not to know the times is something different from moral decay and the love of vice. For when the apostle Paul said, “Don’t be easily shaken in your mind nor be frightened, neither by word nor by epistle as sent from us, as if the day of the Lord were at hand,” he obviously did not want them to believe those who thought the coming of the Lord was already at hand. Neither, moreover, did he want them to be like the wicked servant and say, “My Lord will not be coming for a long time,” and deliver themselves over to destruction by pride and immoral behavior. Thus, Paul’s desire that they should not listen to false rumors about the imminent approach of the last day was consistent with his wish that they should await the coming of their Lord fully prepared and ready for the journey, with lamps burning. 13 Letters 199.1.2.14

Augustine: All this you repeat with great piety and truth, praising the happiness of those who love the coming of the Lord. But those to whom the apostle said, “Be not easily moved from your mind as if the

day of the Lord were at hand,” evidently loved the Lord’s coming. The purpose of the doctor of the Gentiles in saying this was not to break them away from the love which burned in them. Rather, he did not want them to put their faith in those from whom they heard that the day of the Lord was at hand, lest, perhaps, when the time had passed when they thought he would come and they realized that he had not come, they might think that the other promises made to them were also false and might despair of the mercy of faith itself. Therefore, it is not the one who asserts that he is near nor the one who asserts that he is not near who loves the coming of the Lord but the one who rightly waits for him, whether he be near or far, with sincere faith, firm hope and ardent love. Letters 199.4.15.15

2:3 Let No One Deceive You

The Two Extremes.

Origen: As Celsus also objects to the doctrine about the figure called Antichrist, though he has read neither the passages about him in Daniel, nor those in Paul, nor the Savior’s prophecies in the Gospels concerning his coming, ¹⁶ we have to say a little about this also. “Just as faces are unlike other faces, so also the hearts of men are unlike one another.” ¹⁷ Obviously differences exist in the hearts of men, both among those who have inclined to goodness, since they have not all been molded and shaped equally and similarly in their propensity toward good, and among those who because of their neglect of what is good rapidly pass to the other extreme. For among the latter there also are some who have been overwhelmed by the flood of evil, while others have sunk less far. Why, then, is it absurd that among men there should be two extremes, if I may so say, the one of goodness, the other of the opposite, so that the extreme of goodness exists in the human nature of Jesus, since from him the mighty work of conversion, healing and improvement flowed to the human race, whereas the opposite extreme exists in him who is called Antichrist? God understood all this through his foreknowledge. Seeing that there were these two extremes, he willed to tell men about these things through the prophets, in order that those who understood their words might be made lovers of what is better and be on their guard against the opposite. It was right, also, that one of the extremes, the best, should be called Son of God because of his superiority, and that the one diametrically opposed to him should be called son of the evil demon, who is Satan and the devil. Against Celsus 6.45.18

2:3–4 *The Rebellion, the Man of Lawlessness*

The Antichrist.

Chrysostom: Here Paul discusses the Antichrist and reveals great mysteries. What is the “falling away”? He calls him Apostasy; soon he will destroy many and make them fall away.... And he calls him “the man of sin.” For he shall commit numberless evils and shall cause others to do them. But Paul calls him “the son of perdition,” because he is also to be destroyed. But who is he? Satan? By no means. Rather he is a man in whom Satan fully works. For he is a man.... For he will not introduce idolatry but will be a kind of opponent to God. He will abolish all the gods and will order men to worship him instead of God. He will be seated in the temple of God, not that in Jerusalem only, but also in every church. Homilies on 2 Thessalonians 3.19

Masked Heretics.

Cyril of Jerusalem: Such is Paul’s account. 20 And we have reached the “falling away.” Men, that is, have fallen away from the true faith. Some proclaim the identity of Father and Son. Others dare to assert that one should believe Christ has come into existence out of nonexistence. Formerly heretics were quite evident, but now the church is full of masked heretics. For men have deserted the truth and want to have their ears tickled. 21 Make a plausible case, and everyone is ready to listen to you. Talk of changing one’s life, and everyone deserts you. The majority have fallen away from the sound doctrines and are readier to choose what is bad than to prefer what is good. So there you have the “falling away,” and the coming of the enemy is to be expected next. Meanwhile, he has begun to send out his forerunners here and there, so that the spoil may be prepared for him when he comes. Therefore, brothers, look to yourselves. Watch over your souls carefully. Catechetical Lectures 15.9.22

A Wise Caution.

Augustine: No one can doubt that Paul is here 23 speaking of Antichrist, telling us that the day of judgment (which he calls the day of the Lord) will not come without the prior coming of a figure whom he calls the Apostate, meaning, of course, an apostate from the Lord God. And if this appellation can rightly be attached to all the ungodly, how much more to him! There is, however, some uncertainty about the “temple” in which he is to take his seat. Is it the ruins of the temple built by King Solomon, or actually in a church? For the apostle would not say “the temple of God” if he meant the temple of some idol or demon. For that reason some people would have it that Antichrist means here not the leader himself but

what we may call his whole body, the multitude, that is, of those who belong to him, together with himself, their leader.... For myself I am much astonished at the great presumption of those who venture such guesses. The City of God 20.19.2.24

His Own Glory.

Augustine: He who speaks on his own seeks his own glory. 25 This will be that one who is called the Antichrist, "exalting himself," as the apostle says, "above all that is called God and that is worshiped." Indeed, the Lord, announcing that he would seek his own glory, not the glory of the Father, said to the Jews, "I have come in the name of my Father, and you have not received me; another will come in his own name, this one you will receive." 26 He signified that they would receive the Antichrist, who would seek the glory of his own name, puffed up, hollow, and so not enduring but in fact ruinous. But our Lord Jesus Christ offered us a great example of humility. Tractates on John 29.8.27

The Trial Is Transitory.

Basil the Great: In truth, both of our ears rang on learning of the shameless and inhuman heresy of those who persecuted you. They had no regard for age, nor for the labors of a life well spent, nor for the affection of the people. On the contrary, they tortured and dishonored bodies, handed them over to exile and plundered whatever property they were able to find, not fearing the censure of men nor foreseeing the fearful requital of the just Judge.... But, along with these considerations, there came this thought also: The Lord has not entirely abandoned his churches, has he? And this is not the last hour, is it? Is apostasy finding an entrance through them, in order that now the impious one may be revealed, "the son of perdition, who opposes and is exalted above all that is called God, or that is worshiped"? But if the trial is transitory, bear it, noble champions of Christ.... For if all creation is destroyed and the scheme of the world is altered, what wonder is it if we also, being a part of creation, suffer the common evils and are given over to afflictions? ... The crowns of martyrs await you, brothers; the choirs of confessors are ready to reach out to you their hands and to receive you into their own number. Letters 139.28

2:6–7 He Who Now Restrains It

The Roman Empire.

Chrysostom: One may naturally inquire what is that which restrains the man of lawlessness, and in addition, why Paul expresses it so obscurely. What then is it that holds back, that is, that hinders the

revealing of, the Antichrist? Some indeed say, the grace of the Spirit, but others the Roman Empire. I agree with the latter position. Why? Because if Paul meant to say the Spirit, he would not have spoken obscurely but plainly, that even now the grace of the Spirit, that is the gifts, hold back the Antichrist. If not, he should have come by now, if his coming was to occur with the cessation of the gifts of the Spirit; for they have long since ceased. ³⁰ But because Paul said this of the Roman Empire, he merely touched the topic, understandably speaking covertly and darkly. For he had no need to create unnecessary enemies and useless dangers.... “For the mystery of lawlessness does already work.” He speaks here of Nero, as if he were the type of the Antichrist. Homilies on 2 Thessalonians 4.³¹

The Holy Spirit.

Severian of Gabala: That which restrains and prevents the coming of the lawless one is the Holy Spirit. Paul says this to show that the mystery of iniquity is already beginning in the heresies that have arisen since apostolic times. The Manichaeans say that the devil is the God of the law, and the Marcionites say that the father of Christ is not the God of the law. Pauline Commentary from the Greek Church.³²

Disorder and Disharmony.

Basil the Great: Now, if good order with its attendant harmony is characteristic of those who look to one source of authority and are subject to one king, then universal disorder and disharmony are a sign that leadership is lacking. By the same token, if we discover in our midst such discord as I have mentioned, both with regard to one another and with respect to the Lord’s commands, it would either be an indictment or our rejection of the true king. That agrees with the scriptural saying, “only that he who now holds back does so until he is taken out of the way,” or of denial of him according to the psalmist, “The fool has said in his heart: There is no God.” ³⁴ Preface on the Judgment of God.³⁵

2:8a The Lawless One Will Be Revealed

The Nature of Antichrist.

Cyril of Jerusalem: The Antichrist just mentioned by Paul will come when the destined period of the Roman Empire has run its course and the subsequent end of the world is drawing near. Ten claimants to the empire will arise simultaneously, I suppose in different parts, but all wearing the purple at the same time. Antichrist will form an eleventh after them, having seized the imperial power by the use of magic arts. He will humble three of those who came to power before him and cause the remaining seven to be Caesars

under him. ³⁶ At first he will feign mildness and will appear to be a learned and understanding man, with pretended prudence and kindness. Then he will take in the Jews, by making them suppose him to be their expected Messiah, by false signs and wonders produced by magical trickery. And afterwards his character will be written large in evil deeds of inhumanity and lawlessness of every kind, so as to outdo all wicked and godless men that were before him. He will display a murderous, most absolute, pitiless and unstable temper toward all people, but especially toward us Christians. He will act insolently for only three and a half years. Then he will be defeated by the second glorious coming from heaven of the only-begotten Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus, the true Christ. He will destroy Antichrist “with the spirit of his mouth” and commit him to the flames of hell. Catechetical Lectures 15.12.³⁷

2:8b *The Lord Jesus Will Slay Him*

Christ and the Spirit.

Ambrose: We have heard that the Lord Jesus not only judges but also punishes in the Spirit. For neither would he punish Antichrist, whom, as we read, “the Lord Jesus shall slay with the Spirit of his mouth,” unless he had already judged him as fit for punishment ... but the unity of the divine action remains undivided, since Christ cannot be separated from the Spirit, nor the Spirit act apart from Christ. For the unity of the divine nature cannot be divided. Of the Holy Spirit 3.7.44.³⁸

The Proper Power of Goodness.

Chrysostom: “To the one a savor from death to death, to the other a savor from life to life.” ³⁹ For this sweet savor some so receive that they are saved, others so that they perish. If anyone is lost, it is his own fault.... Light (as I have already observed) blinds the weak. Such is the nature of good things. They not only correct things similar to them but also destroy their opposite. In this way their power is most clearly displayed. Fire displays its unique power when it gives light and when it purifies gold. The same is true when it consumes thorns. In all these cases it demonstrates itself to be fire. Christ, too, in the same way will display his own majesty when he “shall consume” Antichrist “with the breath of his mouth and overcome him with the manifestation of his coming.” Homilies on Second Corinthians 5.2.⁴⁰

The Justice of the Word.

Origen: Now just as it is said that the task of the Word is to judge with justice, so also the Word’s task is to fight with justice, that by thus fighting the soul’s enemies with reason and justice, he may dwell in the

soul, justifying it when the irrational elements and injustices are destroyed. He casts out the hostile elements from that soul which, if I may speak in this way, has been taken captive by Christ for salvation. The war that the Word wages is seen even more clearly when we compare it to the war waged by he who pretends to be the Word. This one proclaims himself the truth when he is not the truth but a lie, declaring that he is the truth. For then the Word, having fully armed himself against the lie, “destroys it with the breath of his mouth and annihilates it by the appearance of his presence.” Commentary on John 2.54–55.⁴¹

2:9–10 *The Activity of Satan*

Judgments Precede and Follow.

Augustine: Thus it is that what is obscure in the words of the apostle has given rise to various conjectures. Yet, of one thing there is no doubt, namely, that Paul meant Christ will not come to judge the living and the dead until after his adversary, Antichrist, has come to seduce the souls of the dead. And, of course, the fact that those souls are to be seduced is already a part of God’s hidden judgment.... There seems to be some ambiguity in the expression “pretended signs and wonders.” It may be that Satan is to deceive men’s senses by means of phantasms, in which they imagine they see wonders which are nonexistent. Or perhaps true miracles will lead into deception those who ought to believe that miracles can be done only by God but who mistakenly ascribe them to the devil’s power, particularly at a time when Satan is to be given unheard-of power.... What the devil does is done with his own wicked and malign purpose, but it is permitted by God’s just judgment so “that all may be judged who have not believed the truth but have preferred wickedness.” Thus it comes about that judgments both precede and follow the deception. Those who are deceived are antecedently judged by these judgments of God, covertly just and justly covert, by which he has never ceased to judge even since the first sin of his rational creature. Those are deceived and subsequently judged in a last and overt judgment by Christ Jesus, who is to be the great judge of all judges as he was the victim of the most unjust of all judgments. The City of God 20.19.4.⁴²

The Instrument of Evil.

Cyril of Jerusalem: “And his coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.” This means that Satan will use him as his personal instrument. Realizing that his own condemnation will be no longer deferred, he will no longer wage war through his ministers in his usual way, but now openly, in person. “With all signs and lying wonders,” for the father of falsehood will display

his lying works and cheating fantasies, to make the people think they see a dead man raised, when he is not raised, and the lame walking, and the blind receiving sight, when there have been no such cures. Catechetical Lectures 15.14–15.43

2:11 *God Sends Judgment Upon Them*

God's Hidden Judgment.

Augustine: We can recount many other events clearly showing that from a hidden judgment of God comes perversity of heart, with the result that refusal to hear the truth leads to commission of sin, and this sin is also punishment for preceding sin. For to believe a lie and not believe the truth is indeed sin, but it comes from the blindness of heart which by a hidden but just judgment of God is also punishment for sin. We see this also in what the apostle says to the Thessalonians, "For they have not received the love of truth, that they might be saved. Therefore God sends them a misleading influence that they may believe falsehood." Against Julian 5.3.12.44

The Willingness to Repent.

Cyprian: Not to recognize sins lest penance follow is the wrath of God, as it is written, "And the Lord gave to them the spirit of a deep sleep,"⁴⁵ lest they actually return and be cured and healed by their lamentations and just satisfactions after their sins.⁴⁶ The apostle Paul in his epistle states and says, "For they have not received the love of truth that they might be saved. Therefore God will send them a misleading influence that they may believe falsehood, that all may be judged who have not believed the truth but have preferred wickedness." The first degree of happiness is not to sin; the second, to recognize the sins committed. Letters 59.13.47

Orthodox Confession.

John of Damascus: One should know that the Antichrist must come. Antichrist, to be sure, is everyone who does not confess that the Son of God came in the flesh, is perfect God and became perfect man while at the same time he was God. In a peculiar and special sense, however, he who is to come at the consummation of the world is called Antichrist. So, it is first necessary for the gospel to have been preached to all the Gentiles, as the Lord said,⁵⁰ and then God shall proceed to the conviction of the impious Jews... "Because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them

a strong delusion, to let them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” The Orthodox Faith 4.26.⁵¹

2:13 *Sanctification by the Spirit*

Sanctification Is One.

Ambrose: And the apostle also teaches that the Holy Spirit sanctifies. For he speaks thus, “We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brothers dearly beloved of the Lord; because God chose you as first fruits for salvation, in sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.” So, then, the Father sanctifies, the Son also sanctifies, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies; but the sanctification is one, and the grace of the sacrament is one. Of the Holy Spirit 3.4.27–28.¹

2:14–15 *The Traditions You Were Taught*

The Creed.

Cyril of Jerusalem: In learning and professing the faith, embrace and guard that only which is now delivered to you by the church and confirmed by all the Scriptures. For since not everyone has the education and the leisure required to read and know the Scriptures, to prevent the soul perishing from ignorance, we sum up the whole doctrine of the faith in a few lines.... For the present, just listen and memorize the creed as I recite it, and you will receive in due course the testimony from Scripture of each of its propositions. For the articles of faith have not been composed to please human desire, but the most important points collected from the Scriptures make up one complete teaching of the faith. And just as the mustard seed in a small grain contains in embryo many future branches, so also the creed embraces in a few words all the religious knowledge in both the Old and New Testament. Pay attention, therefore, brothers, and cling to the teachings which are now delivered to you, and “write them on the tablet of your heart.” ² Catechetical Lectures 5.12.³

2:15 *By Word of Mouth or by Letter*

Unwritten Tradition.

Basil the Great: In answer to the objection that the doxology in the form “with the Spirit” has no written authority, we maintain that if there is no other instance of that which is unwritten, then this must not be received. But if the greater number of our mysteries are admitted into our constitution without written authority, then, in company with the many others, let us receive this one. For I hold it apostolic to abide also by the unwritten traditions. “I praise you,” it is said, “that you remember me in all things and keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you,”⁴ and “Hold fast the traditions which you have been taught whether by word or by our epistle.” On the Spirit 29.71.⁵

Delivered Without Writing.

Chrysostom: Paul did not instruct Timothy in his duty through letters alone, but also through the spoken word. He shows this, both in many other passages, as where he says, “whether by word or our epistle,” and especially here.⁶ Let us not, therefore, suppose that Paul spoke anything imperfectly that was related to doctrine. For he delivered many things to Timothy without writing. He reminds him of these when he says, “Hold fast the form of sound words, which you have heard from me.” After the manner of artists, I have impressed on you the image of virtue, fixing in your soul a sort of rule, model and outline of all things pleasing to God. Therefore, cling to these things, and whether you are meditating on any matter of faith or love, or of a sound mind, form your ideas from what I have taught you. It will not be necessary to consult others for examples, when all has been deposited within yourself. Homilies on Second Timothy 3.1.7