

The Antichrist (And How to Kill Him)

Revelation 13:11-13, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-7; 1 John 2:15-22; 4:1-7; 2 John 7

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May 22, 2016

Worship song

I am no longer a slave to fear.

I am a child of God.

I am no longer a slave to fear,

Because I am a child of God.

Prayer

So thank you Lord God, and we pray now that you would cause us, by your grace, to preach your Gospel. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Message

Twenty-five years ago at our high school youth group in Danville, California, I introduced a series on the Revelation. Fifteen years ago I preached through the Revelation here in Colorado. Twelve years ago, I published a commentary on the Revelation you can purchase on Amazon.

Well, twenty-five years ago, in 1991, to introduce the series (to our youth group), I began talking about how confusing these times are in which we live, and I suggested that it would be really great to have some special knowledge as to what was really going on. I then shared that I had been doing some amazing research regarding “the harmonic convergence in the seven bowls of wrath.” I showed them two graphs which systematically plotted “the convergence in the hermeneutical systems of the apocalyptic vision as they relate to the socio-political geo-synchronous issues of the day.” I shared that at all clearly pointed to the year in which the Antichrist would appear on the world scene: 1991.

I then revealed the remarkable numeric acuity so prevalent in the last eleven chapters of the Revelation. On the overhead projector, we began to fill in the blanks that would spell out the name of the Antichrist, all according to numeric acuitive construction. Before our very eyes, the name took shape: “Saksuork Mij.” Now, of course, I just made all this stuff up, but they were totally buying it! I remember freaking out a bit inside—thinking, “Man it would be pretty easy to start a cult, just claim to have some secret knowledge with which folks could save their own hide. . . and you could make a fortune.”

Well, everyone stared at the name on the overhead projector sheet. I said, “I just don’t know what this name means: Saksuork Mij.” Then I said, “What if we reversed polarity?” And I turned over the overhead transparency. All at once it became clear: the name was not Saksuork Mij; it was Jim Krouskas! Jim Krouskas was our new high school intern and sitting in the back row!

The staff all screamed, kids started looking at me like, “Hey . . . you made up that harmonic numeric acuity stuff, didn’t you?” We screamed and ran to the back of the room, grabbed Jim, and dragged him up front. We ripped off his shirt, and sure enough: he was wearing some satanic, heavy metal T-shirt under his Christian T-shirt. We ripped off several other heavy metal T-shirts, until Jim was standing there bare chested in front of 150 confused high school kids. He

was bare chested, but Jim's chest wasn't really bare . . . It was covered with thick, black, curly, Greek hair—like a carpet.

I yelled to Matt (the high school director, "Let's look for the mark!") Fortunately, we just happened to have an electric razor plugged in and ready. As Jim struggled, we began to shave his chest hair and, sure enough, right there on the right side of his chest, a huge black number 6 emerged. (I had drawn it there that morning.) But we gasped and shaved the middle of his chest, revealing another number 6! I said, "Oh, Jim, this is really disappointing. How are we going to explain that the summer intern is the antichrist?" Then we shaved the other side of Jim's chest, revealing the number . . . 5. "665" I looked up and said, "Oh man . . . Jim, 665, I'm so sorry. I miscalculated. I missed by one."

So was I off by one or more than one?

You know, people have speculated on the identity of the antichrist for over 2000 years, and it would be helpful to know just who he is. Back in 1991 the leading candidates were Ronald Wilson Reagan (six letters in each name), Michael Gorbachev (with the freaky birthmark that looked like a wound to the head), and the new guy named Saddam Hussein.

It would be nice to "know," because if you "knew," you could nuke him, or at least not vote for him . . . if you knew.

But, I did know that we should shave Jim's chest hair to look for the mark, because I had seen the movie *The Omen* back in 1978. In *The Omen*, Robert Thorn (played by Gregory Peck) is a US ambassador who adopts a baby boy in Rome. Unfortunately, this boy develops some discipline problems—not the least of which is his refusal to go to church. A Catholic priest suggests that the problem may be that Damien is the antichrist. In this scene, Robert checks for the mark as Damien is sleeping:

Clip from *The Omen*

[The scene opens showing Robert Thorn quietly and steadily walking in a dark room towards a bed, scissors glinting in hand. He begins to cut away some of Damien's hair. Tense music plays in the background. He then strikes a match and lights a lantern. He looks down at Damien's head, anxious to see what might be there. The image shifts to Damien's head the numbers 666 are revealed. Robert looks up and the camera closes in on his concerned eyes as ominous music plays.]

That's a bummer. So Robert tries to kill Damien in a church with the seven daggers of Megiddo, which according to the movie is how you kill the antichrist. But a policeman kills Robert and rescues Damien—the antichrist. Robert's funeral is attended by the president of the United States, who now takes custody of the smiling young antichrist: Damien Thorne. The movie ends with a quote from Revelation 13.

We preached on Revelation 12 last week, and I said that we would talk about the antichrist this week.

To be honest with you, I was pretty stressed about the antichrist from the time I saw *The Omen* in 1978 until about 1995. I wasn't stressed about Saddam Hussein, Michael Gorbachev, or Ronald Reagan; I was stressed about God and me.

I knew that the antichrist fulfilled ancient prophecies. And so it bothered me that God would predestine someone to be the antichrist. I thought, “What if I’m the antichrist?” I remember praying, “Oh God, please don’t let me be the antichrist.” In fact, I went home from the movie and checked under my hair.

Well, in Revelation 12, we met the woman clothed with the sun that gives birth to Christ and His body. That woman is us. The dragon chases her with the river of lies that issue from his mouth. But the earth opens her mouth and swallows the river of lies. All the lies are really one lie, and that lie is that I create God, while the truth is that God creates me.

At the end of chapter 12, the dragon, who is the devil, stands on the shore of the sea—he’s summoning help.¹

Revelation 13:1 – 3

And I saw the beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadem’s on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.

In Revelation 17, we discover that:

- The sea is the peoples and nations.
- The ten horns are ten kings, still to receive power
- The seven heads are seven hills. And remember, Rome is the city on seven hills.
- The seven heads are also seven kings; five have already fallen, one is, and is yet to come.

Emperor Nero was the fifth Emperor of Rome.

- At the time of the Revelation, he had recently died through a self-inflicted wound.
- A myth circulated that he would be back.
- He didn’t come back.
- But in 69 A.D., the Empire, which had appeared to crumble, revived and people wondered, “Who can battle against it?”

Well, this beast is a lion, bear, and a leopard. In the book of Daniel that refers to Babylon, Persia, and Greece—all empires that oppressed the people of God, like Rome was doing at the time of the Revelation.

Revelation 13:4

¹ Just as the Word of God, who is the Truth, becomes incarnate in His body, so the lie will appear to become incarnate in this thing that comes from the sea. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says that the devil is the “father of lies.” This thing is like an incarnation of a lie. The thing that comes from the sea is described as “was, is not, and is to come” as if it exists but only as a memory or a fear. It has no real substance in the NOW. It’s fundamentally false.

And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast they worshiped the beast saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

Verse 7

"Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them..."

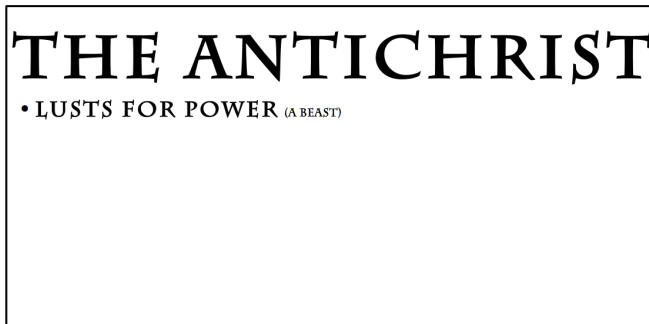
That is a sobering thought. The beast is allowed to conquer the saints, just as Rome and Jerusalem were allowed to conquer the saints.

In Exodus 32:33, God says to Moses,

"Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book."

I think Hitler was the most obvious candidate for antichrist in the 20th century. On March 14, 1938, he annexed Austria and obtained the "spear of destiny," the spear that was supposedly thrust into Christ's side upon the cross. For Hitler, it was a most prized possession. He describes his first encounter with the spear as follows:

I stood there quietly gazing upon it for several minutes, quite oblivious to the scene around me. It seemed to carry some hidden meaning, which evaded me, a meaning which I inwardly knew yet could not bring to consciousness...I felt as though I myself had held it before in some earlier century of history. That I myself had once claimed it as my talisman of power and held the destiny of the world in my hands...



Well, the antichrist lusts for power . . . Maybe that's the first way to recognize him. He lusts for power, like a beast.²

He believes in "the survival of the fittest"—the way of this fallen world:

- The first will be first and the last will be last.
- The one who exalts himself, will be exalted.

The antichrist lusts for power. In the human arena, that's political power, so an obvious candidate for antichrist in 2016 might look like something like this:

² You know, the earth is a good creation, but it's been subjected to futility. So a beast is a good creation that has been subjected to futility. Paul wrote that God can be clearly seen in the things that have been made. I think evil can also be seen in the corruption of the things that have been made. So life is one molecule, sell, or body part loving another molecule, sell, or body parts. And death is one molecule, sell, or body part feeding on another molecule, sell, or body part.

[Image of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump merged into one face]

Look out for this person!

Satan's original lie was a temptation to power—the suggestion that we take knowledge and make ourselves in the image of God.

Well, I'm sorry from bombarding you with so much Scripture, but I'd like us to identify the antichrist before the end of the service.

Revelation 13:11 John continues:

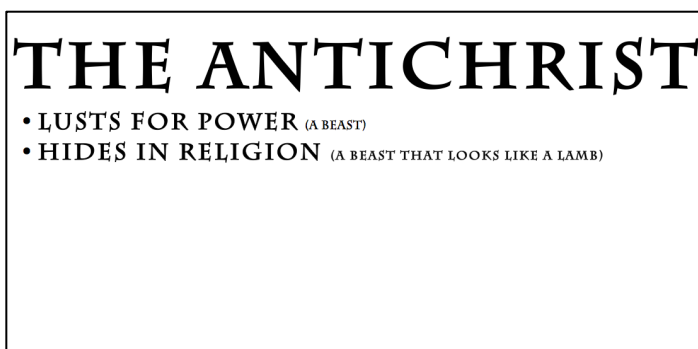
Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people... (Verse 16) Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the four head, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate...

This is the only place in the Revelation where we are invited to calculate. It is like it is saying, "You can figure this out."

Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

- The first beast comes from the sea, like Rome. And almost everyone who studies the Revelation identifies that beast with Rome.
- This second beast comes from the "earth," which is also translated "land" and often refers to the Promised Land—*Erets* Israel.

This beast looks like a lamb, but it speaks just like the dragon. It's a false prophet—a false prophet who preaches the glory of that first beast.



And so the antichrist will hide in religion:

- He'll look religious and probably use words like freedom, love, and grace, but listen closely, and what he means is conquest, power, and retribution.

- He may look like Jesus the lamb, but he'll act like a beast and speak like the dragon. By "crusade," he doesn't mean, "Pick up your cross," but "Nail someone else to the cross."
- He may even call down fire from heaven—but the fire won't be the fire of God's glorious presence, it will be stuff like napalm, rocket grenades, and nuclear bombs.

Historically, there have been at least three major streams of interpretation regarding the Revelation: the Preterists, Historists and Futurists.

The Preterists believe that the Revelation primarily refers to events that occurred at the time the Revelation was given.

- So they often argue that the beast from the sea was the Roman Emperor Nero.
- And the false prophet was the Judaism that collaborated with the Romans against the Christians.

It was common in that day to ascribe numbers to letters. Nero's full name adds up to 666³.

He's the guy that dipped Christians in pitch, tied them to poles, and used them as human torches in the arena.

Historists believe that the Revelation unfolds as all history unfolds. Most of these folks have taught that the antichrist is the Pope.

- That list includes Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Thomas Cranmer, John Knox and Cotton Mather.
- Up until Vatican II, the Roman church DID teach that they were necessary for salvation, like Christ is necessary for salvation.
- In Greek, *antichristos* doesn't simply mean "opposed to Christ," but also "in place of Christ," "imitation Christ."

"Pope" makes sense. But the problem now, is that the current Pope says stuff like, "Who am I to judge?" . . . Which is a very un-antichrist like sort of thing to say.

The Futurists come up with the best stuff for Hollywood movies.

- They usually believe that the Revelation refers to a bizarre seven-year period, about 2000 years after the Revelation was sent to the seven churches.
- This position can be a bit ironic since they often resort to politics cloaked in religion to advance their agenda according to their special knowledge; it's rather un-Christlike activity in the name of Christ . . . almost antichrist. And they often advocate the use of guns, bombs, and armies to do so.

Well, a popular contender for antichrist among these folks is this guy:

[Image of Obama with the caption "Is Obama the Antichrist?"]

³ Or 616 depending on how it's spelled, and there are ancient copies of the Revelation that have both numbers.

If that is the actual antichrist on the left, there is a striking resemblance!

There is a fourth stream of thought that would argue that there may be some truth in each view. But, “*we battle not against flesh and blood but principalities and powers in the heavenly places.*”

- So the beast from the sea is a demonic entity that manifests as political power throughout this current age.
- And the beast from the land is a demonic entity that manifests as religious power throughout the current age—our age.

666 might refer to Nero. It might also refer to this age (the human age). Humanity is created on the sixth day and finished by the seventh.

To be marked with the trinity of sixes might be to have faith in humanity as the savior of humanity.

Jesus is crucified at the sixth hour, on the sixth day of the week, on the sixth day of creation by powerful, political, and religious men that want to take his place as Savior of Israel . . . and Savior of themselves.⁴

It's on the sixth day that humanity is tempted to power—to take knowledge and create the self in the image of God.

And it's on the sixth day that humanity is tempted to religion—to hide in the leaves of the tree.

Human religion is all about hiding our lack of love in-laws about love: politics and religion on the sixth day.

Well, the antichrist lusts for power and hides in religion.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, Paul writes:

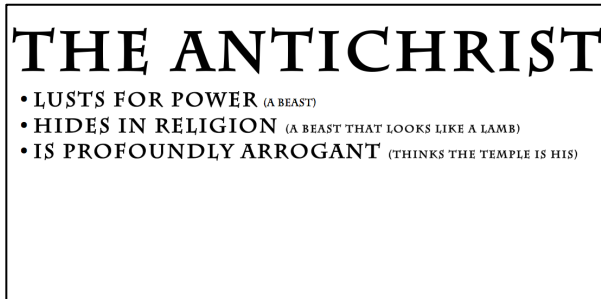
Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and are being gathered together to him, we ask you brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness (which is love-lessness, for love fulfills the law) is revealed, the son of destruction, 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. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 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. 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.

I wish we had more time to talk about that, but we don't.
Yet this much is clear:

⁴ So I'm thinking the mark is more than just a tattoo. But in case it's not, just say “no” to 666.

- We can't see Jesus in glory until the man of lawlessness—which is love-less-ness—is revealed.
- We can't see the Christ until this “antichrist” is revealed.
- Then Jesus Christ will bring this “antichrist” to nothing, with the breath of His mouth and the appearance of His coming—the *epiphaneia* (manifestation) of His *parousia* (His coming).

But before that day, the antichrist will exalt himself and sit on the throne in the temple of God.



The antichrist is profoundly arrogant. He thinks the temple is his.

The Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanies (who believed that he was the “epiphany” of Zeus), actually did take his place in the temple of God by erecting a statue of Zeus in the sanctuary in 167 BC. The Jews called it “the abomination of desolation.”

Emperor Caligula threatened to do the same thing in 40 A.D.

In 70 A.D., Roman soldiers did something like that . . . before they utterly destroyed the temple and plowed it into the ground.

And that’s why some Christians want Israel to rebuild the Temple—so that the antichrist can go sit in it . . . and then Jesus can nuke him along with all our enemies.

Of course, the problem with all of that is that Jesus very clearly explained that the old stone temple was no longer the temple of God, but He was constructing a new and living Temple, which He referred to as His own Body. And of course, you and I, are His Body, His House, His Temple.

And now this message gets dreadfully serious . . .

- For it means that the antichrist doesn’t want a stone house in the Middle East somewhere.
- He wants to find a place in you—the temple of God.

Now, you may have noticed that the word “antichrist” hasn’t appeared in any of the text that we’ve read. It actually only occurs in 1 and 2 John.

1 John 2:18 - 22

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour...

In Hebrew thought, the last hour was the beginning of the transition from the stage into the coming age, the transition from the sixth day of creation to the seventh . . . when and where “It is finished.”

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would've continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all (KJV) are not of us. But you have been anointed (have Xristos—“anointing”) by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ (Xristos—the anointed one)? This is the antichrist (antixristos), he who denies the Father and the Son.

John seems to say that an antichrist is coming, but many antichrists have come already.⁵

Then he says that the *antiXristos* denies that Jesus IS the *Xristos*. *Christ* literally means, “*anointed one*” which is wild, because he just wrote that the people reading this letter were also “*anointed*,” as if the *Xristos* was somehow in them . . . as if they were His Temple.

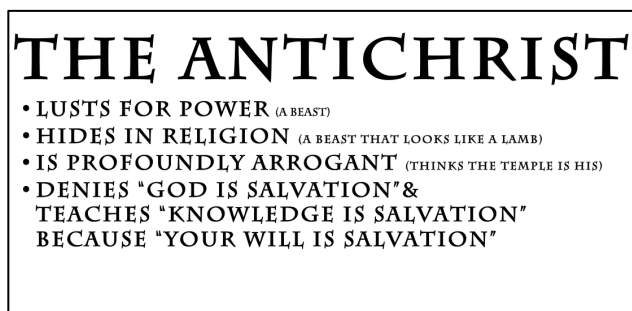
Well, the Christ is the one, chosen by God to be anointed.

In Scripture, three very important people get anointed:

- The Prophet—who reveals God.
- The Priest—who brings people to God.
- And the King—who rules and judges in the place of God.

To say, “Jesus is the Christ” is to say that this peasant from Galilee—who chooses to be last and least, to humble Himself, take the form of a slave, and die on a tree—is chosen by God as *the* prophet, *the* priest, and *the* King. He is the One who reveals God, brings people to God, and is the Judgment of God. Jesus is the decision of God.

Jesus means “God is Salvation.” Salvation is the Will of God and the Word of God.



The antichrist denies “*God is salvation*” and teaches that “knowledge is salvation” because “your will (your self) is salvation.” In other words, if you just take knowledge of the good, you can choose the good and make yourself good. You can will the good, and so save yourself with

⁵ He tells them that they already have knowledge—as if someone was tempting them to “take knowledge” and thereby save themselves.

yourself. The early church referred to that as “Gnosticism”—salvation through knowledge (that is *gnosis* in Greek).

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

1 John 4:1-3

The belief that Jesus only seemed to come in the flesh was called Docetism in the early church and Docetism was a form of Gnosticism.

- John taught that the will of God, which is the Word of God, actually became flesh in Jesus (John 1:14).
- And that the will of God actually becomes flesh in *us*, because the children of God are “*born not of the will of man, but of the will of God*” (John 1:13).

That means that “*doing the will of God*” is not simply my decision but God’s decision in me.

That means love is not my decision, but God’s decision in me.⁶

John continues: “*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from (of) God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God*” John 4:7.

God’s will is love, and God’s will in flesh is Jesus, and God’s will in your flesh is salvation—the birth of the body of Christ that does the will of God.

If you’re proud of salvation (as if it were your own work), if you’re proud of salvation, then you’re not saved . . . And you’ll be offended by grace.

“*For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist*” (2 John 7).

“Such a one” . . .

- That lusts for power and hides in religion,
- That is so arrogant that it sits in the center of God’s temple that is myself,
- That denies “God is salvation” for it believes that “it is salvation.”

“*Such a one*,” sounds an awful lot like . . . my ego.

⁶ The Will of God is faith in God, and God is love.

Faith in love, which is the decision to love, which is salvation—a gift.

In other words, to choose the good in freedom is the gift we call salvation.

Salvation is not taking knowledge in order to make a good choice; a good free choice is not your creation.

You are the creation of God’s good free choice named Jesus.

And a good free choice in you is the Spirit of Jesus in you.

A good free choice is love, and God is love.

Your will does not create love. Love creates your will.

THE ANTICHRIST

- LUSTS FOR POWER (A BEAST)
- HIDES IN RELIGION (A BEAST THAT LOOKS LIKE A LAMB)
- IS PROFOUNDLY ARROGANT (THINKS THE TEMPLE IS HIS)
- DENIES "GOD IS SALVATION" & TEACHES "KNOWLEDGE IS SALVATION" BECAUSE "YOUR WILL IS SALVATION"
- LOOKS A LOT LIKE MY EGO

"Such a one IS the antichrist," writes John.

Holy crap! Maybe I should shave my head and look for the mark?

Well, I don't want to say, "I am the antichrist," because that's really hard on church growth . . . But actually being the antichrist is another matter. Last week, I said that I didn't know how to "grow the church," and that's true. I can't grow the church, which is the very Body of Christ.

But I do know how to grow an institution that people call church. This is how:

- In the name of Jesus, you feed people's lust for power, but you hide the lust for power in the cloak of religion.
- You talk about grace, but you appeal to everyone's pride.
- You give special knowledge and congratulate your folks for making good choices, while you condemn other folks for making bad choices.
- You convince them that "you, your institution, and their good judgment IS salvation."

I don't want to say that I am the antichrist, but maybe I have been, or I am sometimes, part of the antichrist.

Antichrist is anything that takes the place of Christ, our Savior.

- In its most basic form, it looks like politics.
- In its more subtle form it looks like religion.
- In its most brutal form, it manifests as politics and religion.

Whatever the case,

- The antichrist takes the place of Christ, and competes with Christ, and so opposes the work of Christ, in the name of Christ.
- The antichrist talks salvation, but is offended by the actual salvation of sinners, who are saved from their sin—their bad choices.
- The antichrist talks grace but is deeply offended by grace, so always works to limit grace and put conditions on grace so it's not grace.

Kind of like this:

Saturday Night Live Video Clip

[Dina and audience clap together politely.]

Cory: *And a girl I played with, named Anne Frank!*

Dad: *Yeah!*

[The scene opens with banjo music in the background. The screen says Dina Smothers, Country Woman in audience and then whole audience: *Cryin'!*
[The audience laughs and his parents look puzzled.]
Cory: *And a man with a funny mustache, named Hitler . . . and a nice lady named Mother Teresa . . . and . . .* (Dina looks doubtfully at the camera)

Dina: *Hold on a second! Did you say you met Hitler in Heaven?*

Dina: *Welcome to the show. As promised, today, we have the first-ever live interview with Cory*

Cory: *Hi! It's Adolf Hitler* (audience titters). *And, he had a funny mustache! And he talked funny.*

Mom: *No! (patting her son's arm.) Honey, that can't be right!*

Dina: *(In a southern accent) For those of you who don't remember, little Cory went into a coma*

Dad: *Yeah. That's not in the book! No.*

Mom: *(continuing to wave negatively) No.*

Cory: *Yeah, hun.!* *And there was a nice man, named Jeffrey Daumer!* *Hi Cory!*

Dina: *Hi!*

Dina: *(leaning in towards Cory) I loved your book! My daughter had a question for you: she*

Cory: *And a Mr. Gacy.*

Mom: *Waited to Huh? "What does Heaven smell like?"*

Cory: *(smiling broadly and hissing slightly) Um, . . . like cake and sunshine!*

Audience and dad: *Awwww!* (mom rubs Cory's arm proudly and smiles.)

Dina: *Cake and sunshine! I want to go! Ha, ha huh uhhh! I bet you were excited to go to*

Audience: *No*

Mom: *No* (shaking her head at her son and looks out at the audience).

Dad: *(Holding his hand up to pipe audience down.) Alright! folks! He's just a kid! He's just a kid . . .*

(audience mutters)

Dina and audience in unison: *Awwww!*

Dad: *And, this is not what the shifts position grabbing his wife's arm and pulling her to sit further away*

Cory: *And my Pop-pop was there!*

Dina: *Your Pop-pop!*

Mom: *No. Okay.*

Dad: *Yeah, and Dina, there's no way Cory would know what his Pop-pop looked like. My*

Dad: *our feelings are on this issue. (The parents look dismayed at the audiences doubtful*

father, his grandfather, passed away when I was seven. And yet, he described him right

Mom: *down to his cowlick!*

Mom: *Huh!* She turns to her son pats the couch next to her and then looks over her shoulder at her

husband: *Maybe you're mistaken.*

Cory: *I got to play with everybody! All my old family, and a baseball player named Babe Ruth!*

Dad: *Yeah!*

Mom: *about what you saw!*

Dina: *You got to meet Babe Ruth!*

Dad: *Yeah!*

Dad: *Yeah.*

Cory: *No!*

Dina: *Wow!*

Audience: *Oooooo!*

(The audience claps with Cory's mom.)

Mom: *Well, then, maybe you're lying!* (looking at audience and nodding)!

Dad: *Yeah. It's all in the book!* (pointing to the book on table in front of them).

Audience: *(Claps approvingly) Yeah! Wooh! Yeah!*

Mom: *Yeah!*

Cory: *But I did go to Heaven, and Jesus did say that!*

Dad: *Boo! Cory! Boo!* (Audience joins in.)

Mom: *Boo! Boo!* (Making a thumbs down sign at Cory)!

Dina: *Boo!*

Mom: *We will not sit here and have YOU mock God . . . as some all-forgiving monster!*

Dad: *Yeah! No* (waving his forefinger at Cory). *No Way!*

Dina: *Boo!*

[Audience boos and starts to throw things at Cory, who crouches away as his parents flinch.]

Dina: *Yes! Yes! Get him! Get him!*

[Audience continues to boo as they throw things.]

Dina: *Get him. Yeah* (holding a pillow like she wants to throw it at him and then throwing it). *Yes!*

If God, in Christ Jesus, was strong enough and good enough to give Hitler a new heart, would you consider that good news or bad? When I first saw that video, I chuckled . . . And then I wept. I'm a pastor's kid who grew up in church and went to work in church. All my life I've heard religious people say, "God is love, and He wants to save everybody; but sadly, many, maybe most, can't be saved."

About 15 years ago, having preached through the most terrifying portions of Scripture, having encountered Jesus in the most horrifying of situations, and having discovered some great theologians from the early churches and the last century, I began to think, "Maybe Jesus can save everyone."

I've always confessed that the only way to be saved is to be saved by the Savior, and so salvation is 100% Grace—God's work and not my own. And I've always believed that there is a place of outer darkness that some call "*hell*." And I've always believed that God is a consuming fire. But I began to see that hell gets destroyed by that fire and that God just might "*make all things new*," and "*reconcile all things to himself making peace by the blood of his cross*"—because Scripture says that He will.

I began to see how it could all be true, and I couldn't wait to tell my pastor friends in my denomination. They had all said that they wished Jesus would save everyone. But when I pointed to the Scripture that said He *would* save everyone, they seemed offended that I would even suggest such a thing.

I expected millions of questions, and hours of exegesis and theological discussion. I expected it, and hoped for it, but they didn't want it. And I soon found myself publicly tried for my hope that the Savior saves *all* who need to be saved.

I can't know their motives, but many who seem to talk so much about grace, seem deeply offended by grace.

They seemed *anti*-Christ (it really disturbed me, for in them I had seen Christ . . . And now they seemed anti—Christ.)

Maybe we're called as a church to battle the antichrist. Maybe that's the reason we're having this Forgotten Gospel Conference.

- There's only one Gospel, and in a word, that Gospel is Jesus.
- Jesus means "God is salvation."
- That's offensive, if you think, "me and my group are salvation."

Well, I was defrocked. My dreams were shattered. Some of your dreams were shattered.

A couple of years ago I heard that an old pastor friend—who I had dearly loved, but who rejected me during that time—developed some memory problems and lost his church . . . And something in me thought, "Serves him right."

I prayed that God would bless my old church, but when they struggled and lost their building . . . something in me thought, "Serves them right." A few weeks ago I heard that an old friend had died unexpectedly. He was a friend whom I had also dearly loved, who was on the committee

that tried me but would not debate with me, but chose to only judge me. And I genuinely struggled . . . and still struggle.

That's pretty sick. What's wrong with me?

Do I want folks to "get what they deserve?" For then we will all get nothing.
Do I hate grace?
Do I use my "knowledge" to judge them out and judge me in?
Do I refuse to forgive, which is the unforgivable sin?
Do I lust for power, and hide in religion?
Do I preach grace as a cover for my pride?
Am I the antichrist?

Do you remember what Jesus said to the religious Jews in John chapter 8? He said, "*You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do his desires...He is a liar and the father of lies.*"

"Father of lies . . ."

When I listen to Satan's lie that I must create myself,
I create a monster (as we preached last week).

When I listen to Satan's lie that I must save myself,
I put flesh on the antichrist . . . the false Christ. . . the false Savior.

The antichrist is the imitation Christ, my false self, the old man, the loveless and lawless man, the embodiment of a lie—the lie that I must save myself with my knowledge of good and evil and the power of my own will. That's terrifying!

Yet, when I believe the truth—that I'm saved by grace through faith, I give birth to the will of God and become the Body of Christ. But when I believe the lie that I'm saved by my knowledge of the good and my ability to choose the good, I put flesh on the antichrist.

You see, Emperor Nero may really have been the antichrist two thousand years ago. A medieval Pope or two may have been the antichrist. One day, there might be an antichrist sitting in some temple over in Jerusalem. But if you're really worried about the antichrist, I wouldn't concern myself with Middle Eastern dictators, the Pope, or even the ministerial committee of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. I'd shine the light on your own . . . ego!

So, I hope you realize that the antichrist is far more horrid than you ever imagined. And I hope that you want to kill him! But how do you kill him? You can't kill him with your knowledge, or your will to power, the power of your own will. In the Revelation, he's conquered by the Word of God, a sword comes out of His mouth. And He captures the antichrist. And then he's thrown into a lake of fire and *theon*, a *lake of fiery divinity*.

2 Thessalonians describes the very same thing, I think, but from a different angle. Jesus Christ simply speaks, and the Truth destroys the lie. Jesus Christ simply appears, and the Light destroys the darkness, destroyed by the epiphany of His effective presence.

The revelation of the Christ destroys the antichrist.

The revelation of "God is salvation" destroys the lie that you are salvation.

The revelation of grace destroys your pride.

The revelation of the new man destroys the old man, the loveless man, the lawless man.

And do you see? He must be destroyed in order for you to know Jesus. And I think this is the really cool and wonderful news: Christ appears when and where the antichrist disappears. *“For where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”* Where the old man dies, the New Man is revealed. So how do you kill the antichrist? You expose yourself to the Christ.

In 33 A.D., the dragon convinced the beast from the sea to conspire with the beast from the land. He convinced Rome to conspire with Jerusalem, and politics with religion, Pilate with Caiaphus. He convinced them to nail the Christ to a tree, in a garden, in order to save themselves. A Roman centurion actually pounded the nails, and he held the spear that was thrust into Christ’s side, the spear that Hitler thought would give him such power. But he didn’t understand power. *“But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”*

On the tree, Jesus cried out, “Father, forgive them!” The earth shook, the tombs were opened, and Jesus delivered up His Spirit. Then and there that centurion dropped to his knees and he confessed, “Surely, this was the Son of God!” And one day, every knee will drop and every tongue will confess. But that’s how the Christ conquers the antichrist and creates us in His own image. He conquers all things and creates all things with the power of His love.

Communion

And so He took bread, and He broke it saying, “This is my body, given to you; take and eat and do this in remembrance of me.” And He took the cup after supper and having given thanks; He said, “This is the covenant in my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you, and do it in remembrance of me.”

So, close your eyes. Just take a minute; close your eyes. Ask God this question silently in your heart; say, “Father, have I been trying to save myself? How have I been trying to save myself?”

Isn’t that maybe why you can’t sleep? Isn’t that why you may feel driven? I mean, I don’t know, maybe you can sleep, but you’ve got to feel driven sometimes. Isn’t that why you’re anxious and afraid? And it bothers you when someone close to you succeeds and you think you don’t? Isn’t it what makes you competitive with the people you say you love and even God Himself? Do you think that you’re the Christ? You see, I think there’s a word for that . . .

Well, I want you to hear the Gospel. This is the eternal Gospel. That means this cannot be changed. This is the way things are. You cannot save yourself, with yourself. It’s just more self. You cannot save yourself because the Word of God and the Will of God—Christ Jesus, have already saved you from the foundation of the world our Lord. And He cannot love you more than He does right now! He cannot exercise more power and authority than He does right now. He’s Good.

You wondered if He is Good, and He is showing you . . . right now . . . in this world that He is so Good. When you believe Him, you will do “the will of God.” And He’s making sure that you do. In Jesus’ name, believe the gospel. Come to the table, expose yourself to the Christ, kill the antichrist, and be the Body of Christ. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Benediction

Now, I need to tell you something. I am not the antichrist. And *you* are not the antichrist. The problem is that we have thought we were the antichrist. We've believed a lie. You know there's this amazing thing that happens in the Revelation. Jesus is referred to, and I don't fully understand this, but I get a hint I think. Jesus is referred to as the one who "was, and is, and is to come." The antichrist is referred to as the one who was and is not, and is to come. It's like he only exists in our fears in the past, and in the future. But God exists in the NOW, the eternal now. He is what is. So the antichrist is a lie that we put flesh on somehow, the darkness that has taken a form and tempted us. Jesus is the Light and has conquered. And so, very simply, by way of benediction, I would just say, "Believe the gospel. You are not the antichrist. You *are* the Body of Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.