

Strong Delusion 4-23-06

2 Thessalonians 2:7-12 (NIV)

⁷ For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie ¹² and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

The volume of anti-Christian rhetoric that is in our media of late has surprised me. It seems like every week some reworked information is being touted as an insight into what REALLY happened to Jesus. I believe it is essential that Christians have an open mind and examine all the evidence. Having an open mind and having faith are not mutually exclusive. Christians should not be people that stick their fingers in their ears and sing whenever someone confronts them about their faith. We need to listen to the argument, consider its validity, understand why we believe what we believe, and respond intelligently with gentleness and humility. To do that, we must be informed.

The Da Vinci Code is soon to be released and will no doubt be a major motion picture. Sony Pictures is pouring a boatload of money into it, when it would not touch *The Passion* with a ten-foot pole. We have already gone over some of the evidence that clearly shows the book to be based on forgeries and misinformation. In the case of this book and movie, even the liberal scholars are on our side. The so-called code has been verifiably proven false, but Sony's pitch line is "Seek the truth!" If you open the book, soon to be in paperback, you will see in large letters, FACT! When the movie actually has very little to do with truth and is based on very few facts.

Let us review a few points we covered over a year ago in the sermon *Duh Vinci Code*. The whole thing is based on an assumption about one line in a Gnostic Gospel written hundreds of years after Christ. The line does not say Jesus' wife was Mary Magdalene. It says that Jesus kissed her frequently. Is there any validity to the statement? First, we must understand that the New Testament writers condemned Gnosticism as heretical. Think! Why should a whole theory be developed on one line in a very strange and weird document (just read it!) that all agree was written hundreds of years after the eyewitness accounts we have in the Gospels?

Consider a comparable situation today. If someone wrote a book today about President Lincoln and made some outrageous claims, would you believe them or accounts written by Lincoln's Chief of Staff? Now add that Lincoln's secretary and two other aides had all written the same thing that the Chief of Staff wrote. Now throw in that the rest of this new book was incomprehensible! Which would you believe? It would be absurd to take this new author's account over that of

eyewitnesses and yet that is what people are doing today with the Gnostic Gospels.
⁷ *For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work...*

Today, in the Western world, a similar scenario has been accepted as valid information for a best seller and a major motion picture. I could go on with the proven forgeries and lies in the book, but the world has already done a good job with that. This morning I am asking why? Why is the Western world so hungry for anything that would say we do not need to see the Bible as a revelation from God?

The Gospel of Judas special was recently presented by National Geographic. Though I did not get to see it, I did read that supposed gospel. The commercials warn us to get ready for new information about what really happened. When I hear such distortions, it makes me cringe. It is interesting they released this special on the week of Easter. Imagine releasing a documentary on the violent life of Mohamed on the week of Ramadan? In the Western world, we must be ultra-sensitive toward every religion and viewpoint with one glaring and notable exception – you guessed it – Christianity.

The Gospel of Judas was written in the middle of the 2nd Century. It is as wacky as the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas that the *Da Vinci Code* is based on. It contradicts itself, refers to gods that rule various realms, and is pretty much unintelligible. In it, Jesus tells Judas that he is a shining star that will outshine all the others. The author claims that Jesus said no one in that generation would enter the kingdom of heaven. So much of text is missing that you cannot really follow large portions of it. I wish they were there because if those portions were anything like the rest of the text, they would do more damage to the credibility than they would add.

This is nothing new. One of the early church fathers, Iraneaus, refers to the Gospel of Judas (we cannot know for sure if it is the same) and declares it heretical. Long ago, there were those that saw Iraneaus condemnation of this fraudulent gospel and made the same claims that are being made today. Judas was supposedly Jesus good buddy and just obeying Jesus' instructions when he betrayed Him.

The special by National Geographic is bringing up one paragraph that claims that Jesus arranged for Judas to betray Him. That is so contrary to the Gospels that both cannot be true. Listen to the four Gospel writers. Jesus prayed, ¹² *"While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled."* John 17:12 (NIV) ¹⁸ *"I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'* John 13:18 (NIV) ²⁴ *"The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."* Matthew 26:24 (NIV) Judas says, *"I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."* Matthew 27:4 (NIV) These statements directly contrast with the idea that Jesus arranged the betrayal by Judas. What will you believe, the eyewitnesses, or someone writing under another's name a hundred years later?

This is not a new theory. I remember the same idea brought up in the 70s. Just like the *Da Vinci Code* a retelling of *Holy Blood*, *Holy Grail*, *The Gospel of Judas* is a

reworked, spruced up argument that had been shot down long ago. They just keep bringing them up again to make money. What you will probably not hear about the Gospel of Judas is that those who believed it called themselves Cainites, because their hero is Cain, the murderer of Abel. They believe that Jehovah of the Old Testament is evil. Then of course Judas would be a good guy.

What difference does it make if Judas was asked by Jesus to arrange to turn Him in? First it contradicts the Biblical accounts. It claims that the Bible is biased and inaccurate. But I believe the deeper reason is the lesson behind the story of Judas. Judas is a picture of man going his own way for selfish reasons. His sad end is a warning to every person who lives to gratify self. Taking it a step further, it is a picture of the power of the God who can work to bring about His will even in the midst of fallen man's selfish decisions. It declares that God is God and man will never change that fact. The Gospel story declares the sovereignty of God, and natural man cringes at that thought.

Some of the so-called "scholars" these shows use as experts say things like, "It sheds light on what was taking place at the time." That is true, if you are talking about the minds of heretical Gnostics in the 2nd century. But how could you think it would shed any light on what happened 100 years earlier with genuine believers? That is a real stretch. To believe it requires a deliberate willingness to see something that is highly unlikely and requires that one intentionally ignore the obvious.

Many of those who support these ideas claim that the Emperor Constantine fashioned Christianity by discarding the Gnostic Gospels and choosing the four we have in our New Testaments because it suited his needs. That is verifiably a distortion of what actually happened. The early church fathers had long before pointed to the four Gospels as the ones that were authentic and valid. They were circulated throughout the early church and looked to as a source of inspiration long before Constantine. Were there crazy off shoots of early Christianity. Of course, and some of those were the ones that added Jesus to their Gnostic ideologies. They were in no way the main stream of Christianity.

Gnosticism is about deep hidden truths. It reminds me of some of the religions that are becoming popular today like Scientology. If you pay enough money, and serve the group long enough, you can be taught the secret wisdom that is only for the few.

The way of Jesus Christ is diametrically opposed to that kind of thinking. In fact, not many wise, not many noble, not many mighty are called. (1 Corinthians 1:26) It is a faith for everyone, from the handicapped child to the intellectual giant. It is simple enough for everyone but rich enough to delve into for eternity. When you come right down to it, most religions are more exclusive than Christianity. Jesus is the only way to God, but He avails Himself to everyone. It is wonderful that poorest, with the lowest IQ, has equal status here with the CEO who is a genius. I love it!

So why in the world is there a sudden upsurge in Gnostic ideas and teachings? Why are people willing to believe an idea based on one line in a text that was written generations after the fact and ignore the crazy statements in the rest of the book?

Commented [notes1]: 26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.
1 Corinthians 1:26 (NIV)

When you look at the facts without all the hype and glitter, it really makes one wonder. I believe our text today answers the question. Our text speaks of the day when the Anti-Christ will rise to power. He is going to do miracles and deceive many. (Matthew 24:24) I do not think we are there yet, but the principle is the same. *They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.* If you are confronted with the truth and you do not like it, you have a choice. You can decide you will accept it because it is truth, or you can look for a belief system in which you do not have to accept the truth. Many today are creating their own faith systems, a little of Buddhism, a little Hinduism, a little Christianity but not the things that tell me I have to change my life and accept another master.

Commented [notes2]: 24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible. Matthew 24:24 (NIV)

Once confronted with the truth we must decide to accept it and change or reject it and form another way of seeing the world. Our text says of those who decide to reject truth, ¹¹ *For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie...* God allows these false teachings and their absurdities to fill the void in those who reject the truth. He gives them what they have insisted on. Like the children of God in the wilderness who said they would prefer to die in the desert, He gives them their request but sends leanness into their souls. Psalm 106:15

I talked to a very nice and helpful man this week who said, "I think religion is great. Everyone should have one." Next time I hear that I need to ask, "Even if it is a lie?" Not all religions can be true. Each contradicts the other. You cannot believe that you get to heaven by grace alone and say that a religion based on the righteousness of man is good. In a way, this friend was saying what that verse just said, only he did not mean it that way. Everyone will have a religion; even atheism is a religion. If you will not receive the truth, you will find a strong delusion to believe in. It is not a weak thing; it is strong. Have you ever noticed that the simplest logic is lost on some? If you point out a contradiction in what they are saying, they shrug it off as if it was not there. It is strong delusion.

For many, the *Da Vinci Code* and the *Gospel of Judas* are just one more reason not to accept the Lordship of Christ. It does not matter to them what is written in the rest of those books, they found the part they want. It is cafeteria-style faith. "I'll just pick what I want. Who cares what God wants!" They make their choice, and God lets them go their own way. You can try to show them the inconsistencies in their beliefs, but a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still. You can even prove they are wrong, and they will go right back to the lie they have chosen. It is not up to us. All we are to do is present the truth. We proclaim the Good News. Each person must decide for them self. The Holy Spirit will work on every heart, but there comes a time when they will accept or reject the truth.

Hear Peter's address in regards to Gnostics of his day. ¹ *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves.* ² *Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.* ³ *In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over*

them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. 2 Peter 2:1-3 (NIV) Solomon was on target when he said there is no new thing under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

Commented [notes3]: 9 What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.
Ecclesiastes 1:9 (NIV)

I have shared this with you so that you will realize there are those who do not want to know the truth. They will continue to attack the truth because it challenges them. There is a reason they are so vehement. They are fighting their own conscience. It should break our hearts that they are not willing to receive the truth, but we must realize that the decision is theirs.

After writing this sermon, that very same evening, NBC's news anchor closed the news hour by saying, "It's been a very tough week for the Christian faith, a scientist determined that when Jesus walked on water it was actually frozen. The transitional fossil from sea to land animals was discovered, and Judas real role has been found not to be the arch enemy but the obedient friend of Jesus."

What a perfect illustration to this message. Let's see. Now we know why the disciples were having such a hard time rowing. Their boat was frozen in the ice! When Peter fell in, it must have been a thin patch. The waves he saw must have been a hallucination. Is that fish fossil that had large fin bones that may have become legs anything like the species already in existence that uses their fins to crawl and even climb trees? Where are the gazillion transitional fossils between species? Scientists admit there is none. And the final supposed nail in our faith coffin is supposed to be the Judas' Gospel. Let me see, did he write it before he hung himself. That was quick. He must have been a speed writer. I guess he just wanted everyone to know he had been faithful and was about to be the leading apostle. But then I am confused as to why he would choose suicide.

The anchor closed by saying, "People of faith will believe what they choose to believe." I thought, "Yes, you will." I think it takes a lot more faith to believe the desperate arguments of those who search for evidence to disprove the miraculous, who hang their hopes on bone fragments and single copy parchments from unknown sources. That news anchor puts my faith to shame. He has incredible faith. It is just faith in the strong delusion his heart desires.

I am sharing this with you so that you will realize there will be more of the same and in an increasing way as that day approaches. The Apostle Paul predicted, *"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."* 2 Timothy 3:12-13 (NIV) Expect it. Do not be surprised by it. Use it as an opportunity to present the truth. Every conversation about the *Da Vinci Code* or the *Gospel of Judas* is a chance for you to share the truth. Do so gently, in an informed way, and get to the reason behind it all. To do that you have to be prepared to answer people about the hope you have. Do not be lazy; be prepared. You do not need to win every discussion, but you will sow the seeds of truth and make people think.

I am also sharing this with you in case there are some of us who are being tempted to compromise. How much do you want truth? When you hear these wild claims of some "new" discovery, find out the truth. Examine the information with a critical

eye. Ask yourself if those who present it are unbiased. Hear the opposition, consider the evidence, and think logically. If you have doubts because of these recent shows, I challenge you to pull up the English translation of the Coptic texts, read them and ask yourself if any of it is worth anything. (You can find them on-line.)

In the final analysis, we must be people who are committed to truth. Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life!*" John 14:6 Truth will prevail. We must come to God by faith, but it is faith backed by the truth of God's word. It is logical. There is better evidence to believe than to doubt. Jesus said of God, "*Your word is truth.*" John 17:17b The testimony of His life makes Him a lot more convincing than wild theories of His detractors. But do not just believe me. Examine the evidence for yourself! (www.truefoundations.com) Be able to give a gentle and informed answer to those who ask. Use this resurgence of old claims to share the truth of Jesus Christ and His power to change lives. Some may want to use these old false teachings to turn people from the truth, but we can turn it into an opportunity to share the facts. Amen?