

Sermon—February 12-13, 2000  
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Daniel: Thriving in a Hostile World  
Daniel 12:1-4

## Keeping the End in Mind

There is a famous play by Samuel Becket that some of you may have been forced to read when you were in High School or College. They usually force students to read certain plays or books because they know that no one else would, on their own, actually read some of these things that are forced down the throats of our young adults. It is probably just a big power play by teachers.

But Samuel Becket wrote a play called “Waiting for Godot.” In the play there were these two hobos that are sitting around on the street rambling on and on as they wait for this Godot fellow to show up. And they carry on this dialogue as they are waiting for Godot, but they are just rambling about meaningless stuff with each other. As the audience listens, they realize there is not going to be classic dialogue they can take away and meditate over. You know, like, “To be or not to be, that is the question.” Or “Life is but a poor player that struts and frets its hour upon the stage and then is heard no more, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” These two tramps are carrying on mindless banter. One of them talks about some bunion on the bottom of his foot that has been hurting. The other talks about what he ate for lunch or the weather. They aren’t really communicating with each other. They are just rambling and talking.

Becket's point in the play was that real life and the ability to even communicate with each other only works if you are waiting for a Godot who really comes. See, what he is attempting to say is that life is a waiting game and that if you don't have anything to look forward to, if your end is nothing, then your present existence is nothing.

Now, if you are simply driving down a dead end street, if your whole life is a dead end street, then your present existence is purposeless, it is meaningless. It is going nowhere. The point is, without a future goal, without some end in mind, life just loses its joy. It loses its fizz, its zip.

Is this not the reason that most people's childhoods were at least endurable and actually at times exciting? How do children get through all the garbage of being a child? Many boys are not ever picked for anything in sports. Think about it. On a nine person baseball team, one-ninth of the players are picked last, with the comment, "Do we have to take you?" A significant percentage of high schoolers never go out on a date, are never even asked out on a date. And then there are all your personal characteristics that are made fun of at some point—your hair, your freckles, your ears, your name, whether you have braces, whether you are fat, thin, tall or short.

How do kids get through all of that? What is their coping mechanism? I think children know something intuitively that adults forget or stop doing somewhere along the line. Children are almost always looking forward to something. They are always waiting for a better time than just today.

I remember really looking forward to summer vacation. Adults don't get three months off every year, but each year I knew that there was at least one good thing to look forward to and that was summer. I would be out of school and I was going to go to camp. I had summer to look forward to. Now, summer just means that I get to drive to work in a hot car and have kids around to care for and watch in the heat.

When you are a child you look forward to the time when you are going to date. Many girls dream about their wedding day and what it is going to be like. I used to dream about playing center field for the Yankees. I am beginning to realize at age 44 that that is probably not going to happen. Teenagers look forward to the moment when they will be able to drive. They look forward to having their own apartments and going off to college.

All these future dreams, all these future goals fueled the joy of childhood. I believe it is precisely the death of dreams that creates what we now call mid-life crises. What I see in people who are suffering from a middle age crisis, and quite a number of folks in this room are among the pool of potential crisis people, but what I see happening in the life of very successful people is that there are very few things that a person in the midst of a middle age crisis are looking forward to. There's no goal any longer. No driving end that fuels them for today. All of their goals have either already been accomplished, so that they are a successful professional or they have a certain size house or a certain kind of family, a certain type of marriage; or, their goals have not been fulfilled. We have all these folks who are about age 40 who have either accomplished their goals and now they

have 30 more years to live and then they are going to die and be buried, or they haven't accomplished their goals and it is unlikely that they are going to accomplish their goals and so they are going to live 30 more years, die and be buried.

The reason I state it in such stark terms is that this is the kind of thinking that gives rise to a middle age crisis. What middle age people tend to do, and what all people tend to do when they don't have anything in the future to look forward to, is they escape. I have no dream to look forward to, so I am going to buy myself a nice little red sports car. Or, I am going to dye my hair and pretend that I am not 40, but 14. Or maybe I will get an earring or take off with a 22 year old, or get myself a toupee, or unbutton my shirt and let my chest hair stick out. Or quit my job, or get divorced. That is what middle age people do. They often escape to prevent the reality of the death of all future dreams.

I think you see this process at work in America's poorest inner city neighborhoods. When people live on a dead end street, when they don't believe that they have a future, when they don't feel like something good is going to happen to them, when there are very few opportunities and very little hope – what do you do? You do what most people do in that situation, you try to escape. You smoke dope or get high or have cheap sex. Life becomes totally expendable, not worth anything, meaningless, like the tramps in Samuel Becket's play, if there isn't an end in view. You know, the quality of our lives depends in very large degree on whether we have a bright future in store, or whether we envision nothing but a dead end street.

This is the last talk in a series that I am doing on the book of Daniel. Throughout this series we have been talking about how to live well, how do you live successfully in Babylon? Daniel is this Jewish guy taken captive along with other Jews from his homeland, taken to the middle of Babylon, this pagan environment, that doesn't worship God, that doesn't acknowledge God's laws or rules for living. How do you thrive in Babylon? How, as Christians, do we thrive in a world where all the signals, all the pressures are completely contrary to Christianity? In this last message we are going to find that Daniel is given a revelation of how to thrive in Babylon and that is by having something to look forward to, by "Keeping the End in Mind." Let's pray.

We are going to begin by looking at Daniel 12.

"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."

What will the future be like? What do we have to look forward to in America on planet Earth? Daniel says in v. 1, "At that time [he is talking about the end of time] Michael,

the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.”

The continual message of the Bible is that the last days – and by last days, the New Testament at least is talking about the entire period of time between the first and second coming of Christ – the entire last days are times of stress punctuated by times of great distress leading to one final, ultimate tribulation for America and planet Earth. Jesus described these days of distress with the metaphor “labor pains.” He says in Matthew 24, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.” Jesus says, echoing Daniel, that there will be great distress, “unequaled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again.”

Paul says in 2 Timothy 3 that there will be terrible times in the last days. Now again, we are talking about the whole period of time from the time of Christ to his second coming, but there seems to be periods of times of greater distress than others, marked by one final great tribulation, one final birth pain, before the Lord returns.

Now there are many Christians who would say that God is going to snatch his people away from all of the tribulation that Daniel is describing here in Daniel 12:1 or the

tribulation described in Matthew 24 and in the book of Revelation. Surely, God is going to snatch us away from all of that. God would never let his people go through intense suffering or difficulty. That was Peter's initial response to Jesus' announcement that Jesus was going to suffer and die. Peter said, "No way would God allow that. Certainly, he wouldn't permit something like that to occur with a person that he loves."

It is quite clear, from a New Testament perspective, that God frequently does not shield his beloved people from great difficulty or great tribulation or great suffering. Jesus said, on the night he was betrayed, and this was one of the last things he said to his disciples, and you know that last words are lasting words, words said at the end are very, very important. Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Jesus said, "In me you are going to find peace." Don't look for it in the world. Don't look for it in your job. Don't look for it in the coming election, in the presidential primaries. Don't look for it out there. It is never going to be there.

The truth is throughout history, God has not seen fit to remove his beloved children from intense persecution or trials. And God loves us more intensely than we love ourselves, but God has not seen fit throughout history to remove his beloved children from all suffering, persecution, or tribulation. Tell the church in China under Chairman Mao that God and his love would absolutely deliver them from all tribulation and they would say, "You don't understand. It doesn't work that way."

Tell the church in Uganda under Idi Amin that God will snatch them away. Tell the suffering church in the Sudan today or in other Muslim countries that God in his love will not allow his children to undergo great tribulations and they would say to you, “You Christians in America don’t get it at all. You don’t understand that following Jesus means walking in his steps. That it is not just believing in him, enjoying blessings and all the good things of being a Christian, but it also involves Philippians 1:29 sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ.” Does it scare you to imagine that it might get increasingly worse for Christians in America and the rest of the West? Does it scare you that there will be more anti-Christian messages, more blatant anti-Christian moral views, more attacks politically and academically? Does the idea that we are rapidly becoming a post-Christian America frighten you?

The truth is that every time we Christians in America experience anti-Christian backlash, anti-Christian rhetoric, the mocking on TV, the politicians with their anti-Christian perspectives, every time we hear the slogans, the put downs, we experience some persecution at work or in our classrooms or our college classes for our faith, we are shocked by it. We American Christians say to ourselves, “There is something wrong. How could this be? Why am I getting hassled by my unbelieving boss or spouse or parent? Something must be wrong.”

Friend, this is the lot of Christians throughout history. It has been granted to Christians to suffer for the sake of Jesus. And unless Christians are prepared, unless we look forward



and see this coming in the end, we will not patiently endure, but will throw the whole thing out. We will jump ship. We will think something has gone wrong. Maybe we need to change our message. Maybe we need to water it down a bit. Maybe we need a better public relations firm for Christianity. Maybe we just need to gain a little more political power – get our guy in office. This is not the way it is suppose to be. Well, maybe not according to the script written by the American success story.

Peter, who was so shocked by Jesus' prediction of suffering in Matthew 16, gave a very different perspective on suffering in his first letter in chapter 4. In his letter he said, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice." I like that. He said don't be caught off guard, if you are going through some present difficulty because you are a Christian. You are getting pressured from your parents. You are being harassed by an unbelieving husband or wife, or ex-spouse. Don't be surprised as if that is strange, that you have somehow fallen out of the will of God. It is precisely the will of God. When Peter was young, he thought life was supposed to all work out fairly and that you are always going to get all the goodies. But Peter says, "Now that I am older and I have gone through the war, suffering is neither strange nor so terrible."

The truth is, friend, that those who have been through the wars, the great difficulties, will tell you that if you look ahead in the future, and the Bible says there is trouble or tribulation coming, you don't have to fear for yourself or your family. People who have been through it understand some things. People who have gone through the valley will

tell you, “Before I went down in the valley I never believed that I could handle that. I thought I couldn’t survive. I was always so afraid of what might happen. I thought I couldn’t handle it if I didn’t have a certain amount of money or a certain job. I thought I could never handle being alone. This particular terrible thing that I feared in my imagination, I thought if it happened, I would just wither up and die.”

“But you know, the truth is I didn’t die. I am still standing. And I discovered something. I discovered that Jesus Christ really can sustain you through difficulty. I honestly feared that Jesus wasn’t enough before. But now I see he really is enough. Before I had 87,000 different ways to finesse life and keep myself from being shocked by trial and tribulation. I had safety nets and security policies and all that stuff blew apart. I have discovered that Christ is more solid, more real, more secure than I ever thought he was.

Talk with people who have gone through the valley and come through on the other side. They will tell you, “It was really, really hard, but there is something else. Christ was more real, more solid, more of what the Bible says he really is. Friend, I would never ask to go through what I went through, but I also wouldn’t ever want to lose what I discovered in Jesus Christ.”

So, what’s the future for planet earth? Daniel says there is great tribulation coming, but you don’t have to fear because Christ really is enough. Is that all? Is that the only message? There is another message of the Bible that Daniel 12:1 doesn’t hit, but other texts hit. Jesus tells a parable of a woman who puts leaven in a lump of dough and it

leavens the whole lump. He says that is what the kingdom of God is like. It will leaven the whole lump. Jesus says the kingdom of God will start like a mustard seed and then it will grow and become the greatest of plants.

Christians throughout history have argued with each other about whether the world is going to get worse and worse as we see in some of the stories and statements of great tribulation that is coming. Or whether the planet is going to get better and better as we see in some of Jesus' parables.

Here's the bottom line, friends. I believe that on planet earth, in the future, the very last days are going to be both the best of times and the worst of times for the world. I believe that the great summary parable for what we should expect in the end is the parable of the weeds and the wheat. Jesus said that the heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while everyone was sleeping his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. He went away and when the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. And Jesus said, "Let both grow together until the harvest." I think the best description of what is going to happen on planet earth is that the good seed, the seed of the kingdom, is going to grow to full maturity while the weeds also grow. The bad seed sown by the enemy, will also grow to full maturity.

I believe the best times for the Christian church are the days ahead of us. That the church before Christ returns will be the strongest it has ever been, the holiest, the most full of the life of God, the most full of the miraculous power of God. The church is experiencing in

these days its most amazing growth and like wheat, it is just going to grow and grow and grow. And right along side this amazing growth of the church is going to be, like weeds, this amazing growth of wickedness and perversity such as the planet has never seen.

What can you anticipate for the future? Light getting lighter and lighter and lighter; and darkness getting darker and darker and darker. We are going to see the ripest fruit, the church is going to go beyond anything we have seen yet; and evil is going to go beyond anything we have seen yet. And there is going to be greater antagonism between the good and the evil so that it is going to result in great tribulation and birth pains.

Now, we have a wonderful word of assurance in v. 1 where we read, “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise.” In times of great suffering it is also important for us to remember that there is help in times of trouble. As you look forward to a difficult stretch to continually hear the words of scripture that there is help for you in times of trouble, or Jesus’ words where he says, “I will be with you even to the end of the age” is so incredibly comforting.

You might or might not know that Michael’s job in the Bible is to bring deliverance to God’s people. There are several references to the angel Michael in the New Testament. But in each reference, whether we are looking at the reference in Jude or the reference to the archangel Michael in Revelation 12, Michael is seen in a guardian role, in a protective role over God’s people, battling Satan on our behalf.

Here's the deal. This is a really important point. We do not live in an impersonal universe with a bunch of forces grounding out life according to certain impersonal laws of cause and effect or just accidents or things that might happen. As you think about the future, think about the future in a universe that is intensely personal, a universe that is inhabited by personal beings – some visible, but many who are invisible. And God's people are regularly experiencing intervention by God and by God's angels on our behalf.

The book of Hebrews says that we may not be conscious of this. It says that some people have entertained angels without knowing it. We don't know all the time when there is an angelic intervention on our behalf. But rest assured, you are regularly experiencing interventions by God and by God's angels. Part of the reason why you haven't just evaporated into a puddle is because God has been caring for you. The Bible says, "He will give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands, they shall bear you up lest you dash your foot against a stone."

Well, what is your hope for the future? That you will just be snatched away from all trouble? Or that he will be with you and will send mighty angels to watch you and guard you? It is being preserved through trouble, not being removed from trouble, that is the future of the people of God. When God lights a candle, it is not blown out. And so we read, "But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will

shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.”

Not only can we look forward to the Lord being with us, no matter what, and to him providing us angelic intervention and protection, no matter what, but we are told that our names are written in the book. Those of you who have received Christ into your lives as your Savior, and who are following him as your Lord, your name is written in the book of life in indelible ink. It cannot be removed. It will not be removed. And you are going to share the glory of the Son of God. It says here in the clearest verse regarding the resurrection of the dead in the whole Old Testament that those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens. Our goal, again, is not dying, it is not escape. Our goal, our end is total transformation, body and soul, where in the words of 1 John 3, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is.

Let me bring this down to earth just a little bit. I would imagine if you are the average American Christian that you do not spend very much time contemplating the return of Christ or contemplating the radical transformation of yourself body and soul. But I want to tell you the secret of all of the great saints in the past. The great saints who have served Christ all had in their minds this extraordinary capacity to look forward to being with God in heaven. They understood that the power to live well now depended upon their ability to lay hold of what they were going to get in the future. Like children

looking forward to the summer, they understood their present joy and their present endurance depended upon their capacity to lay hold of the future.

The great C. S. Lewis, the English writer, who probably has had more effect on Christians in the last 50 years than almost anyone else, said, “Christians who did most for the present world were those who saw most of the next, and the reason we are so ineffective in this world is that we ceased thinking about the next world.” Lewis said, “Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither.”

Do you understand, friend, this principle of looking forward, keeping the end in mind, and how it is the fuel for your present joy? Those of you who are familiar with the so-called heroes of the faith in the Bible, you ask, “How did they get to live such high quality lives with such profoundly radical obedience to God? How did the heroes of the faith get to be heroes? How was it that Abraham was willing to leave his home and family and culture and venture out after the voice of God? How do you produce a Billy Graham or a C. S. Lewis or John Wimber? How do you get to really aim high in your faith?”

Follow Jesus radically. The 11<sup>th</sup> chapter in the book of Hebrews tells us that these men and women who seem so different than us are really like us, only they had a firm grasp on the future. The reality of heaven was constantly impressed on their consciousness. Every one of these people was looking forward to something more. They had this engine in their plane called Christian Hope and that is what made their plane fly so high. They

weren't only believing in the past and in what Jesus did. They weren't only trying to love people in the present. They were hoping for something better in the future.

The way to a high quality life is to stop dead end thinking, to let your mind run forward all the way to eternity when you are going to be with God. You are going to stand before him and you are going to enjoy his presence. One of the most basic character-building principles that is virtually gone in modern child raising and in the whole way that we adults live, is delayed gratification. We say to our kids, "No, you can't eat now because it will ruin your appetite for supper." Or "Children, you can't watch TV now, you have to study in order that you might do well in school." Or "You need to practice the piano even though it is kind of a drag because you are really going to enjoy playing music in the future." And "You have to sit there with a book on a hard chair studying a subject that you don't like to study when all of your friends are hanging out together, fellowshiping, because in the future your hard work is going to pay off."

Delayed gratification. That is what going to medical school is all about. That is what working at an entry level position at a company is all about. That is what internships are all about. That is what graduate school is about and college is about. Delayed gratification is what we tell single people about regarding their sexuality. We say to single people, "Look, if you save sex for marriage, your life is going to be so much better. You are going to have a stronger marriage."



And I will tell you single people, that if you don't believe me that it makes a difference to wait or not wait, sit down with married couples, look them in the eye and say, "Did you have sex before marriage?" And if they say, "Yes," ask them the next question, "Did it hurt you? Do you wish you would have waited? Did it cause you any pain?"

We diet, we exercise – to feel better and look better in the future. We delay gratification because we want the absolute maximum in the future. Psalm 17:14 David prays to God, "God, save me from people in this world whose reward is in this life." Lord, I don't want to think the way everyone at my work thinks. Help me, God, to not think the way everyone at my school thinks. Help me to not think the way everyone in my extended family thinks. God, help me to not think the way lots of people in the church think. Protect me, God, from the counsel of people that says, "I have to get mine now, or I will never get it because there is not going to be anything later on." Save me, O Lord, from every single message which says that it is stupid to delay gratification, that to indulge myself now, to escape from everything that is hard and difficult, to get out of my bad marriage, to get out of my difficult circumstance, to jump at a marriage proposal – even if it's not ideal, that the only way to live wisely is to live for right now, because there is nothing else good coming down the pike. Father, help me to learn the lesson of Jesus' first miracle where he turned water into wine and the steward said to him, "You know, everyone serves the best wine first, but you have saved the best until last." That is your method, God, to delay, to cause your people to wait upon you. Help me to not be taken by the lie that says that I have to have the best now because I won't have any good later.

Friend, you have to have a future perspective, to regularly say to yourself, “I am going to delay gratification so I can have something better later.” In fact, you are not going to have the ability to fight sin in your life unless you can delay gratification because you will be regularly deceived, since sin is not always immediately destructive. It takes a future orientation to believe what the Bible says that sin is ultimately always destructive in every case, for everyone, in every situation. Sin hurts. It wounds and causes pain. It destroys. But it doesn’t do it immediately. And if you don’t have an ability to think down line, then you are regularly going to be a sucker for the enemy who says, “Do it now. You won’t experience pain now.”

Daniel, of course, talks here about a great separation. He says, “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life and others to shame and everlasting contempt.” We like the everlasting life part of Daniel’s statement. The everlasting shame, the stuff about hell, the prospect of future judgment, if you are thinking down the road a piece, it is very sobering and can instill in us good qualities to think every once in a while about the prospect of everlasting hell. There is a real hell. There is a place of real torment. I don’t like the prospect of this at all. It is the most uncomfortable thought that ever enters my mind, but I don’t dismiss it because I don’t like it. As I have told you many times from this pulpit, you don’t decide whether you are going to believe something or not based on whether you like it or not. You decide whether you are going to believe something or not based on whether it is true or not.

I don't like the fact that there is a real hell. But I believe in it because it is true. Because Jesus taught it. Because no one in the Bible talked more about hell than Jesus. Nor did anyone ever live a better life than Jesus. He believed it was important for us to often contemplate heaven and hell and to run our minds to the very end of things.

You say, "Well, how is it that there is going to be this great separation, some going to heaven and some going to hell? What must I do to be saved?"

The Bible says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Put your faith fully in Christ. Follow him as your Lord and you will be saved."

What must I do to be lost?

Do nothing. Do nothing. Don't respond. Because, friend, right now you are lost. To be saved you need to be rescued by Jesus. To be lost, do nothing. Don't cry out for Christ. Don't confess your sins. Don't become a follower of Jesus. Do nothing.

I read a story once about junior trainees in hell who were taking final exams before being commissioned to torment people. And on the final exam there was the question: What are you going to say to someone who is about to put their trust in Christ?

The first junior devil said, "I am going to tell them there is no God."

The senior devil said, “That is a stupid answer. Most people won’t believe you. They believe there is a God.”

The second junior devil said, “I am going to tell them there is no hell.”

The senior devil said, “That’s a better answer, but people still may not believe you. They may start thinking there is a hell.” He turned to the third junior devil and said, “What about you? What would you say to people to keep them from turning to Christ?”

The third junior devil said, “I will tell them there is no hurry.”

The senior devil said, “Great answer. Tell them they can put off a decision for Christ. Tell people they can put off obedience. Tell them there is no hurry regarding doing what they feel prompted to do in the right direction. Tell them to wait. Tell them to delay.”

Daniel said, “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens.” As we live in Babylon in these last days and we wish to live well, we need to remember that the end times are not just hard, but they are tricky. It is easy to become confused about what we ought to be doing. It is easy to get involved in the wrong things and it is easy to be misled. Daniel says, “Those who are wise will shine.”

How do you hear God’s voice in Babylon? How do you avoid a self-destructive life when every other Christian around you is blowing himself up? How do you distinguish

between what is genuine and what is phony? How do you reject what is popular and go after what is true and what is right? How do you go after character?

We have to go before God and ask him for wisdom. God help me to really see things clearly, to gain discernment. The crying need in Babylon is for wise people, for discerning people, for people who can see through the culture.

What a great inspiration to evangelism, those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever. There is a great promise for those of you who turn others toward the doing of what is right and the believing of what is right – that you will shine like the stars. The so-called stars today, the actors and actresses, the athletes and the politicians, they are not shining as brightly as even a little candle light compared to the star power that you will have if you turn other people toward righteousness. Do you want to be a star? You don't have to go to Hollywood to be one. Just counsel someone. Befriend someone. Direct someone toward the doing of righteousness. Every time you do, you are increasing your star power.

Finally, we read, "But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."

What can we expect in the future? We can expect difficult times. We can expect the protection of God. We can expect the church to be glorious. We can expect a great separation of humanity. And we can expect people to be running here and there looking

for answers. Some of you are looking for answers. It says, “Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.” Is this not a description of modern America? Multiplying books and shelves, and shelves of the multiplication of theories of human personality, more study groups, more think tanks, more psychological theory. We are exploring further reaches of the universe and smaller bits of matter. Knowledge is increasing. But an understanding of life is decreasing.

It reminds me of Walker Percy’s statement, “You can get A’s on all of your exams and still flunk life.” That is what is happening. We have more and more folks getting A’s on exams and flunking life – not having a clue about how to have a great marriage; not having a clue about how to raise healthy kids; not having a clue about how to really find joy; how to have a clean conscience; how to find God; how to break bad habits. All these folks running around looking for answers, looking for a purpose, looking for meaning.

Listen, if you have a clear view of the end, you live well now.

How do I forgive someone who has hurt me, who has ripped me off?

Well, I can’t if I believe that people ultimately get away with stuff. If you fundamentally think that someone who hurt you or abused you is ultimately going to get off the hook, that there is ultimately not a righting of the scales, that there is no ultimate justice, then you can’t ever forgive. But if you believe, as Daniel 12 is teaching, that there is going to be a great resurrection day and that no one gets away with anything, that unrepentant

abusers are going to fall into the hands of God, then I can let that person go and say, “Justice is with the Lord.”

Why should I sacrifice? Why give my very, very best? It doesn't make any sense unless you believe that ultimately in the end what I do and what I think and how I live make a difference to God who sees and will reward.

Let me close with an encouragement to a little exercise. Take some time this week, perhaps even today, and project yourself forward into the future and ask yourself, “What kind of person do I want to be?” and write that down. If you go forward five years or ten years, what do you really want to be like? What do you want to be like when you are old? What do you want to be like at the end of your life?

The other day in my journal, here are a few things I wrote down:

I said, “Dear God, at the end of my life I want a deep friendship and relationship with you that keeps me from being lonely or afraid, even when I am old and alone. Dear God, at the end of my life I want my personal spirituality to be infinitely more prominent than what I know. Dear God, at the end of my life I want the quality of my life and the way I live to be hugely impactful on people who meet me.”

What do you want at the end of your life? Do you want a deep spirituality? A great, warm relationship with God? Keep the end in mind and you will live well now. Let's pray.