



The End

Daniel 12

Speaker: Anthony Ballard

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So, we are finishing up the Book of Daniel. And I'm going to be reading some excerpts from Daniel chapter 12. At that time, Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as 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 forever and ever. But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge. As for you, Daniel, go your way till the end. You will rest and then at the end of the days, you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.

Good morning. Sorry I'm late. I was preaching over there. I didn't go long, but we did have an emergency, a brother who had a medical emergency and we had to stop the service and pray. And so I just, I want you to know that even though you're in modern worship, but we pray for people around here when things happen. And he's on his way to the hospital and is actually doing okay. So just want you to know that.

Hello everyone online. Good to see you or not see you. All right. My name is Anthony Ballard and I'm preaching the word today. This summer, we went through the book of Daniel, and we also participated in a Bible reading plan, which I hope many of you along with your families participated in because I think Daniel is a story or is a book of the Bible and a story line that is crucial to understanding the whole story of the Bible. It also helps us to understand things that are happening today, have happened in the past, and are going to happen in the future. And if you did not read along with us this summer, I hope you feel a little bit of conviction. Conviction, not condemnation. Those are two different things. Conviction is good. It actually helps us grow and do better later. So next time, you will join us in the reading plan.

After 9 weeks of sermons, 12 weeks of reading, we are at the end, or 12 chapters of reading. We are at the end of this story line. And personally, Daniel is a book that is very important for me and my family now, because it is where we found the name for our daughter. As you may remember early in the story, Daniel had three friends. Their names were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these names were actually the Babylonian names that were given to them that pointed to the goodness, or not the goodness, but the glory, I should say, of the Babylonian gods. And, but that was not their actual names. Their Hebrew names, the one named Shadrach, his true Hebrew name was Hananiah, which means Yahweh God is gracious. And this is what we named our first daughter. And sometimes when she's throwing a tantrum, I'll pick her up and I'll say, hey, you're being like Shadrach right now. You were Hananiah, that's what we named you. And she looks at me like this.

But the name Hananiah is also meaningful, has even deeper meaning for my wife Sarah because her life verse is Genesis 21, verse one that says the Lord was gracious to Sarah. And as he had said, the Lord did for Sarah all that he had promised her. And so even though the names are a bit unusual here in the West, we wanted to give a name that pointed to God's goodness in his character. And when Hannah and I was only three months old, we were surprised to find out that my wife was pregnant again. And so these two will only be 13 months apart. And so when Sarah told me she was pregnant, she said, this baby's name is Azariah, which means Yahweh helps. She said, because we are gonna need God's help to do this. And I agree.

So the Book of Daniel has special meaning for us in our household, because two of our kids now are named after Shadrach and Abednego, Hananiah and Azariah. And so before I dive into this week's text, I want to recap our journey a little bit. Because Daniel is a story that's famous that we can kind of tend to make the stories just kid stories for kids' church, or for Veggie Tales, the cartoon, if you know about it. But if you've been in church for a while, you likely grew up hearing these stories, or maybe you heard some of the phrases in culture. Chapter three is the story of the Fiery Furnace. And if you ever hear someone say the writing was on the wall, that comes from chapter five. And then chapter six is the story of the Lion's Den. These are stories that are just generally known in our broader culture outside of church.

But these are more than just little kid stories. They're good for kids, but they're more than just that. Because we have to edit them for kids, actually. In Daniel six, the story of the Lion's Den, it says that the people who conspired to throw Daniel into the Lion's Den, they were thrown into the den afterwards, along with their wives and their children. And it says that before their bodies hit the floor, their bones were crushed and they were devoured by the lions. That's not good for kids' church, is it? But that's what it says. That's what, if you did the reading, that's what it says.

After chapter six, though, things start to get kind of confusing and a little weird because this book moves from a narrative to more vision and prophecy and dreams. And these are not easily interpreted if you just read through them without some scholarly help. Even Daniel himself had trouble understanding what was going on at this point in the story.

Daniel is about more than just lions and the lion den and people getting rescued. It is about resistance to earthly kingdoms. And it is about radical allegiance to God's kingdom. That's the theme of this book. And if we get that, we can get everything else.

Radical allegiance was displayed by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they said to Nebuchadnezzar, if we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it. And he will deliver us from your majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we will not worship your gods or the statue you set up. In other words, we will die rather than doing something evil against our God's way. That's the recap of this whole story. And this will help us understand chapter 11 and chapter 12, which part of Pastor Rich just read for you.

As I was prepping this sermon though, I realized that I was assigned the hardest chapter in the whole series to preach from, okay? Part of my process is to read like a commentary, just to kind of get some extra understanding and nuggets and stuff like that. And one of the commentaries I read said, the end of Daniel is better suited for a Wednesday night Bible study than a Sunday morning sermon. And I was like, well great, I have to preach this on a Sunday morning.

So, the way that we can understand this, where we're about to go, is that the end of Daniel deals not just with the end of his story, but it deals with the end of everything. The end of all time. This is what is called, in some Christian circles, the end times, or better yet, the word is apocalypse. One of the great subject matters of any movie, not any movie, but some movies, is the end of the world, right? The superheroes want to prevent the end of the world. And so, the word apocalypse brings up images of war, of disaster, of catastrophe, and for good reason.

But before it became an action movie word, apocalypse is a Bible word, and as you see on the screen, it means to be unveiled. That something that was once hidden, or that we were unable to understand is now unveiled and revealed for us to fully understand and grasp. And so, this subject is used to scare people and scare people into going to heaven and all that so you don't live through the apocalypse, but it's not a sensationalized word in the scriptures.

So, an example of this, of just to help us really understand apocalypse. In weddings, we don't really see this too much anymore, but in a wedding, the bride will come forward with a veiled face, right? It goes up to the groom, and the groom unveils the bride. So you can say that the bride is apocalypse-ed. That's a way to... You can say it. It will be weird, but you can say it.

And so, the reason for this conflation with catastrophe, with this word, is because when it is in apocalyptic literature in the Bible, it is showing disaster and things happening, but it also always, always, always points to an image of hope for the future, that God will make things right in his world, always.

Two weeks ago, Pastor Annie shared a cliffhanger from her sermon about Daniel with the man in linen, this heavenly figure, and she said, I would kind of help wrap it up, and I will... I was like forced to after that. I was going to go this way, but I was like, alright, fine, I'm going to go this way. So here's what happened between them. What was revealed was an apocalyptic vision. And we are going to fly high over three chapters of scripture, of complex scripture, so I need you to follow me just for a few minutes.

Two things to remember. The prophet Jeremiah had said that Israel would only be exiled for 70 years. But the man in linen told Daniel that Israel had remained in their sin, they had not learned their lesson, and they would be in captivity for longer than 70 years, as prophesied by Jeremiah. Seven times longer, in fact. And this was terrible news for Daniel, because he was ready to be free and to go back to his home in Jerusalem.

And the way this 70 years would play out is that it was shown to Daniel in another vision. There would be a series of kings and kingdoms who would come and conquer Israel, and they would lead the people back into captivity, and this pattern would play out over and over and over again. One of those conquering kings ended up being Alexander the Great. And all this led up, this rhythm led up to this mysterious and final king of the north who would invade Jerusalem, who would desecrate God's temple, and he would set up himself as a god among nations.

And so that is a lot of context and history, but the hits continue in chapter 12 as we read. It says, there will be a time of distress, such as not happened from the beginning of nations until then. And so, what does this all mean now? What does it mean for us today in this room? And Christians have debated what it all means, because some scholars can't place the details of the prophecy. They don't fit cleanly in history. They won't fit cleanly in the future times, because things don't match up.

And so people say, who is this evil king, and when is this time of distress going to happen? And it gets interpreted differently depending on your church background, depending on where you're from, or your theological views yourself. Some see it as an ancient king named Antiochus, who defiled God's temple. Others as the Roman Empire after Jesus, who destroyed the temple. And then others still see this as a future antichrist figure, who will be an enemy of God's people, which are living temples.

And so which is it? Which is correct? I tend to lean on the side that says, all of it is. Meaning, it has happened, it is happening and it will happen in the future. And why is because the Bible must be relevant for all time. It must be relevant for the past, it has to be relevant for today, and it has to be relevant for our kids and our future kids down the line. It has to be relevant for Christians who live in West Bellevue, where there is no war and catastrophe, global catastrophe happening. But it also means it must be relevant for there because it must help prepare us spiritually for things that can happen and can occur.

But then it also must be relevant for Christians who live in Gaza, to encourage them, to help them to remain steadfast in the ways of the Lord in the midst of global catastrophe.

And believe it or not, there are Christians that live there. I meant West Bellevue, not Gaza. That's a joke guys, come on, laugh.

Alright, anyway, but the theme, if we can understand this better, if we remember the theme of Daniel, which is resistance to earthly kingdoms and radical allegiance to God's kingdom. Everything written about in Daniel that is so kind of sometimes hard to understand is apocalypsed in Jesus. Apocalypse means revealed.

In Matthew 24, Jesus says that to his disciples who were, there were times of trouble coming for them, and Jesus referred back to Daniel. And more importantly, Jesus teaches them how to be faithful in times of trouble. He says this in Matthew 24. It says, as Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately and said, tell us, when will this happen? What will be the sign of your coming in the end of the age? Jesus answered, watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming I am the messiah, and will deceive many.

You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places, and all of these are the beginning, just the beginning of birth pains. Jesus even uses the same language we found in Daniel 12. For there will be a time of great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now, and never to be equaled again.

So for us, we hear that, well, that sounds like now, right? It was relevant for then, too. But, have you heard the news lately? Sounds familiar, doesn't it? All the stuff he's saying. It sounds like all these things are happening now. It sounds like they might even be happening more frequently than ever before in the time of history. Every generation, though, of Christians has their time of trouble. Every generation does. And so, it might feel to us that the times are getting worse and that they're happening faster and more frequently than ever before.

And that is, I do believe that is because we now, more than any time in history, have access to know when something happens the moment it happens. The moment an earthquake happens on the other side of the world, we know about it. When an airstrike happens on the other side of the world, we know about it. So it feels like things are always going on and always happening.

And studies are showing, though, that this time in history is the least violent time in the history of the world. But that does not mean that things aren't happening because the stakes are now higher than they've ever been. Genghis Khan, who killed a lot of people in his time, did not have access to nuclear weapons. And so the stakes today, things feel scarier and they feel more frequent.

And I don't actually believe that God intended for us to know what's happening everywhere the moment it happens. I don't think that's good for our brains as human

people. And so even still, Jesus says, when you hear about the next impending war, he says, see to it that you are not alarmed.

And then, but you might say, I just heard Russia's gonna do this next thing, and it's gonna be really, really dangerous, and really, it's gonna be scary. Jesus says, see to it that you are not alarmed. But what if the stores went out of food, and then we can't go grocery shopping, we can't get food anywhere? Jesus says, see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

Not being alarmed does not mean that you don't care, though. When the world and its systems and its structures seem like they're collapsing all around us, it might be easier for you to give in to fear, and to be scared and afraid, and panicking. We can get so afraid or so scared that we might actually lose the teachings of Jesus, which tell us to love our neighbor, but instead we might see everyone around us as an enemy.

In times like this, it's easy to panic by and to hoard our resources, and to cut off our generosity to others, but the teachings of Jesus don't go on holiday when the times of distress are here. And another warning is that people who give in easily to worry and to fear, they end up looking for salvation in anyone who's offering it.

That's why Jesus says in the same passage, Many will come in his name, claiming, I am the Messiah, and they will deceive many. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear, and they will perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. And he says, See, I have told you ahead of time. Jesus is warning us.

In times of fear and trouble, false leaders, they arise with this message of security and safety, but it ends up leading to destruction. Because the time of the end, the end times, the apocalypse, is the time to be more faithful and more watchful than ever before. Jesus' followers, we must learn to interpret the times, because we're living in dark days. The danger around us is real.

But his end-times teaching don't cancel out his earlier teachings. That means when it's end-times, we need to be more like Christians, more radically like Jesus than ever before. Like really start being like him, immediately. We don't get time off from being like him. We get time on to really be like him. And we preach this gospel, this good news to people who don't know it.

Because Jesus says before that end will come, he says this gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the whole world as a testimony to the nations. And then the end will come. People don't want to respond to a gospel that isn't actually good news. And it's fear that leads us to this hoarding of resources and decreasing generosity. But God's kingdom says continually to only take what you need and to be generous always.

And if that's a kingdom that you don't like, that is the kingdom that Jesus is bringing. I read this quote from a priest named Herbert McCabe that said, the business of the church

is to remember the future. Not merely to remember that there is to be a future, but to mysteriously make the future really present today.

That means the church, us, we were supposed to be a preview, a foretaste of things to come, of God's goodness coming here on earth as it is in heaven. And Jesus says, when the world reaches his absolute darkest point, which sometimes for some of you that might feel like now, he says, then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.

And all the people of the earth will mourn regretting their rebellion and rejection of the Messiah when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and great glory. The first coming, Christmas, he came humbly, he came lowly in a manger. But the second coming, he's coming with power and great glory to right all the things that we see that is wrong in our world today. By his standards, not mine or yours.

He will confront every unjust empire throughout history. And he will confront all who reject him. And even those with the name Christian who misrepresent his name. And I know we see some of that happening. He will set right what has gone wrong.

And so if we want to live out this message of Daniel after today, we must cling so faithfully to God's kingdom. When he was told to do something against God's values, Daniel never planned a government coup against King Nebuchadnezzar, nor did he agree when the kingdom did evil in God's sight. But he only spoke the words that God gave him. That's what he did.

And Daniel was not a centrist. He didn't just walk the middle line to not make people upset. He lived, he said he would rather die than live in a way that would go against God's kingdom. And rather than fight against the evil empire with swords, Daniel actually served that empire. But when the cost got too high, then it was time for radical resistance.

Daniel and his friends, they believed God to be faithful through all of their trials. And so that brought me to a question. What if God did not rescue Daniel from the lion's den? Would this story still hold value? Would we still see God as faithful if Daniel remained in the den? Is God faithful if you get laid off from your job? Is God faithful if the diagnosis is terminal? Is God faithful if you're betrayed by a friend? Is God faithful?

Is God faithful to the refugee who may be sent back to their country when their life is in danger there? Is God faithful if the relationship never comes or if it fails? And I had to ask God this week, God, how are you faithful in Minnesota where these children were in chapel praying and some of them were killed? I asked God that. And I don't have an answer.

And I think it's an answer that comes in time. And I think for many of you who are going through these other things, it's an answer that we can't answer today. And so I'm waiting to see how God is faithful in the midst of this tragedy. And I'm challenged by the cause against prayer. People are saying, don't pray. Now is not the time for prayer. No thoughts and prayers are wanted or welcomed.

But I struggle because we're preaching about a man whose act of protest against his government was to pray when they told him not to. Even at the risk of death. That's what God Daniel and the Lions did, was prayer. And so I believe that it is a mix of both. It's prayer and it's action. It is an act of protest to pray. And again, challenged when today we're making an announcement that we're opening this prayer room for a week of prayer, but now at the same time, in the culture they're saying, don't pray.

But if you want to protest, one way for the Christian to do it is to pray anyway. Pray radically to the God of the universe. Daniel ends with him being unsure. He's lived this life in the beginning of the book. He was a teenager. And now at the end of the book, he is in his 90s and he is still in captivity. And then further, Daniel realizes that he will never see Jerusalem again, his home city, the place where he was raised and born.

Daniel also died in captivity. Do you realize that he died in captivity? He was not rescued and taken out. He died there in captivity. And in these last verses of the book, the angel tells him that all the evil that you see happening, it will be made right by God. But not in our time, in his time. Only God knows when it is going to happen. And Daniel himself is not allowed to know.

The words are sealed up, as the angel said. No one knows the hour or the day when the end will come. Only the father knows. And because of his faithfulness, the angel speaks these words to him that I believe are encouragement to him, but also can be to us. It says, as for you, Daniel, go your way to the end. You will rest, and then at the end of days, you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.

And that is the end of Daniel's story. In the midst of the trials, he has a future hope, and that hope is an inheritance that comes from Jesus. Some of you have received an inheritance from someone, like a family member, and some of them are really nice inheritances. But it does not compare, it's nothing close to the inheritance that comes from Jesus.

James called this inheritance the crown of life that will sit upon your head if you remain faithful and do not give up. There is a better inheritance in following Jesus and remaining faithful to him in all things.

And if you cling to God in your faith walk, you can receive that allotted inheritance that's just for you. I'm actually going to read this, I have a second. It's in Revelation, and Revelation ends with an apocalypse. Not the bad kind, it ends with the end. So when Jesus talks about the end, he's talking about this.

And it says, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear

from their eyes. There will be no more death, or crying, or mourning, or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

I get teared up just thinking about it. And he who is seated on the throne said, I am making everything new. That is the apocalypse. That's what we're waiting for. Let's pray.

Jesus, we join the calls and the prayers of Christians for 2,000 years, and we say, come, Lord Jesus, make right what is wrong, bring healing to the pain that we feel in our lives and in our hearts. Bring your justice to your world. Lord, I pray for every person here that they would be able to remain steadfast and strong and stand firm and faithful as Daniel did. Help us to do it today in our own context. We pray this in your name. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What does radical faithfulness to God's Kingdom in times of trouble or injustice look like?
- Jesus said in the last days don't be alarmed when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, famine, and earthquakes. What are some good practices to counter fear when it grows in us?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.