

Daniel 12 - Bringing Eternity into Today

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[0 : 00] Thank you all so much.

Beautiful to have a chance to look forward to what lies ahead. We are coming this morning to the end of our study in the book of Daniel.

Well, we're looking at the last chapter, chapter 12, and we'll also look back a little bit through the rest of the book. One request before we jump in today.

I really value your prayers for me. I mean that. I always mean that. I need them. I'd especially appreciate your prayers this week as I'm taking some time away to study and pray, primarily in preparation for our fall sermon series and looking ahead towards that.

Pray that God would teach me, would direct me and guide me as I spend that time with him, would help me understand and explain his word and his heart for his people here at Southwood.

[1 : 11] I'd really appreciate that if you'd be praying for me this week. But one more time in the book of Daniel. I'm going to miss Daniel. I've loved this study.

Some of you will miss the piercing gaze of the lion. You've told me that. You want this slide to stay up there. A lot fewer of you will miss the cutest sermon series title I've ever written, Lions and Fires and Prayers.

Oh my. Should have gotten rid of that one a long time ago. But Daniel has taught us not just about those things, but about God, the true king, and what it looks like for us to follow him in this crazy, difficult, messed up world that we live in.

That's the context of the chapter we're about to read. Chapter 12 begins with the end of a vision that's been going on for a while now. An apocalyptic vision about wars and suffering for God's people and devastatingly difficult days to live in.

And then after that, there's one final vision to close the book. Listen as I read beginning at verse 1. This is God's holy word.

[2 : 28] The heavenly messenger says to Daniel, At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.

But at that time your people shall be delivered. Everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.

Some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above. And those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.

But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall increase. That's the end of that first vision.

Daniel, put it away. There's a time coming that we need to save it for and protect this vision for God's people to have then. And that's the end of this vision that's been running for several pages now.

[3 : 31] And then Daniel sees this last vision at the end of the book. Verse 5, I, Daniel, looked and behold two others stood. One on this bank of the stream and one on that bank of the stream.

And someone said to the man clothed in linen who was above the waters of the stream, How long shall it be till the end of these wonders? And I heard the man clothed in linen who was above the waters of the stream.

He raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time. And that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things would be finished.

I heard, but I did not understand. And then I said, Oh my Lord, what shall be the outcome of these things? He said, Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.

Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand.

[4 : 38] And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days.

But go your way till the end, and you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days. Will you pray with me?

Father, thank you for your word. Thank you that in times of trouble and times when we don't know what and whom to trust, that we can trust in you and trust your word to speak to us.

And so we are here this morning to hear from you. Holy Spirit, would you speak? Would you use even one who doesn't understand, like you used Daniel when he didn't always understand?

Would you speak to us? It is you we desire and need to hear from. And we ask that you would give us ears to hear. In Jesus' name, amen.

[5 : 48] How much longer are we there yet? Some of you have heard those classic questions before. From every vacation you've ever taken where the destination was longer than, I don't know, 10 minutes away or something like that.

When are we going to get there? Because your kids are excited about the destination, this fun vacation they're going to have, but less excited about the not as fun car trip to get there.

Sometimes my kids ask a different question in a different context. Dad, who do you think is going to win? Sometimes the game is still in the first half.

I don't know who's going to win. It's a big game maybe and they're anxious. Or it's a scary part of a movie they've never seen before. And your two-year-old looks up and says, is he going to be okay?

I'm anxious. How is this going to turn out? Maybe you've asked one of those questions this week in your distress or sorrow.

[6 : 56] How long, O Lord? How much longer will we deal with these difficulties? Will I face these griefs and pains? Or the second type of question, what can be done?

How will this ever get any better? Is there any hope for a good outcome? Come? Both of those deeply felt questions are asked here in Daniel chapter 12.

But in this case, it's ultimate questions. Ultimate how much longer kinds of questions. They're asked by an angel of God and a prophet of God who have heard that there is unparalleled evil to come such as they've never seen.

And unparalleled deliverance as well. And so the angel first says, how long will this great evil last? That's the question in verse 6.

And then Daniel, fearful for God's people, hears the answer to that but doesn't understand. And so he asks, okay, well, just how's it all going to turn out?

[8 : 03] Maybe I'm not tracking with the timing and how all that, but just tell me, is it going to be okay? Okay. We ask these kinds of questions, don't we?

We ask them because as we've said from week one in the book of Daniel, we live in a difficult world. In a world where it's hard to follow Christ in all of life when many others around us are not.

It's hard to live in a pluralistic society and maintain a singular devotion to God. It's hard to face persecution, crisis, tragedy, injustice, godless authorities, and so forth.

And keep your head on straight. Much less have the wherewithal to know how to follow the true king. Probably don't have to convince you of that this week.

I thought about this reality this week as I was preparing for this sermon and realized that we said those things when we started this series maybe three months ago.

[9 : 05] And we had lots of examples of that then. And some of them, many of them even, are off the radar now. We're not even thinking about those things.

Just the events of this week have given us enough to overwhelm us, haven't they? Tragedies and difficulties in the news just in one week could overwhelm our hearts again.

And the same is true in many of our lives personally, isn't it? Things you were concerned about three months ago and haven't even thought about them this week, but you've had other things on your plate.

It's been difficult. You haven't known how things would go. Now, Daniel can relate to that, can't he? He's passing his days in exile, away from the promised land.

It's been about 70 years now. Basically his entire lifetime. And Daniel's been there facing these same difficulties. Every week new and different things in Babylon.

[10 : 06] Sometimes his life has nearly been snuffed out. He's been through the whole thing a prophet of Yahweh, surrounded by people who worship other gods. They don't want to hear from him.

And now what's he told? Things are going to get worse for God's people. As this vision that starts this chapter begins in chapter 11 and runs through that chapter, we're told of horrible persecutions.

Many under the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes to come in the second century BC. Then even more of them in a future time where the figure we know is the Antichrist will bring even more awful suffering on God's people.

This is what's being talked about in verse 1 there. In the middle of verse 1, there shall be a time of trouble such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.

God's people have had trouble all the way up to here. And he says it's going to get worse in ways you've never seen. The point essentially in this vision is this.

[11 : 14] You think things are as bad as they could be. Well, they get worse for God's people later. And then there will still be worse things ahead of those that these things are only glimpses of the ultimate difficulty.

Now process that, Daniel. Process that when you think things are as bad as they could be. It'll get worse and then again later there will be more difficulty to come.

When we hear warnings like these that the worst is yet to come, we tend to respond one of three ways. I've read all of these on Facebook just this week. It's a great place to go for sermon prep.

Sometimes we give up. Just quit altogether, right? Become hopeless and despondent in the face of pain, face of the brokenness of the world.

Sometimes, I think maybe this is our most common tendency, at least it is this week, sometimes we stress out. Scrolling through the latest social media feeds, reading one article after the next, just becoming fearful and frantic.

[12 : 27] Or sometimes, we buckle down. We strategize how we're going to fix the problem, how we can prevent the worst from happening, at least happening to me. Again, the visions God gives Daniel throughout the book, don't hold back the reality of suffering we will face as we follow the true King.

It's like the psalmist over and over again speaking of enemies, of the wicked, of those who mock and taunt and pursue Him. That's the life that God's people are called into.

That's what they're supposed to sing and pray about when they come into worship. Just flip through the psalms and you'll see it. Suffering, pain, confusion, cries of, how long, oh Lord?

They're all over the place. But in the midst of that real suffering, in answer to the ultimate cries of how much longer and how will this turn out, Daniel's told something different from give up or stress out or buckle down.

He's told, go your way. Look at verse 9. Daniel asks his question there in verse 8. What's gonna happen?

[13 : 46] Tell me how it's gonna turn out. And God says, go your way, Daniel. There's gonna be a lot of things that happen. There's gonna be people who trust me, the wise, and they're gonna be refined.

And there's gonna be the wicked who do wicked things and don't understand. And there's gonna be all these days and lots of time's gonna pass and then down to verse 13.

But Daniel, hear me clearly. What you need to do is go your way till the end. When life seems uncertain, we don't understand exactly how many days are gonna play out.

When things seem unfair, when we're tempted to begin feeling hopeless, we must live by faith. Just do what I've told you.

Just trust me. Just go back to what I've called you to. You may hear echoes perhaps of Aslan saying, I tell no one any story but his own.

[14 : 54] Or the resurrected Jesus saying to Peter who wants to know about John, what is that to you? You follow me. Just go your way.

And that can sound almost trite by itself, can't it? In the midst of where Daniel finds himself to say, hey, just chill out. Just go your own way. Just do your thing.

It can sound like it's minimizing Daniel's pain and anguish. Like it's disregarding his well-warranted concern for God's people. Have you ever been in pain and someone said, just carry on.

Trust me. No big deal. And you think, yeah, yeah right. Sure. I'll just go my own way. How am I supposed to do that? How can I know the trouble that lies ahead?

Can I see this vision and just go my own way? Just live by faith, pastor says. God says this to Daniel.

[15 : 57] He doesn't just say, go your own way. He says, heavenly glories must transform our outlook on earthly difficulties.

I changed the words a little in the last couple days. Sorry. But notice, heavenly glories must not minimize earthly temporal difficulties, not eliminate the concern, but transform our outlook on them.

How we respond to the difficulties that will indeed be there. The devastating and worsening news feed is real. There's no need to deny that.

But it's not all that's real. So it can't be the only thing shaping and controlling the outlook of our hearts, and it does that so fast, doesn't it? When that's all we're looking at, when that's the only thing that seems to be real and that seems to matter, we've got to be looking somewhere else as well.

As Daniel has been told, many of the difficulties will persist and some will worsen, but our perspective on them must be an eternal one.

[17 : 07] There's no other way to live by faith, to make it through this crazy life, to follow the true king in a world that often doesn't feel like he's on the throne.

Theologian Michael Green tells of the early church that their practice was to record the dates of the death of martyrs. They'd write down the appropriate date in their calendar year, and then they would add the Latin phrase *Regnante Jesu Christo*, in the reign of Jesus Christ.

It was a discipline to remind them of their only hope in those times when it didn't seem like the true king was Jesus Christ, to remind them that he indeed was on the throne and would remain on the throne even when everything around them didn't look that way.

The loss of a beloved martyr made no sense apart from an eternal hope. Apart from King Jesus reigning and offering hope beyond the grave, the death would have been the end, right?

That's the hope of Daniel chapter 12. When facing death from the persecution of God's people or from Daniel's aging body that would give out before he experienced the fulfillment of all God's promises, Daniel is told this, verse 2, many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

[18 : 49] And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. That phrase everlasting life used only here in the entire Old Testament.

Right after the verse about trouble such as has never been, Daniel, there will be everlasting life. How else do you go your way?

When a loved one has died, especially tragically or senselessly, you've got to be able to see both the horrific pain of the temporal loss plunging you and your world into darkness and at the same time the unimaginable glory of life never ending, shining like stars forever and ever, that that's also true.

That's facing death. What about when facing insignificance? From feeling small, forgotten, unsuccessful, unimportant, like a marginalized prophet who's seeing little fruit from his lifetime of labors.

Daniel is told in verse one, there's gonna be this time of trouble, but at that same time your people shall be delivered. Everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.

[20 : 23] Daniel, you're not forgotten. Your name is in his book. The God of heaven knew you long ago. He knows your name today and one day soon he is coming to rescue you personally and particularly.

He treasures you so much that your name remains written on the palm of his hand. So the eternal reality that's true when we feel insignificant is my name from the palms of his hands eternity will not erase.

Impressed on his heart it remains in marks of indelible grace. These glorious heavenly realities, the truths that are eternally true are really what chapter 12 highlights in the midst of the pain and the suffering.

That's been the pattern of the entire book of Daniel, hasn't it? We've said this over and over and over that our vision of heaven, our grasp of eternal realities has to impact the way we approach life today.

It has to transform our outlook on all of life and every difficult situation. Heaven must impact earth. It's come up in almost every chapter of Daniel.

[21 : 45] Just think back with me for a minute. When facing loneliness and the fear that often accompanies it from being neglected and abandoned by those you love or being surrounded and marginalized by those who hate God, there's the comfort not only of the king of heaven knowing my name but also of the son of man being sent to me.

Chapter 10. Fear not for I am with you. The mighty eternal king who's always on his throne is always with me.

Never alone. When facing the apparent defeat of God's people and his kingdom, remember that's how the whole book of Daniel starts, isn't it?

Babylon has come in. God's people are being oppressed. His promises seem to have failed and we must remember that God is on the throne of heaven, that he remains the true king, that Yahweh wins and he loves to bring ultimate victory through apparent defeat.

Regnante Jesu Cristo. And so because of that, when we're facing weakness, from being outnumbered or overwhelmed by strong, impressive enemies, remember back to chapter 2 that the four-person prayer meeting that overcomes the captain of the king's guard and the army of Babylon as Daniel faces an execution.

[23 : 23] Because the dream in chapter 2 tells us the most apparently mighty human kingdoms will likewise be crushed by a small stone cut with no human hand.

The true king of the true kingdom that will grow to become a great mountain and fill the whole earth. There's your strength in weakness.

How about when facing injustice? Listen, no matter what your political opinions or your personal experiences are, this has been a rough week for justice in our country, hasn't it?

It's been hard. Difficult things have happened. It angers us. It breaks our hearts. It makes us wonder what could possibly be done to bring justice.

And it's easy to give up. It's easy to stress out. It's easy to buckle down and think we can fix it. We're the solution. Daniel would remind us when we face injustice to see the ancient of days still on his throne.

[24 : 37] The most wise and holy judge of all the earth. Remember his white hair flowing, the fire coming out from his throne as he sits on it. The only one whose power can always be trusted.

Who takes sin too seriously not to judge all and to right every wrong. He will one day punish evil completely and he is on his throne today.

Listen, that must impact how we look at this week's events. It must. 2016. Regnante Jesu Cristo.

Sometimes we face different things. There's a lot of days when we face personal failing. When we know in the depth of our being that we deserve to face judgment from that holy judge, when he doesn't feel like one who's coming to protect us and right wrongs done against us, we feel like he would justifiably be out to get us.

We know we haven't measured up when we've failed again and we want to give up on ourselves or we think that our last chance is to buckle down to try harder to be better on our own. We must see that our righteousness is in heaven.

[25 : 57] The son of man standing before the throne of the ancient of days on our behalf, reminding us as we saw last week in chapter 9 that we depend in our sin on God's great mercy, not on our righteousness.

What about when facing persecution? The only way that we can faithfully endure persecution is to know the heavenly reality that God is supremely valuable, that we would choose the reproach of God over the treasures of this world.

that's an eternal perspective. It's not an easy one to have. It doesn't feel true when things are hard. But in the face of temptations to blend in, chapter 1, to worship other gods to avoid the fiery furnace, chapter 3, to quit praying just for a few days to avoid the lion's den, seems like no big compromise, right?

That's chapter 6. We've got to know how valuable God really is. Is the true king really the true king even when he doesn't seem to pay off for you in the short term?

I'll just mention a couple more so we can make it a true top ten list. I've always wanted to have one of those. When facing rejection from those who hate you, from one who promised to love you, from in the midst of that you begin to suspect even God himself would reject me.

[27 : 35] Remember the heavenly reality that he speaks in chapter 10 to a despondent, failed prophet. Oh Daniel, man greatly loved.

The glorious good news of the king of heaven, the one who is most entitled to reject you more than anyone else, and he says to you, I don't reject you, I love you.

Finally, when facing suffering, whether it's the fiery furnace in front of you or the worst days ahead that the saints of God are promised in chapter 7, we're told that we must see clearly that the God who will meet us at the end is with us in the midst of it.

He meets his people in suffering, doesn't he? Over and over. The fourth man in the furnace, remember? He shows up in it with them so that whether he delivers in the way or the time that we wish for, we can trust he will indeed deliver us.

You see, heaven reminds us that suffering, while always a part of our story, is never the end of our story because glory is coming.

[28 : 52] That's what heaven reminds us, right? The promise of Scripture that eternal life awaits those who feel like they face death day after day after day. Darkness and darkness and discouragement, y'all, glory is coming.

Amen? That's the truth. It has to shape the way we enter into these things. That's the bottom line, I think, at the end of the book of Daniel. We will suffer. And that may involve many of the things on this list, but whatever it is in our lives, even to the point of death itself, even when we cry out, how much longer and how will this turn out?

What we need to know is not all the controversial details, and Daniel has plenty of them, but rather the last verse of the book. How does it end? Verse 13.

Daniel, go your way till the end and know this, you shall rest. You shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.

A little bit more than just go your own way. There's rest ahead. Well, we need to know that, don't we? The true king you have entrusted yourself to will indeed cause you to stand in the place he has prepared for you forever and ever.

[30 : 20] It will happen. So with those heavenly glories in place, how do we live on earth? Well, we don't give up. There's hope.

There's always hope. We don't stress out, he's on the throne. We don't buckle down, he's on the throne, not us. But to give answers from Daniel to what should we do, I'd say just two things.

First, pray. Daniel does that a lot, doesn't he? Pray that heaven would come to earth. In the sense of the prayer I trust many of you prayed this week, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Long for that. Pray for that like it's your only hope because it is. Secondly, work to bring heaven to earth.

Go your way. One relationship at a time, one day at a time, faithfully serve the true king that his kingdom might come more and more on earth as it is in heaven.

[31 : 38] As long as he places you here on earth in this difficult world we live in, be an ambassador of your true homeland. Make earth more and more like heaven, the place that you're to know so well and long to be.

I know I've asked how much longer and how will this turn out a lot lately. I don't know all of the reasons you might have asked it recently.

There are a lot of them. Reasons for you personally. For some of you it's because you're fearful for your kids and your grandkids and what they're going to grow up and face and deal with.

For some of you you're asking those questions because you're living in or facing the potential of divorce and relational brokenness and you're feeling the pain and the grief of that in your own life.

For some of you it's because you're struggling to make life work financially. You're not sure how you're going to make it through this week or professionally you're not sure how you're going to make it through this season.

[32 : 52] There are many other sufferings and difficulties represented in this room and Daniel says there's more to come. But to all his struggling people God says I'm not surprised by what you're facing.

I've not left you alone in your suffering and I've written a glorious conclusion to your story. Everlasting life. Rest.

Glory. Forever. I'm the true king. Follow me. What a glorious comfort to know the true and eternal king.

You know there's been a lot of talk in recent days about being on the right side of history. And no matter what the issue of the day is we're told of how important it is for our legacies that we're on the right side of history.

Seems really important and it can be. I'm convinced however that what's far more important is being on the right side of eternity. That there's a God the book of Daniel says who is the true king.

[34 : 04] Who will defeat all of those who align themselves against him. And who will deliver all of those who trust him. And that will be an eternal delineation for those who are with the true king and those who are against him.

He's cause for either great fear or great comfort. If you don't know him, nothing could be more important this morning than aligning yourself with the true king.

king and he offers himself to you again today. The good news with this king is that he comes to you. He comes to you and offers you himself. He doesn't demand that you clean yourself up and then come to him.

He comes to you. You see, this table reminds us we're about to celebrate something that Jesus, our true king, has come willingly to us.

Has willingly undergone, just look down that top ten list on your bulletin. All of these earthly difficulties in some way Jesus has taken.

[35 : 11] Injustice against repeated false charges. Persecution, mocked and beaten for following God. Loneliness and rejection when even his father turned his face away from him.

And not for his personal failings but for ours. And then apparent defeat and death itself on the cross where we deserved to be.

He is the true king and the one you can trust in the midst of all of these situations. He's been there. He's gone there with you and for you.

He's the one you can trust today. Yet again or for the very first time in your life you can trust him. He invites all to trust him. To join his team to know his mercy and then to eat this meal as a sign of your connection to him.

Remember how Paul tells us he instituted this supper with his disciples. He writes, I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you.

[36 : 35] Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also he took the cup after supper saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. This is not the table of Southwood or of the Presbyterian church.

This is the Lord's table the table of King Jesus. All of you who know him and trust him and are a part of his church please come and eat.

If you don't know him I'd invite you this morning to come not to this table not to the sign of who Jesus is and what he has done and you're being connected to him but actually to come to Jesus himself.

We would be delighted it would be our privilege to talk with you and tell you more about him. Let's pray. Father thank you for this table that reminds us that you sent your only son to suffer that you didn't remain far off but that you moved towards us so that you could welcome us into your family.

[37 : 55] Would you set these common elements aside for a sacred purpose in our hearts this morning that we might know and remember what is true in the midst of many other things in our lives that are real and true that you love us that you have secured our eternity and that you watch over and care for us today might this remind us of that we ask it in Jesus name amen Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread and he broke it and gave it to his disciples as I ministering in his name give this bread to you and he said take eat this is my body broken for you do this in remembrance of me in the same way after the supper he took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins drink from it all of you our host team will usher you to tables at the front and the back and we will feast and celebrate what Jesus has done for us together for more information visit us online at southwood.org and your one and in there were many meetings in platforms and those them are feet and they come to eat them

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