

## **The End will be the Beginning**

### **Daniel 12:1-13**

#### **Introduction**

We started our sermon series in Daniel right around Valentine's Day; and by the conclusion of this sermon, I will have preached 21 sermons on a book that has helped me work through my own anxieties concerning all that has happened, is happening, and will happen in my life and the world I live in.

I started preparing for this series on Daniel last August while on vacation in Idaho. My hope was that when I finished the series, we would find ourselves in a somewhat more normal and stable world than it was before the pandemic. If anything, it seems like things have gotten more bizarre than normal. In fact, I am not even sure what normal means anymore.

Regardless of how you may feel things are going in our world, it is the same problem that has existed for thousands of years with a different dress; what was true of the age in which Daniel lived is true today. I said when we started our series in Daniel that there was a physical empire known as Babylon, but there is a more ominous force at work in our world today and that is the Spirit of Babylon. The Spirit of Babylon is the spirit of the age. The Spirit of the Age is what Paul wrote of in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, **“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power”** (2 Timothy 3:1–5a).

In many respects, I think the emotions Daniel experienced throughout his lifetime as he watched and experienced the world around him violently change is like ours today. The difference between Daniel's world and ours is that with every passing generation, the spirit of the age seems more brash than the age that preceded it. It has been true of every generation that the world is a place full of people who are lovers of self and money, who are proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, undisciplined, brutal, lovers of evil, treacherous, reckless, conceited, hedonistic, and who are repulsed by a God who hates sin. The apostle John admonished the Church with these words:

**“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.**

**Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.”** (1 John 2:15–18)

I said throughout this sermon series that all of history is moving in one direction with purpose. The theme of Daniel can be summed up in the way Daniel responded to Nebuchadnezzar’s dream God had given him about the future: **“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings...”** (Dan. 2:20-21). This theme is heard again in Daniel 4:34-35 with the king’s description of God: **“...for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’”** (Daniel 4:34–35). After Daniel was rescued by God from the jaws of hungry lions, another pagan king said of the God of Daniel: **“...for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions”** (5:26-27).

What is true of God will never change regardless of how dark the days become or how unrestrained the evil in our world seems to be.

### **There is a Day of Trouble We Must Endure**

We are told in Daniel 12:1, **“And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.”** The “time of trouble” that is coming I believe is still in our future. Some believe the “time of trouble” to be contained within seven literal years, and others believe that it is figurative. What everyone who takes these verses serious believes is that a time of trouble is coming. Daniel was curious like we are and wanted to know the specifics of what was coming, but before he could ask, he saw two beings: **“Then 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?’”** (v. 6).

The man clothed in linen is believed by just about every theologian who has commented on these verses dating all the way back to Saint Augustine to be the preincarnate Son of God. It is possible that this being is the Son of God, but he may also be an angel. The point is not who is answering the question, but the answer itself. How long oh lord? Here is what Daniel describes next: **“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”** (v. 7).

Then Daniel asked the same question all of us are asking in light of that answer: **“I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, ‘O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?’”** Tremper Longman, in his commentary on Daniel states what I believe is the point of these verses: “God alone knows—and that seems to be the point. God knows that there is an end that

he has determined, but we cannot figure it out because we are not supposed to. Leave it to God, the angel says to Daniel, and through him he speaks to us.”<sup>1</sup> The angel then answers Daniel’s question with a directive: **“Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will 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”** (vv. 9-10).

What is clear, is that the reign of the antichrist will be limited as will the time of trouble. While we wait, watch, and pray, we are to live our lives in light of what is coming and when the worst does come, our foundation will be sure and our suffering will not serve to destroy our faith but to refine it. Ligon Duncan, who I have grown to really respect, said the following in light of these verses:

When evil has done its worst, we are told, as soon as [it finishes] shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be complete. When evil has done its worst and the hopes of the people of God seem shattered, then God will act. The grim work of the oppressors will roll on and on and on. But at the appropriate moment God will intervene.<sup>2</sup>

Daniel 12 was for Daniel in his day, it has been for God’s people long after Daniel was buried in his own grave, and it is for our generation today. Daniel 12 is for the Afghan pastor who received a letter from the Taliban as the United States withdrew from the country. The letter simply stated the following: “We know who you are, what you do, and where to find you.” Daniel 12 is for the Afghan Christian whose village was taken by the Taliban and his 14-year-old daughter was ripped from his arms and forced into sexual servitude in what the Taliban believe is her “dutiful Islamic privilege and responsibility.” Daniel 12 is for that 14 year old girl too.

Do your worst evil! God will intervene, and when he does, there will be nowhere to hid from his white-hot wrath fueled by his perfect holiness!

### **There is a Final Judgment to Come**

There is a final judgment that is coming; it will come at the end of the time of trouble. We are told in Revelation 19:11-21 that Jesus will return just as he promised and what Daniel 7:13-14 foretold, here is how he will appear:

**Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”** (Revelation 19:11–16)

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<sup>1</sup> Tremper Longman III, *The NIV Application Commentary: Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan; 1999), p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Daniel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing; 2017), p. 165.

When he comes, not only will all the tribes of the earth mourn (see Matt. 24:29-31), but Jesus will kill the antichrist with the breath of his mouth (2 Thess. 2:8). Sometime after this battle that the Bible calls Armageddon, there will be a final judgment where all people will be judged. This is the judgment Daniel 12:2-3 speaks of. Now, Daniel lumps what the apostle John describes in Revelation 20:1-15 in only two verses. In Daniel 12:2-3, a resurrection of the redeemed and the wicked is mentioned. The redeemed will rise to everlasting life and the wicked to everlasting contempt.

The resurrection of the redeemed is described in 1 Corinthians 15:50-53 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; the resurrection of the redeemed will be one where both the dead and the living will receive glorified bodies similar the one Jesus had after he rose from the grave. Our resurrected bodies will not grow old, experience disease, struggle with sin, or die. The resurrection of the wicked will not end with glorified bodies but bodies that serve as a reminder of shame and the curse of sin. We are provided with greater detail of this coming judgment in Revelation 20:11-15,

**Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11–15)**

Those whose names were not written in the book of life, that is, those whose sins were not covered by the blood of the Lamb will be sentenced to the lake of fire.

The prophet Isaiah describes hell as a place where **“Their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”** (Isa. 66:24b). Trust me, this is not a place you want to be.

Can you imagine what this scene will be like? The thing that stands out to me most is how tiny we humans are compared to the God of the Bible. Billions of people will be gathered before the throne both great and small, CEO's and those who didn't even have enough to put shoes on their feet. We are told that books will be opened containing the deeds of every person that has been born on planet earth and not one deed or thought will go unnoticed. No one will be exempt from judgment.

The judge on the great white throne will not be like the judge who had a man brought before him who was caught eating a bald eagle. When the man appeared before the judge, the judge asked him why he ate the bald eagle. The man replied, “Judge, I am a very poor man and that was all I could find to eat.” The judge was deeply moved by the man's appeal and dismissed all charges. As the man was escorted out of the court room, the judge asked him, “Before you go, I would

like to know what a bald eagle tastes like since I have never had it?” The man replied, “Well judge, it tastes like a cross between a whooping crane and a spotted owl.”

The man guilty of a serious crime was able to talk his way out of being judged, but at the final judgement, there will be no place to hide, there will be no sweet talking your way out of judgment, for we will all stand before the One from whom heaven and earth will flee. How will we be judged? The Bible says, **“for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil”** (2 Corinthians 5:10).

In the gospel of Matthew, we are told that on the day of judgment, it will be Jesus who will judge all people. There will be two types of people: the sheep and the goats; the sheep are the redeemed and the goats are the wicked. To the sheep on his right, his judgment will not be one that leads to condemnation but life and will welcome them by saying, **“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”** To those on his left who are the wicked, Jesus will say: **“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”** (see Matthew 25:31-46).

The only thing that will separate the sheep and the goats is a cross—the cross of Christ. The only deed that will merit anyone from escaping eternal punishment in hell is the work Christ did when He willingly suffered and died as our sin substitute. This is what is meant in 2 Corinthians 5:21, **“For our sake [God] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”**

The cross is God’s terms of peace and it is presently before the wicked to be received by faith. C.S. Lewis put it this way:

We can understand Hell in its aspect of misery. All your life an unattainable ecstasy has hovered just beyond the grasp of your consciousness. The day is coming when you will wake to find, beyond all hope, that you have attained it, or else that it was within your reach and you have lost it forever.<sup>3</sup>

Understand however, that a day of judgment is coming when the sins of all will be weighed on the scales of God’s perfect and holy standard. On the other side of the day of judgment is life for the redeemed when every tear will be wiped away and the redeemed will have their “happily ever after.”

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<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis. *The Quotable Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publisher; 1990), p. 294.