



SERIES: ONE KING TO RULE THEM ALL

Daniel 12:1-13
Thirteenth Message
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Today marks two years since we closed the PBCC campus early in the Covid pandemic. No one expected the tunnel to be so long and so dark. Several times we thought we had emerged into the light at the end of the tunnel, only to go back in as cases surged. We have lost count of how many waves we have been through. We hope that as we now emerge from the Omicron wave we really are exiting the tunnel.

Meanwhile Russia's invasion of Ukraine grinds on in its third week. The world is trying to adjust to this new normal now that Putin has unmasked himself. No one knows where this will lead and how it might end—how long the tunnel will be and how dark it will get. Despite the heroic resistance of the Ukrainians, the situation is getting darker with no light yet on the horizon.

I have been having my own tunnel experiences, preaching through these difficult chapters of Daniel. I feel the weight of them. Each Monday I wonder how I can create a sermon out of the text. Initially I see no light. But as the week progresses there is first a glimmer, an initial idea. The light grows until by Sunday morning I am out of the tunnel.

I am sure some of you have your own tunnel experiences.

In these six weeks we have accompanied Daniel through four visions. In each vision he has been told that dark days are coming for God's people. In this fourth vision the darkness intensifies under the "contemptible person" who acts against God's people in the holy city Jerusalem. The Jewish community is divided in its response. Some side with the oppressor in return for reward. They forsake and violate the holy covenant. They are corrupted by the ruler. Others resist him actively or passively. In particular, "the wise" engage in the passive resistance of teaching. They enable others to understand the times. They speak truth to power, unmasking evil. For this they are killed as martyrs.

The Ukrainians have been speaking with a united voice, much to the surprise of Putin. They are speaking truth to power, while Putin is hiding the truth behind a smokescreen of propaganda, deceit, and outright lies. The Ukrainians do not want to be saved by the Russians. Instead they want justice. They want retributive justice: for Putin to be held responsible for his war crimes. And they want restorative justice: for their shattered land to be rebuilt, perhaps using frozen Russian funds.

Retributive justice punishes the evildoer, but it doesn't heal the evil done by the evildoer. Restorative justice repairs the damage from the evil. The best restorative justice repairs the evildoer himself.

Where was justice, as the king of the North was attacking God's people in Daniel 11? Justice is needed for three groups of people. Justice on the oppressor: the contemptible person, the final king. Justice on those who have broken faith, been disloyal to covenant, by siding with the oppressor. And justice for those who have been martyred for being faithful. There is a need for both retributive and restorative justice.

Chapter 11 built to a disturbing climax: the final king "will set out

in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many" (11:44). This sounds just like Putin. Frustrated in his plan to bring Ukraine back within the Russian fold, he seems determined to wreak as much destruction as possible, as he did previously in the Chechen capital Grozny in 1999, and in Aleppo in 2016.

The king "will pitch his royal tents...at the beautiful holy mountain" (11:44-45). He encamps outside Jerusalem, the city of God and his people, ready to make a final assault. The Last Battle is nigh. But the battle is not actually fought. "Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him" (11:45). Justice is meted out on the oppressor, the arrogant ruler. He meets his end, "at the time of the end." The Lord's appointed time for his end had arrived. Justice is accomplished: evil is halted and the evildoer is terminated. But what of the damage he has left?

Now we have a chapter break, but the angelic message, which forms the heart of this fourth vision, continues into chapter 12:1-4. (Chapter divisions were not added until c. 1220.) Verse 1 details what will happen at that time, the time of the end.

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. (Dan 12:1 NIV)

It will be a time of distress, unprecedented, not since "the beginning of nations" (NIV), but since Israel's existence as a people. The actions of the final king are an existential threat to Israel, and therefore to God's purposes. Israel is not just any nation. God called Abraham out of the seventy nations to form a new people, God's people. Abraham was God's new beginning in response to the disorder and chaos of humanity gathered at the Tower of Babel. But his recovery plan seems in jeopardy. Evil and consequent suffering reach a crescendo, a great tribulation. As we have seen repeatedly in these chapters, the darkest and coldest hour is just before dawn. Is there any hope? Is there any light at the end of the tunnel at that time? Will God's restorative purposes survive?

Israel's tribulation will persist until that time, but help is on the way. At that time, Michael, the great prince of Israel, will arise. He is the heavenly counterpart of earthly Israel. The conflict on earth is mirrored in heaven. He has been busy fighting the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece, the demonic spiritual powers behind those great empires. Now he will come to Israel's aid.

Also at that time, God's people, Daniel's compatriots, will be delivered from the darkness and the tribulation. Who escapes? God has a register of names. Elsewhere this is called the book of life, or the book of remembrance. All those whose names are in the book will be delivered. How do they escape? Not *from* death but *through* death. Where then is justice if the righteous end up dead? We are told in v. 2.

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some

to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. (12:2)

Many who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake. Sleep and awake are clear metaphors for death and new life. There will be resurrection. Those who awake do so to different destinies. Some rise to everlasting life. Others to shame and everlasting contempt; these are presumably those who broke covenant.

Verse 3 specifies the first group, those who rise to everlasting life.

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. (12:3)

They are the wise who lead many to righteousness. They will shine brightly, like the brightness of the sky in the day time, like the brightness of the stars at night.

The blasphemous king had exalted and magnified himself above every god (11:36). He had made an assault on heaven. He was following in the pattern of the Babylonian king who said, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly... I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa 14:13-14). The arrogant ruler exalts himself to the heavens and is cast down. This is the pattern of every human ruler who does as he pleases.

God's faithful servants follow the opposite trajectory. They were cast down to the ground by their oppressors, killed while being faithful. But God exalts these faithful martyrs to the heavens. The wise will be vindicated and exalted. These are the faithful resisters of 11:33-35. By their instruction they lead many to righteousness. That is, they teach God's people how to remain true and faithful to his covenant, loyally devoted to him, while living in a foreign empire, while living in difficult times. They may die for their faithfulness, but they will be vindicated. This language is echoed by Jesus: "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt 13:43).

Here in 12:2-3 we have the clearest reference in the OT to resurrection. Conviction about resurrection arose from the problem of martyrdom. Where is justice when God's faithful people are killed specifically for being faithful, for being loyal to God? What would justice be for them? This has been an issue ever since Abel, who was the first martyr. He was killed *while* being faithful. He was killed *for* being faithful. His blood cried out from the ground to God. Retributive justice on Cain could not bring justice for Abel's spilt blood. The only adequate answer is resurrection—restorative justice.

The message of the vision ends on this positive note of resurrection. The time just before the end is very dark, but there is light at the end of the tunnel. God's faithful people will be vindicated by being restored to life in resurrection.

Daniel is to seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end, which from his vantage point is far in the future. How far in the future? Daniel wants to know, so he asks, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" (6). He receives a cryptic answer, "It will be for a time, times and half a time" (7).

This is similar to the answer given in the first vision for how long the blasphemous little horn will oppress God's holy people. It will be "for a time, times and half a time" (7:25), where it is clear that the "times" is two times, for a total of 3½ times. It is assumed the same here. It is further assumed that this refers to 3½ years, that is 42 months.

We can empathize with Daniel who writes, "I heard but I did not understand" (8). I am sure all of us have felt this way throughout this

second half of the book.

Later Daniel is told two more time periods: 1,290 days and 1,335 days (11-12). These work out to 43 and 44½ months. The three time periods form a sequence: 42, 43 and 44½ months. Taking 42 as the baseline, the increase is one month and 2½ months for a total of 3½, which may or may not refer back to the 3½ times. The meaning of these three times is elusive.

As we draw this series to a close I want to look back over Daniel's four visions. There is a common pattern.

In the first vision (ch. 7), Daniel sees a sequence of four beasts, from which come ten horns, and finally a little horn. This final figure does evil against both God and God's people. The little horn speaks arrogantly and against God. It attacks and defeats the saints. But there is justice both on the evil oppressor and for God's faithful saints. Retributive justice against the little horn: its power is taken away and it is destroyed. And justice for the saints: the Ancient of Days issues a judicial ruling in their favor, and theirs will be the eternal kingdom. How long? For a time, (two) times and half a time.

In the second vision (ch. 8), Daniel sees in sequence a two-horned ram, a one-horned goat, from which come four horns, followed by a little horn which grows great. It exalts itself even to heaven. It attacks and destroys God's people. It terminates the daily sacrifice amid a rebellion that desolates. But it is destroyed by a non-human hand, that is, God. How long? For morning and evening 2300 times.

In the third vision (ch. 9), Jerusalem will be rebuilt, but a coming ruler will destroy both city and temple. He will terminate the daily sacrifice and install the abomination of desolation. How long? For seventy "sevens," broken down into 7+62+1.

Now in the fourth vision (ch. 10-12), Daniel sees a sequence of kings climaxing in a contemptible person, a ruler who in fury attacks God's people and temple. He is self-exalting, even to heaven. He desecrates the sanctuary, terminates the daily offering, and installs the abomination of desolation. God's people are divided. Some are seduced by the little horn and profit from aligning themselves with him. But the wise engage in passive resistance: they teach others to understand so they can be righteous not wicked, so they can be faithful not unfaithful, so they can be loyal to the one true God not switch their loyalty to a human king. This king will come to his end at the moment of his greatest assault. Then the faithful will be resurrected to life eternal. Those who sold out will go to shame and everlasting contempt. How long? For a time, times and half a time; for 1,290 days; for 1,335 days. Perhaps understood as 42, 43, 44½ months.

So we see the same pattern across all four visions. A human ruler exalts himself far above his proper station, even to the heavens; he grasps after equality with God. He attacks God's people, desecrating God's sanctuary. He seems all-powerful. But God will enact justice: judgment upon the arrogant ruler, and vindication for his faithful saints who receive resurrection and a place in his eternal kingdom. Retributive justice on the arrogant ruler. Restorative justice for God's faithful people. This is the pattern of history.

In the short term this pattern was fulfilled in Antiochus IV Epiphanes, ruler of the Seleucid Empire. This king proclaimed himself *Theos Epiphanes*, God manifest on earth. But he met his end. There followed a metaphorical resurrection as Israel became an independent kingdom for 80 years. But it was corrupt, the rulers abused power, and it ended in civil war. It is ironic that the Romans came in 63BC to put down the civil war between the Jewish factions. It became clear that Israel was as much a part of the problem as the

pagan empires. Israel had failed in its mission to be the new humanity.

It was into this darkness that God sent his beloved as the light. But his own did not receive him. Instead they put out the light. Saying “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15), the leadership of his own people handed him over to the empire of the day to be executed as a dangerous rebel. Evil had won. The one faithful human had been rejected and killed. Where was justice? What had happened to God’s purposes for humanity? The world lay in darkness that first day, through the second day, and into the third day.

Then God vindicated his martyred faithful servant in resurrection. He restored him to physical life in a physical body. Justice required this: death had no rightful claim on Jesus. Then God did a most surprising thing. He did not point his finger at rebellious, sinful humanity and demand retributive justice. Instead, he spread his arms wide and offered restorative justice. He invited rebellious humanity to come and receive forgiveness and new life in Christ. When we give our loyalty to Jesus and are “in Christ,” we participate in his death and resurrection. This is symbolized in baptism, in which we pass through the waters and emerge into new life. It is worked out daily, as we die to self and put on Christ, being renewed by the Spirit. And it will be fully realized when Christ returns: we shall be raised bodily in an incorruptible body.

We recited the Apostles’ Creed. “I believe in Jesus Christ...who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried...the third day he rose again;” then “I believe...in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” What God did with Jesus’s body he will do with ours: bodily resurrection. This is the ultimate restorative justice. But it goes beyond restorative justice. We will be more than we once were, for we shall be in transformed bodies, fully conformed to the likeness of Christ, and readied for God’s presence in glorious light from which all darkness has been banished. This is more than floating on a cloud with Jesus in heaven. The ultimate destiny is life on earth in a new heaven and a new earth that has been restored, indeed perfected to something beyond what it once was. This is the ultimate light at the end of the tunnel.

Meanwhile, we also affirm the communion of saints. Those who have gone before us into death in Christ, and we who are still alive in Christ, are in communion. We are knit together as one body, as one family.

Much of the imagery of Daniel is carried over into the Book of Revelation, which our women are studying and which I have been referring to each week. The imagery is re-visioned through Christ Jesus. He is the antithesis of the self-exalting ruler. The beast of Revelation is all the beasts and horns of Daniel rolled into one. He speaks arrogant words. He is worshiped by a deceived humanity. He wages war on the saints and conquers them. The martyrs cry out, “How long...until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” (6:10) How long? Five times we are told how long it is, using three different expressions: a time, times and half time; or 42 months; or or 1,260 days. During this time the holy city is trampled; the two witnesses prophesy and are killed by the beast; the woman is nourished in the wilderness; and the beast seems to have all the authority and power. I understand that all of these things are happening simultaneously throughout the entire Church age. God’s people bear faithful testimony to the Lamb, for which they are killed by the beast who conquers them. But the Church, God’s people as an entity, is preserved. The dragon, Satan, is raging mad because he has been thrown out of heaven in a war with the angel Michael, and

goes off to make war on the saints, using the beast. At the end the evil powers gather their forces for a final battle at the place called Armageddon, the mount of assembly. Three times we read of them gathering but each time it is over before the battle is even fought. The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire. They are removed from the earth, together with all evil. And God issues a ruling in favor of the martyrs (20:4), just as he issues a ruling in favor of the saints in Daniel 7. They live in resurrection life, following in the footsteps of Jesus who was martyred but lives.

How is Daniel to live in the light of the vision he has received? The linen-clad man tells Daniel, “Go your way, Daniel...go your way to the end” (9, 13). The end is determined. God has an appointed time. Meanwhile, carry on living your life. But do so in the light of the wisdom, understanding, and discernment provided by the visions.

The crisis will create a divide between those who respond well and those who respond poorly. Some will be faithful, some will be faithless:

**Many will be purified, made spotless and refined,
but the wicked will continue to be wicked.
None of the wicked will understand,
but those who are wise will understand. (12:10)**

This verse has a chiasmic construction. In the inner pair, the wicked will continue to be wicked. Wicked is the opposite of righteous. Both are relational terms. The righteous person acts faithfully within his relationships; the wicked person acts unfaithfully. The wicked acts unfaithfully towards God and towards others. These are the ones who forsake the holy covenant, who violated the covenant (11:30, 32). They prospered because the king of the North favored and flattered them. But he corrupted them. They failed to understand the times, and thus failed to respond faithfully in the times.

The outer pair of the chiasm is about the faithful. They “will be purified, made spotless and refined,” a link back to 11:35. They are martyrs, killed for their faithfulness to God. How are they able to remain faithful even in the face of death? Because they are the wise who understand the times. They are able to see behind the curtain and discern the spiritual realities. They will not give their allegiance to the self-exalting ruler. Instead they stay loyal to the one true God—in the face of death and through death. They entrust themselves to God. He will vindicate them in resurrection. Through their martyrdom they are purified and refined, ready to shine brightly in the resurrection.

Daniel is the paradigmatic wise person in the book. In the stories of the first half he was able to work faithfully in the pagan king’s service, while also being loyal to God. Now he is to go his way, and carry on living faithfully in a pagan empire. He is now an old man. Soon he will die. But the book closes with this reassurance to him:

You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance. (12:13)

You will rest in the sleep of death. And at the end you will awake and rise to new life. You will receive your allotted inheritance. Not a place on a cloud, strumming a harp. But a place in a restored earth combined together with heaven. A place in a physical body on a physical earth.

We all face the challenge of how to live in the world while being loyal to a different kingdom. Daniel and Revelation are the two main apocalyptic works in Scripture. They draw back the veil to show us the unseen realities in the spiritual realm. This is not to feed

our curiosity. It is not to enable us to fill in detailed timelines. It is to give us wisdom, understanding and discernment so that we remain faithful to God while living here on earth in pagan empires, as Daniel did. Revelation calls us to wisdom and to endurance. The saints conquer the beast by the blood of the Lamb and by their faithful endurance, their loyalty to Jesus.

Our life in this world has value, whether in paid employment, parenting and homemaking, learning, or volunteer service. We live in a physical, material world that requires work. Full-time Christian paid ministry is not a higher calling, a status for those that are really committed. Whatever our arena of work, may we labor faithfully in all that we do as unto the Lord.

These two books speak truth to power. They unmask the powers for what they really are. Revelation reveals the Lord Jesus Christ as God's antithesis to the rulers of Daniel and the beast of Revelation. The Lion has conquered by being the slain Lamb. Power is turned upside down. God manifests his power in apparent weakness. We are

called to follow the Lamb wherever he goes. He is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. We follow him in that trajectory: in faithful witness, through death, to participation in his rule in God's eternal kingdom.

The book of Daniel encourages the wise to remain faithful. Revelation encourages us to remain loyal and devoted to the one who is truly worthy of our allegiance. Revelation shows us who is and who is not worthy of our loyal devotion.

Lord God, the light of the minds that know you, the life of the souls that love you, and the strength of the hearts that serve you: Help us...so to know you that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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