

Present Tense and Future Perfect

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Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 00] Okay, three days after being elected as Prime Minister, Winston Churchill delivered his first speech on waging war against Germany. And so on May the 13th, 1940, he said, I would say to the House, as I said to those who have joined this government, I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.

We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I will say it is to wage war by sea, land and air with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us. To wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime.

That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word, victory. Victory at all costs. Victory in spite of all terror.

Victory however long and hard the road may be. For without victory, there is no survival. And that was one of Churchill's most motivating speeches as the forces embarked upon war against Germany.

[1 : 20] Incredibly motivating because Churchill outlined the reality of suffering for the people of this country. But also he outlined the aim of victory and victory at all costs.

Now as we read this vision in Daniel chapter 8, it is a vision about how God's people will suffer in the future. But it also emphasises not just the aim of victory, but the certainty of the victory that is to come.

Now last week we read Daniel chapter 7 and said that it was apocalyptic literature. And from chapter 7 in Daniel through to chapter 12, it is all apocalyptic. And the purpose of apocalyptic literature really is to make things clear.

It is to reveal rather than confuse. It's to unveil in a sense the future so that we can better grasp it and understand it. And so if you were here last week in chapter 7 in Daniel, it revealed God's rule in establishing his kingdom that will last forever.

Next in chapters 8 to 12, these chapters reveal God's people must suffer. And persecution will come before that everlasting kingdom is established.

[2 : 35] And so on one level, the vision in Daniel chapter 8 is confusing. And yet the point is clear. Because it shows that while God's people will suffer in the future, victory is assured because God is in control.

And that's the message that God's people must be convinced of in every age. So how do you live out your faith in a hostile world? How do you live on a day-to-day basis when it seems as if you're a minority and the world and the people of the world are against you?

And especially if you face intense persecution, which many Christians do across the world. That is the reality of the world that we live in today. So what Daniel chapter 8 does is that it motivates us to keep going because the ultimate victory is certain.

So if you're one of God's people, then be assured that you are on the winning side and victory will come. And so today what we're going to do is consider this chapter under three headings.

First of all, Daniel's appalling vision of the future. Secondly, God's absolute control of the future. And then thirdly, our appropriate response to the future.

[3 : 54] So Daniel's appalling vision, God's absolute control, and then our appropriate response. So first, Daniel's appalling vision of the future. Daniel chapter 7 shows God's rule by giving us a panoramic view of the whole of human history, whereas Daniel chapter 8 narrows in and focuses on a particular period.

Essentially, we're looking at a preview of about 400 years of history. And it's like a time lapse that you might have on your phone, where the text captures the historical figures and their dealings with God's people, just in a brief amount of verses.

And so for Daniel and his first readers, this was an appalling vision of the future before the time of Jesus. But for us, as we read these verses today, this describes history past.

And because when we look back in retrospect, we can work out the characters mentioned here, because they're figures in history.

And so chapter 1, sorry, verse 1, chapter 8, the vision comes two years after. The vision in chapter 7, we're told. Daniel sees himself in Susa near the Ulai Canal, which is about 230 miles east of Babylon.

[5 : 14] And so Susa later would become the capital of the Persian Empire. And what does Daniel see? He sees a ram and then a goat and then a horn in verse 1 to 14.

And then we're told the meaning of this vision by Gabriel in verse 15 and 17. And so let's look at the vision and then the interpretation together.

And that will help it make sense. So first of all, there's the ram. Verse 1 to 4 and then the interpretation in verse 15 to 20. Let's read what the ram is like.

Verse 3, I looked up and there before me was a ram with two horns standing beside the canal. And the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later.

So the ram represents the kings of Media and Persia. And we're told this in verse 20. The two-horned ram you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia.

[6 : 10] So the ram was powerful. Verse 4, I watched the ram as it charged towards the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it and none could rescue from its power.

It did as it pleased and became great. Okay, so the ram charging in every direction indicates the kingdom is expanding. So nobody could stand against the ram.

And that indicates the strength of the Persian Empire. It was a strong empire. Joyce Baldwin, one of the commentators in Daniel, says this of verse 4. Nearly 200 years of history and political aggrandizement, such as the world had not before seen, are summed up in this verse.

So 200 years of history in one verse. That's the ram. Next came the goat. That doesn't mean the greatest of all time. It's a different goat. And the goat's there in verse 5 to 8.

And then the interpretation of the goat is 21 and 22. So the goat has a horn between its eyes. Verse 5, as I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground.

[7 : 18] Now the goat, whilst the ram represents the Persian Empire, the goat represents the Greek Empire. Verse 20, the two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia.

Sorry, verse 21, the shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between its eyes is the first king. Okay, so Greek Empire. Now this is a description of Alexander the Great, who is a figure we've probably heard of in history.

So he came from Greece, and he conquered the Persian Empire with great speed and strength.

And that's why, verse 5, the goat crossed the whole earth without its feet touching the ground.

And this happened from 334 BC onwards, as the kingdom of Alexander the Great extended all the way to India, and it was greater than any other kingdom before it in its size.

So Alexander the Great, you may know, was a general in the Greek army from the age of 21. He basically conquered the whole of the known world, and then he died aged 32 or 33.

[8 : 28] So Alexander the Great is somebody we've heard of. He's a prominent figure in the history books. And yet, despite his impact on this world, he is not the focus of the vision in Daniel chapter 8.

So verse 8 says, The goat became very great, but at the height of its power, the large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up towards the four winds of heaven.

Makes sense when you read verse 22. The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation, but will not have the same power.

Okay, so the four horns indicate Alexander the Great's empire being divided into four parts, and so four of his generals took a portion of the land as their own kingdom.

So that's the goat. And then the vision immediately shifts focus onto another horn, and this one horn came out of one of the four horns. So if you're following, the horns there in verse 9 to 14, and then the interpretation, verse 23 to 25.

[9 : 39] On the sermon worksheet for the children, there's a box where they can draw a picture of the reading or something that's helped them understand things better. So there'll be some great pictures to be drawn from this passage.

So who is the little horn? Well, verse 9 says, Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and towards the beautiful land.

Okay. History, when we look back, indicates to us that the little horn is Antiochus IV Epiphanes. His name is not mentioned here, but he was the ruler of the Seleucid kingdom, and that's in modern-day Syria from 175 to 164 BC.

So Antiochus Epiphanes, he gave himself the name Epiphanes, which means God manifest. In other words, he set himself up against God, in opposition to God, and in opposition to God's people. And we read this in verse 23 to 25. In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise.

[10 : 51] He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people.

He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.

So God is the prince who's described here. And Antiochus IV Epiphanes was extremely brutal in his persecution of God's people. So he grew in power, verse 9, to the south and to the east towards the beautiful land.

So the beautiful land stands for the place where God's people are, Israel, Palestine. And Antiochus took over with the aim of destroying God's people, and he committed horrific atrocities against them.

And so compared to Alexander the Great, Antiochus Epiphanes is really a minor figure in the history books. And yet he gets far more airtime than Alexander in this vision.

[11 : 57] So unlike Alexander the Great, we may never have heard of him, but he takes center stage in the vision simply because of his appalling assault on God's people.

And so the language is brutal. If you look at verse 10 to verse 12, the horn, it grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them.

It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord. It took away the daily sacrifice from the Lord, and his sanctuary was thrown down. Because of rebellion, the Lord's people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it.

It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground. So Antiochus would attempt to abolish the worship of God at the temple in Jerusalem.

He sought to take away the daily sacrifice and to overthrow the sanctuary. And apparently he entered into the most holy place in the temple, and he plundered it of its silver and gold vessels, and then he erected an altar to Zeus on the altar of God.

[13 : 06] And we read that the truth was thrown to the ground because he burned copies of the scriptures. And so he caused this astounding devastation and destroyed God's people.

Okay, so Daniel's appalling vision is a vision of the future, and it focuses on a certain person, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. And he is significant because of his rebellion against God and against God's people.

And so it's obvious when we read this that God's take on world history is different than ours. So what seems important in the history of the world, in the history books to us, isn't what matters to God.

So God wants to focus Daniel's attention and our attention on the plight of his people instead of the power of the kingdoms of this world.

And that's the message that these visions of Daniel drive home. God is alerting us, his people, to the severe persecution that God's people will face in the future.

[14 : 18] And so that's really the application for people, God's people, in any age, where persecution of God's people, in this vision, is meant to prepare God's people to face any kind of persecution at any point in history.

And so even though this was appalling for Daniel to see, to see what the future would hold, it was revealed to him so he could see the one who holds the future. And that's crucial for Daniel to get. It's crucial for us to get. That's what we must see from this vision. Not just what the future holds, or not to worry about what the future holds, but to know the one who holds the future.

And that takes us to our second heading. First, Daniel's appalling vision of the future. Second, God's absolute control of the future. So as well as this appalling vision, it does assure us that God is in control.

He's in control of the future. So everything in the vision was predicted centuries before it took place. So Daniel was written in the 6th century BC, and these events took place 400 years later, in the 2nd century BC, before Jesus.

[15:31] And so what is happening here is prophecy. So the vision, in fact, is so accurate that some people think Daniel was written later, after these events took place.

And yet the obvious response to that is that God is in control. And so God can predict the future. He knows what is going to happen in the future.

He writes history. History is his story. And that's what enables us today to put our faith in him, because he knows what he's doing.

And that's why we've got these references to timings here in this passage. So in verse 13 to 14, we read of this conversation. Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, how long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled?

The vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary, and the trampling underfoot of the Lord's people. He said to me, it will take 2,300 evenings and mornings.

[16:36] Then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated. So there's this, the holy ones or two angels are having a conversation about timings and when it's going to happen, because the rebellion against God and the persecution against God's people would only last for a specific time.

So yes, there would be persecution, but God is the one who would bring it to an end. And so the sanctuary would be overthrown, but it would be reconsecrated again.

And so the little horn, Antiochus, would terrorize God's people, and it would be for a period of 2,300 evenings and mornings. And we might wonder, well, what does that mean, evenings and mornings? Well, it could refer to 2,300 days, or 2,300 evenings and mornings could refer to half of that. So 1,150 days.

That's a period of around three years. And so it could be a reference to the whole period of Antiochus' persecution of God's people, or it could be a smaller length of time.

[17:44] It could refer to the period between his desecration of the temple, which was in 167 BC, and then its reconsecration in 164 BC, that shorter time of three years.

But because this is apocalyptic literature, normally numbers, dates, times are symbolic. And so however we're meant to understand this, the point is that there would be a limit to the amount of time that God's people would suffer.

So there was a fixed period of time, and it was determined by God. So it's like God has his big calendar on the wall. He marks the date the persecution will start, and he marks the date the persecution will end, and that is when it will be.

So if you like, God put Antiochus' epiphanies on a leash. So verse 24 says, he will become very strong, but not by his own power.

So God would give him power. God would set barriers on what he could do, and then God would bring his power to an end. Then verse 25 at the end. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.

[18:55] So his end would come, not by human power, but because God would take him out. And so Antiochus apparently wasn't assassinated. He didn't die in battle.

Apparently he died of an illness, a physical or a nervous disorder. That's according to the Apocryphal books, one and two Maccabees.

So basically this was a lesson for Daniel, but it's also a lesson for us, because we must never think that human powers or rulers rule this earth.

That they steal the show somehow from God, and they are in control. Because no matter how powerful or evil the kings or the kingdoms of this world are, they don't determine history.

It's God who determines history. God gives them power. God allows them to strut their stuff on the world stage of history for a while, but that time is appointed by him.

[19 : 57] And so when we read that this vision, verse 17, concerns the time of the end, or verse 19, it concerns the appointed time of the end, or verse 26, that it concerns the distant future, doesn't just mean the absolute end of history.

The expression, the time of the end, has different layers. And so here the context suggests the end refers to the end of this persecution under Antiochus.

It's the answer to the question that's asked in verse 13. And yet God's destruction of Antiochus at that point in time points towards God's victory, his absolute power, his control at the end of time. So there's a victory in time pointing to a victory at the end of time. So when Jesus returns, God's everlasting kingdom will come in all its fullness. And so this vision, showing God's absolute control of the future, is a preview of God's absolute control of the future until the very end.

So God is in control of the future from Daniel up to this point, up to Jesus, and now from us up to the end. God is in control. But we might ask the question in our heads, how can God be in control and yet allow his people to suffer?

[21 : 27] Why was Antiochus Epiphanes allowed to destroy God's people, to kill them? And we often hear it put, if God is in control, why does he allow evil and suffering?

Or how could a good God allow suffering in this world? And perhaps the issue is a barrier to some coming to believe in Christianity. Even believers wrestle with these kinds of questions.

And so how do we make sense of it? Well, like Daniel, there is much that we can't understand. Just look at verse 27. But there is also so much that we can understand.

And so what God reveals to us does help make sense of what goes on in this world. So in this vision, we see the reality of evil and rebellion against God.

And throughout the book of Daniel, we see this fleshed out in the clash of kingdoms, the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God. And then throughout the Bible, we're told that all human suffering and evil is a consequence of humanity's rejection of God's rightful rule over our lives.

[22 : 37] And so all of that is true. But the Bible also tells us that God is perfect. God is pure. God is righteous. He's holy. He's good. And he's loving. And so God can never be responsible for evil.

And that is a truth as well. And here in Daniel, we see that God does use evil and suffering in his purposes. So that is true.

And that's why it's hard to give an answer for why when it comes to specific suffering. And yet the ultimate answer is that God is accomplishing his salvation plan, his purposes, through his sovereign rule over this world.

And that does include evil and suffering. And so the best way for us to make sense of it is to see the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross.

Because that's where we see God working through evil and suffering to achieve great good, to achieve his purposes. And so God is not immune to suffering.

[23 : 43] God knows what it's like. In Jesus Christ, God experienced the greatest suffering. Jesus suffered and died on a cross to pay for our sins so that someday he could end all evil and suffering without ending us.

And so we might not understand the reasons why God allows suffering but we can know the reasons. We can know what the reason isn't or what it can't be.

It can't be that God allows it because he doesn't love us. And it can't be because God has no power to stop it. Because God has demonstrated his love and his willingness to come and suffer for us in order to deliver us from far greater suffering.

because it was through the suffering of the cross that God achieved his purposes. And while the cross looked like defeat, it was actually victory. And so if God has worked like this for us on our behalf, then we can trust his control and we can trust that he is with us as we face the brutal realities of life in this world.

So that's the second point. God's absolute control of the future. Daniel's appalling vision of the future, God's absolute control of the future, and third, our appropriate response to the future.

[25 : 10] Daniel's appalling vision of the future is one where God is in absolute control. And it's knowing this that will enable us to face the future with faith instead of fear.

And that's surely why Daniel had to seal up the vision in verse 26. The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given to you is true, but seal up the vision for it concerns the distant future.

So the truth of the vision would need to be kept safe because its message would steady God's people for the suffering that they had to face. And it's the truth, that truth, that helps God's people in every age.

And so, what is our response to the future? Well, three things. And I think they come up on the slide. Three things. Be appalled, be assured, and be active. Be appalled. So this is not just a history lesson limited to Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the evil he inflicted on God's people because the vision is meant to point beyond him and behind him to a greater appalling reality because it highlights the anti-Christ opposition to God's people that will go on right until the very end of time. So Antiochus is one manifestation of the evil kingdom of this world that stands in rebellion against the everlasting kingdom of God. And so he is one of many anti-Christ's who have come and he points to the final anti-Christ who will appear in the last days.

[26 : 48] And so this devilish power that we read about here in Daniel chapter 8 appears again at the end of the Bible where if we look to Revelation 12 we're not going to but Revelation 12 shows this fierce conflict between the dragon which is Satan and then the woman God's people.

So the enormous dragon's tail sweeps away a third of the stars from the sky and flings them to the earth which picks up on Daniel chapter 8 verse 10 where this horn threw some of the starry host down to the earth and then trampled on them.

And so Daniel chapter 8 is really a window onto the great battle between God and Satan that's described throughout the Bible and that rages on until the end.

And it's appalling because God's people will suffer. And so Daniel's reaction is hardly surprising. Verse 27 I, Daniel, was worn out.

I lay exhausted for several days and I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision. It was beyond understanding. Daniel was overcome, worn out, exhausted, sick at the thought of what would happen to God's people, what they would have to endure.

[28 : 07] And so if we truly love God and we truly love God's people then we will surely feel something of Daniel's emotion too. Because there's something wrong if we are not appalled by the persecution that God's people suffer across the world today.

And how do we feel when God is mocked as he is here? How do we respond? Well, how do we respond not just to the horrific thought of God's people being persecuted which is what the vision's about but to the reality of it because it is going on?

Surely it should drive us to our knees in prayer for those who suffer and face death because they follow Jesus. So we should be appalled but we should also be assured.

Be assured because God rules and through all of this suffering he is establishing his everlasting kingdom. In his sovereign power God is always in control no matter what happens in this world. So the devil has already been defeated at the cross when Jesus died but he is still fighting against God and his people. But God's destruction of Antiochus points to the final destruction of the Antichrist and Satan at the end.

[29 : 29] So Jesus said I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And that is why we can be assured. So be appalled, also be assured, and then be active.

Just notice what Daniel did after seeing the vision. Yes he was worn out and exhausted for several days but verse 27 he says then I got up and went about the king's business.

So Daniel went back to his day job which was to work for a pagan king. And he could get on with his job knowing what the future was and how appalling it would be for God's people because he knew for certain that God rules.

And so we can be confident in God's rule as we go about our daily lives. We can be active in this world not by disengaging and thinking that because we're a minority we can do nothing and be crippled and disabled but we can be active and engage with the world that God has put us in. We can get on with doing whatever God has given us to do. Whatever he's called you to do Monday to Friday we can get on and do it knowing that he is with us.

[30 : 47] So God is building his kingdom. It will continue being built. It will include suffering. There will be hostility towards God's people.

But the message of Daniel chapter 8 is live with faith in God and don't be crippled by fear. Let me try and illustrate.

The house that we used to live in had a trampoline in the back garden and to get to the bins you had to walk around and pass the trampoline. And on a dark winter's night I went outside to put the

rubbish in the bins and I didn't notice the back door was open.

I didn't notice that Matthew, our middle son, had sneaked out from the back door and he hid under the trampoline. And after I put the rubbish in the bins and I walked back, he jumped in the dark from underneath the trampoline and shouted boo!

And I got the fright of my life and he fell about laughing on the grass. And after that he thought it was so good he always tried to sneak out behind me and do it again.

[31 : 53] And sometimes I'd pretend I didn't see him and then I was scared and play along. But I was never scared again. Never really scared again. because I knew what was going to happen.

I could tell and predict what the future would be. And that made all the difference. And so Daniel's vision didn't stop the suffering of God's people.

It did forewarn them and that's what made all the difference. They knew it would be coming. And so when it came it was no shock, it was no surprise.

They had to have faith in God to see them through. Because when we know that the future is under God's control, we won't be surprised.

No matter what comes our way. Jesus told his disciples, if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. Then he went on to say, all this I have told you so that you will not fall away.

[32 : 52] Like Daniel's vision, Jesus tells his people what's coming. We know what's coming and because we know it's coming, that enables us to persevere.

And we will persevere when we remember what Jesus has done for us. When we see how as part of God's plan, he willingly suffered and died for us in our place for our sins, then we can persevere through our suffering because we know that the victory is sure.

And so if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, don't continue to stand in opposition against God. There's no future in that.

God's people were being told here win. The victory is certain and sure. And to be in the victory side, you need to know Jesus as your saviour.

Because when he returns, he will take his people. All evil and all suffering will be destroyed once and for all. And that's coming.

[33 : 58] Daniel 8 is a window onto what will be. So the present may be tense, but the future is perfect. We hope that's to the second meeting that will prepare you and the future will prepare.

We have a break. We'll sign up in the ■ where we will retire. And this willign will be grown.