

The End

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're still caught up with COVID and the COVID crisis. The coronavirus is still here, especially as we know in Glasgow. And I guess we're wondering, when is it all going to end?

When will the brighter, better future come? And when will we get through all of this? I guess we're looking for hope, aren't we? Hope for the future whilst we seek to endure in the present time. Now, last summer, Coca-Cola brought out an advertising campaign with the slogan, Open Like Never Before. And it's meant to convey some future hope in a world that's changed by COVID. Open Like Never Before. And the ad has an inspirational poem by a spoken word artist called George the Poet, along with a film of people. And the people in the film are trying to enjoy life in a post-COVID world. And it's really smart advertising because Coca-Cola have tapped into the desires of our hearts, because we are people who long and look for hope. And Coca-Cola want to communicate a future that is better than anything in the past. Open Like Never Before. It offers hope hope for the future. And yet, it's a hope that has to be realised because we're still living in COVID times.

But even if you don't drink Coca-Cola, I prefer Iron Brew myself, even if you don't drink Coke, you are someone who hopes for a better future. That is true. You know that you want things in the future to be better than they have been in the past. We all long for this brighter day, for better times to come. But what is the basis of our hope? How can we be sure that things are actually going to get better? Well, we can't be sure if we overlook God. The only certain and sure hope for the future is with God and in God. And that's what we see at the end of the book of Daniel, where God shows Daniel the vision for the future. He gives them the vision and it's a future for God's people that is bigger and brighter and better than the present. And while some of the details may be confusing, as we've seen in the second half of the book of Daniel, the hope that is on offer is clear.

Because when it comes to our world and when it comes to our lives, we need faith in God if we are to have sure and certain hope for the future. And that's the message of Daniel chapter 12. It is meant to be a comfort for God's people, encouraging God's people to endure right up to the very end, to persevere. But it's also a challenge for all people to prepare for the end, to prepare for what is to come in the future. And so catching this vision of the future shows us how we should live right now.

And so we'll think about two points that follow the sections of Daniel chapter 12. Two simple points. First, the future hope, and then second, present endurance. Future hope, verse 1 to 4, and then second, present endurance, verse 5 to 13. So the future hope, first of all, chapter 12 concludes the vision that God gave Daniel that began in chapter 10. And the focus from essentially chapter 11, I think verse 40 onwards, is on the future. It's on the end of history. And so if you look down at verse 1, we see at that time, and then at that time again. Then verse 4, the time of the end.

[3 : 52] Then verse 9 speaks about the time of the end again. And then verse 13 mentions the end of days. And so it's talking about the end, the end of the world as we know it, the end of history, the end times, the future. And this vision was in response to Daniel's prayer. And it's a vision about the devastating suffering that God's people must face in the future. But also, the suffering they must face is under the control of God. God is in control throughout history, as we saw last week, and this week we see that God is in control of history at the end, the very end. So verse 1 says, 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. So this is an unparalleled time of distress for God's people, far worse than anything that's gone before. But Michael, we're told, will protect God's people, and they will be delivered. Michael was mentioned earlier in chapter 10. He's one of the chief princes. And he's also mentioned in the New Testament in the Bible, where he's the protector of God's people. And so what we're being told is that God's people will suffer, but God's people are safe. Because we read, everyone whose name is found written in the book will be delivered. What's the book? Well, it's a book that belongs to God, and it records the names of all God's people. And it's referred to in Revelation, the last book in the Bible. And there, it's the basis of the final judgment.

And so Revelation chapter 20 speaks of the book of life, where the dead are judged according to what's recorded in the books. And then in Revelation chapter 21, it speaks of the Lamb's book of life, which contains the names of all of those who will be part of God's new creation. And so if your name's in the book, you will live with God forever. But if your name isn't in the book, you will never enter heaven. Can you imagine, I don't know how it will work, but can you imagine Andrea as she comes up at the judgment? And she's told, yes, your name is in here. Welcome. Come in. This is where you belong.

After Andrea, along comes Andrew. Andrew, sorry. No, I'm afraid your name isn't in the book. You aren't welcome here. Off you go. It's astonishing, isn't it, of how the judgment of God will work.

There will be a dividing line between all of humanity. And so how do you know then if your name is in the book? Well, we can be absolutely sure if we have faith in Jesus Christ. That's the only way to be saved from hell and for heaven. That's why this vision is a comfort for God's people, because for God's people, things will only get better. And that's why this vision is a challenge for those who wouldn't be part of God's kingdom and who don't know God, because for such people, things will only get worse. And so this division here is further emphasized in verse two. It says, multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. It's talking about the resurrection of everybody at the end of time.

There is going to be a physical resurrection of everyone, all human beings before the final judgment. Some will head to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. So it's a vision of the future that will come and it will happen. And Jesus also expands on this. He says in John chapter five, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out. Those who have done what is good will rise to live and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

[8 : 25] Now we might not be sure about the afterlife, but in the Bible, it's clear. Everybody will be raised. Believers will be raised to eternal life in the new creation, whereas unbelievers will go to an eternity in hell apart from God under his condemnation. And that's why the resurrection is great hope for all of God's people. And so in the extreme suffering that this vision says God's people must endure, they had this hope to cling on to, the hope of the resurrection and being in God's presence.

And yet the resurrection is also a great warning for everybody who doesn't know God, because this vision tells us how it's going to be and actually refutes some of the common beliefs that people have these days about the afterlife. One popular error or false belief is universalism. And we might not use the term universalism, but it is essentially the belief that everybody eventually ends up in heaven.

Lots of people think that these days. And yet we're told here that the fate of some will be everlasting contempt. So not everybody will end up in heaven. In other words, there will be many who are under God's wrath in hell. Another popular false belief or wrong view is annihilationism. And again, we wouldn't talk about annihilation these days, but annihilationism believes that unbelievers won't suffer. They'll just cease to exist. In other words, after death, there's nothing. Lots of people like to believe that that will be the case today. And yet there's none of that here in Daniel or in anything Jesus said or in the rest of the New Testament. We're told that all will be raised with everlasting life for believers and everlasting contempt for unbelievers. That's what the vision is saying.

And the next division expands on what this existence will be like for God's people. Verse three, those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. So just as Jesus Christ has been raised and is glorified, so his people will also share in his glory. And this is the glorious resurrection hope for all of God's people. And it's coming in the future. And until it comes, because it's not here yet, it's clear from Daniel 12 and verse three, what our task is right now. It is, as it says, to lead many to righteousness.

This is the mission of God's people right up to the end until Jesus returns. God's people are to witness to the good news of God's message, his message of Jesus Christ, life, death, and resurrection, and lead many people to righteousness. Now, none of us are righteous before God. It's not as if there are some goodies and baddies. The good people go to hell, the bad people go to heaven. No, we all deserve hell. We're all under the wrath of God. And the great hope of Christianity is that through faith in Jesus, we are saved from one, saved from hell and for heaven. And so our righteousness doesn't come through anything we do. Our righteousness comes through what Jesus Christ has done. And so this vision of the future should motivate God's people, those who have been saved and rescued and made righteous by Jesus Christ, to share this good news of Jesus with others who still need to be saved before the end comes and before they face the judgment. And what we read here is so good because

[12 : 30] God uses the witness of his people to transform unrighteous sinners into people who are made righteous in Christ. And so there's an urgency, there's an urgency in the church's mission to help people trust in Jesus Christ for their righteousness, to see them through the judgment. And it will be fantastic to shine bright like stars one day. I can hardly imagine what that is like.

But won't it be brilliant to shine alongside other people, people who have come to trust in Jesus Christ because of our personal witness or because of the work of Christ Church Glasgow, whether that be our parents or our children, our friends, our neighbours, our classmates or our colleagues.

Because if we love people enough, we'll do all that we can to help them spend eternity with God instead of eternity apart from God, separated from him. And how can we do that? Well, we can do that by planting a church. That's a good way to lead many to righteousness. We can do it by teaching and training our children. We can speak to our children about Jesus. We can pray with them and for them each day.

We can run a Christianity Explored course to help people understand the good news about Jesus Christ. We can lead a scripture union group in school where young people come at lunchtime and hear things about Jesus that they've never heard before. Or we can study the Bible with somebody one-to-one, help them understand the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. Because when it gets to the future, the end, after the judgment, being with God, everlasting life, we want to be there with as many people as possible.

And so Daniel here is saying this is what the future will hold. And so now we, as God's people on this earth right now, know what we should do about it. And so listen to what Daniel's got to do in verse 4.

[14 : 44] But you, Daniel, roll up the seal and roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge. Daniel had to seal up the words that God gave him.

They were to be preserved for the end, recorded for God's people. So when future generations of God's people face the intense suffering that the vision speaks about, what was written would help God's people persevere. Because what God revealed to Daniel was really hard to take in at the time.

You couldn't understand what it would be like for all of this to be fulfilled. And so it had to be rolled up and kept. Maybe it's a bit like having a baby for the first time. You can be told before you have a baby.

Well, I've never had a baby, but I have had a wife who's had a baby. But you're told by other parents who try and be helpful. They tell you what it will be like when a baby enters into your family.

They'll say, you know, there will be sleepless nights. You will feel completely wrecked. You'll be running on about 50, 60, 70 percent efficiency compared to your usual 100 percent.

[15 : 56] And you think, yeah, yeah, yeah, I'll be fine. Don't worry. I'll cope. And you only really grasp what it's like when the baby comes. That's when you really discover how hard it actually is.

And so for Daniel, having these words sealed for the future would enable God's people to endure for the end. They wouldn't understand it at the time, but what was written down would help them when it was a reality.

And so we can be confident in the truth of what God says to us. We can trust what he says here about the future because it will all happen. We can be confident.

And yet what Daniel 12 verse 4 says that many people won't accept what God says. They will refuse this truth about the future.

Daniel's told that many will go here and there to increase knowledge. That is, some will ignore what God says and will search for truth and look for answers elsewhere. So rather than trust the knowledge that we receive from God that comes to us in his word, like in visions to Daniel, rather than trust what God says, many will search in other places for enlightenment, for discovery.

[17 : 12] Perhaps by trusting in their own intellect and what they can find out on the internet or wherever. It's always dangerous to trust what you read on the internet. Yet people can try to suck in just the latest cultural trends, thinking they will be helpful in helping them understand what life is about.

Or maybe just trying different religions or philosophies. And yet no matter how much knowledge we can accumulate from the world around us, what we're being told here is that actually it will fail us.

It won't help. Because the only sure hope that we can have for the future is not in what we can find out ourselves with our own knowledge. The only sure hope we can have for the future is in what God reveals to us in his word.

And so that's the future hope. And Daniel and God's people and we today can be certain that what God says he will do, he will do. And so we should trust him instead of trusting anyone or anything else.

So that's the first point, future hope. Second point is present endurance in verse 5 to 13. God showed Daniel what would happen in the future and so it called for endurance in the present.

[18 : 26] But that didn't mean that Daniel understood everything. And that's why this final scene here in Daniel contains questions about all of these astonishing things that Daniel sees.

So look at verse 5 and 6. So here's Daniel.

He's on the bank of the river with three heavenly figures and they're not identified. But it's likely that the man clothed in linen is the heavenly messenger we met in chapter 10.

And then the other two seem to be angels. Perhaps Gabriel and Michael who've been mentioned in Daniel before. And they're all talking to Daniel and then one of them asks, How long will it be until these things are fulfilled?

And an answer is given. Verse 7. The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand towards heaven.

[19 : 36] And I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed.

So how long will it be until these things are fulfilled? A time, times and half a time. It clears up, doesn't it? But that's the answer that's given. But don't just think about the answer that's given.

And see how the answer is given. Because typically an oath would be made with one hand raised. But here the heavenly messenger raises both hands, emphasising the definite nature of this time.

Even if we don't know what the time is. He says it will be for a time, times and half a time. Now if a time is a year, this would be a period of three and a half years.

But in apocalyptic literature, numbers tend to be symbolic. And it seems like that's the best way to take them here. And so while the length of time may not be clear, the point is that the time is limited.

[20 : 46] It is a definite period of time. It's going to happen, but it's controlled by God. And so it will be brought to an end by God. And that's important because it's referring to the devastating suffering that God's people will face.

Because we read, when the power of the holy people has finally been broken, all these things will be completed. So there will be an antichrist opposition, and it's going to be brutal, and it will be at the end.

But God will stop it. Now it's no wonder that Daniel struggled to understand this. Verse 8, he says, I heard, but I did not understand.

So I asked my Lord, what will the outcome of all this be? And Daniel gets an answer, and it includes more timescales about events at the end, in verse 11 and 12.

But it wasn't just the end that was to be Daniel's only concern. So look at verse 9 and 10. He replied, Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end.

[21 : 56] 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.

So this was an encouragement for Daniel to keep going. Go your way. Now, from what we know of the book of Daniel, Daniel lived his whole life with a firm commitment and confidence in God.

He practiced his faith throughout his life, and here he's an old man in a society that was hostile to his God. And yet he was committed, despite the constant pressure to compromise.

And here he's told to keep going. So God had helped Daniel endure in the past, and so he had to persevere in the present and leave the future to God.

Because whatever happened to Daniel or any of God's people, it was being used by God to refine them. And if we are wise, we'll see the suffering that comes our way in life as being God's way of refining us, of making our faith what it should be.

[23 : 10] And Matt, helpfully, mentioned that earlier when he spoke and shared with us. And so hard as it is, nobody wants to suffer. We will understand, if we are wise, that God knows exactly what he's doing with our lives.

And if he does send any suffering, then it is for our good. Because if we believe that God has got the future sorted, then that will help us to endure in the present.

And of course, we don't understand all the details, or why this is happening, why it's happening to me. But we can trust that God knows what he's doing, right down to the very last detail.

And we see that here, because it goes down to days, verse 11 and 12. From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished, and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.

Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days. So this will be a terrible time for God's people.

[24 : 19] And what's the significance of the days? Well, we're not told. But 1,290 days, and then 1,335 days, it's roughly three and a half years, within a little bit, added on at the end.

And it could correspond to the time, times, and half a time earlier. And yet, I think the point is, that God's people will suffer for a set period of time.

The suffering will be intense. And so they will have to endure for a period, for a while. And then they may have to endure for a period longer. So there will be intense suffering, and then even more suffering.

And God's people need to endure. And then when evil has done its worst, we're told that God will intervene. And so this vision, as brutal as it is, for God's people, because of the suffering they'll face, God's people must keep going.

Because we're told that God's people will get through it. And so we need to live with some questions, don't we? But still trusting that God knows what he's doing.

[25 : 33] And that's why Daniel is told, again, verse 13, go your way. As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days, you will receive, you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.

Notice that the end is mentioned twice. So as an old man, Daniel was commanded to go your way till the end, meaning the end of his life.

And it's such a down-to-earth, practical command from God. Because despite seeing all of these astonishing visions, all of what would happen in the future, Daniel is told, basically, to get up the next day, to go to work for King Cyrus, his pagan employer, I don't know, sit down at his desk, pull up his laptop, check his email, and just get on with life.

And isn't that a reminder for us all, if we are one of God's people, to keep living for God, wherever God has placed us, and whatever God has given us to do. Whether that be as a student, at school, or at university, or college, or working our job, or looking after our children, or growing old and retired, go your way till the end.

That's what Daniel's told. That's what we're all told. Faithfully serve God until the day that you die. And yet that's not the only end that's mentioned here.

[27 : 02] The second end comes there. Daniel is told, you will rest, and then at the end of the days, you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance. So death wasn't going to be the end.

The end of Daniel's life wasn't the end. He would die, but he would rest in the sleep of death, and then he would rise to resurrection life in God's everlasting kingdom.

And that's the motivation that Daniel is given here to go your way. So no matter Daniel, no matter what God's people will face by way of opposition, or hostility, or suffering, or trials, or shame, or difficulty, the call is to go our way, to keep the faith, because we have this future hope.

And so do you ever feel, if you call yourself a Christian, do you ever feel that life is hard? Do you struggle and feel sometimes like you want to give up?

That is normal. But the message here is, don't give up. It is worth it. You will survive.

[28 : 17] Not by singing, I will survive, in some kind of Gloria Gaynor fashion, as if survival is something that you will be able to do yourself. No. We will survive because the God who calls us is with us, and he will ultimately deliver his people.

God's got this. How do we know? Because of Jesus Christ. God's people are safe because Jesus has defeated Satan, and sin, and death.

The victory has already been won through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus had to die on a cross for our sin, and so the future hope that's promised in Daniel can be a reality.

All of us deserve nothing from God except his wrath and condemnation. We deserve the shame and everlasting contempt of hell.

And yet Jesus willingly substituted himself for us on a cross to take the punishment that you and I deserve. And so the judgment of God fell on Jesus Christ so that it need never fall on us.

[29 : 35] And then the resurrection of Jesus assures us that everybody who believes in him will not die but have everlasting life. And so right now Jesus reigns as king and one day Jesus will return as judge and sort this world out at the end and put everything right by bringing in the new creation, God's perfected everlasting kingdom.

That is where we are heading. That is the kind of hope that our world needs and the hope that we need. And so that's why the book of Daniel points us to Jesus Christ.

It points us to him in order to prepare us for the end. Because when you know that Jesus suffered and died to save you from the ultimate suffering of hell, then you can endure everything else that comes your way in this life.

And so for whatever reason what is happening to you is happening to you, it can't be because God doesn't love you. God has already declared his love for us when Jesus died on the cross.

And that's how we can endure with certain hope for the future. But for those who don't know God, well, there is no hope. There is only an urgent need to turn from sin and trust in Jesus Christ.

[31 : 04] So the message of Daniel at the end is go your way until the end. but make sure that it's the right way. Thank you. Thank you.