

Daniel 12: Living in the hope of God's Eternal Kingdom

Exegetical Big Idea: Many difficulties arise for God's people, as well as many mysteries that are beyond our comprehension. God's people must be wise in perseverance and trust as we wait for the culmination of God's eternal Kingdom

Homiletical Big Idea:

Though we remain in exile for now, we live as citizens of God's eternal Kingdom

Fallen Condition Focus: It is easy to become lethargic and lackadaisical as we await our eternal home. In reality, we ought to be training in righteousness.

Background:

Today we come to the last chapter in the book of Daniel. You'll remember that Daniel and his three friends were taken into captivity while they were just young men, and thrust into the service of their new king, king Nebuchadnezzar. They excelled by God's hand and became trusted advisors very high up in the kingdom. God kept them safe through the furnace and the lion's den and gave them interpretations of dreams. Daniel and the three friends were challenged a number of times but each time remained faithful to God amidst trials and persecutions.

By the time we get to chapter 12, Daniel is a very old man. This too is a gracious gift from God especially if you consider that the life expectancy for men was probably somewhere in the low to mid 40's. And so in all likelihood, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) are all dead.

You'll remember too that Cyrus has already made the decree that any Jew wishing to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple may do so. Daniel however remains, whether by choice or by necessity because of his age we do not know. And so these last few chapters have a bit of a somber tone to them as we understand that Daniel has lived to see the day of the end of exile, and yet he himself has not tasted it. But at the same time, there is something even better waiting for Daniel, as we will read today.

As read chapter 12 now we should be reminded that these last three chapters actually make up a unit. It all starts back at the beginning of chapter 10, when a terrifying being appears to Daniel and reveals to him things that are taking place in the spiritual realm. Then the being reveals things to Daniel in terms of kingdoms and wars and rulers that were still to come. And finally as we pick it up today, we are face with events that are even further away in the future, particularly events that relate to the end of world history as we know it. So today as we look at these verses and things that are yet to come still, we need to really wrestle with the question: "alright so what does this all mean for God's people now?"

Intro:

Who here has been on an airplane? The longest flight I have ever been on was a flight from Vancouver British Columbia, to Sydney Australia. That flight was something crazy like 16 hours.

The hardest thing about being on a plane for 16 hours is that there is nothing to do but sit and wait. There are only so many movies to watch and snacks to eat and pages to read. But there's nothing you

can do. You can't get out and push. You can't make it go any faster. All you do is sit and wait for the plane to take you to your destination.

It is too easy to view the Christian life as boarding an airplane for eternity. You're on the plane, it's going to be uncomfortable until we get there, might as well enjoy some pretzels and take a nap to pass the time.

That's not however the picture we see here. Otherwise God would have just beamed his people up to heaven the moment they believe and are saved. And yet here we are! Until the end, we are called to train in righteousness.

Think about Daniel's situation. He remains in exile, in Persia. What is he to do? His job is not yet complete, his training in righteousness is not done until he is called into his master's presence.

It's the same for us.

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Vv. 1-3 Resurrection hope gives meaning to this life.

Verse one starts with the statement "at that time". There is disagreement as to what "that time" is referring to. It's clearly pointing to the verses coming directly before these verses, although last time we discussed how it is uncertain who exactly is pictured in the previous verses. One strong possibility is that the antichrist is pictured in the previous verses and so "that time" that we are looking at today very well could still be future for us. This makes sense to me since at the time indicated there will be a massive time of trouble that has never been seen before, particularly for God's people. I think there is little doubt that this is referring to the period of great persecution coming for God's people that many call "the tribulation".

Now whether this time is yet to come, or if indeed it is right now, one thing is for certain: God divinely protects his people. The phrase here that Michael has charge over Daniel's people is a phrase that means protection or guarding. No matter what happens in this world, God's people are divinely guarded by him, and we will be delivered.

But who exactly is it that will be delivered? According to verse 1, it is all those whose names are written in "the book". This of course is the same book that is found in Revelation 20. Revelation 20 is a clear reference to this passage in Daniel. The Book of Life contains the name of every person, throughout all of history, who has believed in faith the promises of God fulfilled in Christ Jesus. Yes, even the Old Testament saints' names are written in that book since they believed the promises of God, though they could not see the fulfillment of them yet in Christ.

And so God will protect and deliver his people, but here's where it gets good. Look at how exactly it is that God will deliver his people. Look at V.2 with me which says "many of those who sleep in the dust shall awake". Some will go to everlasting life, and some to everlasting contempt. Just a side note, the word "many" here is not implying that there is a third category of people who will neither be part of heaven or hell. This phrase could either simply be a way of saying "all", or more likely it is referring to those who are killed during the tribulation, while at the same time not excluding those who have died in Christ before the tribulation. But even with the seemingly difficult word of "many", this is still a crystal clear indication of resurrection life given to us in the Old Testament!

The message is clear, those who belong to God have the hope of resurrection unto eternal life.

So with this hope, which is secure and unshakable by the way, are we then to just sit back and wait for it to happen? Nope. Not according to verse 3.

The “wise” here in this verse is just a way of saying those whose names are written in the book. In other words, all Christians! Since all Christians have resurrection hope, all Christians ought to shine as bright as the sky. What does that mean to shine like the brightness of the sky? It means that a life with resurrection hope is a clear contrast to those who have no resurrection hope. And it is exactly by this contrast that God uses his people to display his glory and lead people to Christ.

And so there are two clear implications of a life that has resurrection hope.

The first is this: Do not stop fighting your sin. The more you fight your sin, the more you stand in contrast to the world. Train in righteousness Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who is at work in you. Your reward is everlasting life, so don't stop now.

The second is like it: As you continue to stand in contrast to the sinful world, you shine forth the beauty of the glory of God to those around you. You show those around you who are frantically running around looking for truth, that you have found it, and it's worth giving your life for.

One commentator pointed out here that as the world keeps getting darker, the more God's people like the stars in the sky.

[I have a watch here with a light on it. I can push the button on the side and the face lights up. On a morning like this with the sun coming through the windows and all the lights on, it's hard to actually see the light from my watch. But if this was midnight, and all the lights turned off, you'd be able to see the light from the back of the room]

We live in exile, in a land of evil. But the darker things get, the more God's people shine with the hope of the good news of Christ.

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Vv. 4-10 God's people walk by faith according to God's true Word.

The next few verses are somewhat perplexing, as Daniel is told in verse 4 to shut up the words and seal them before the time of the end. But of course we have the words of this prophecy so does that mean Daniel did not in fact do what he was told? No of course not. That's not the meaning of “seal up” here. The meaning here is more like keeping safe until it is time for these words to come about.

In God's good providence we have these words preserved for us to build us up and give us confidence. The point of these words is the same as the point of all God's Scripture, to reveal God to us so that we may put our faith in him.

Contrast this with what comes next. Verse 4 continues and says “many will run to and fro and knowledge shall increase” Many commentators believe that this is a picture of someone frantically running around looking for something. In this case, because this phrase is in contrast to God's Truth, the picture is of culture who is running back and forth frantically looking for the truth in all the wrong

places. Knowledge in one sense increases, but they never arrive at the truth because they are determined not to surrender to God.

On one hand is the life-giving true and eternal Word of God, and on the other hand is empty knowledge that leads to misery and shame and destruction. What a sad picture of our culture even today.

One very clear example of this in our culture is the month of June. Many people are desperate to find truth that gives their lives meaning and purpose and satisfaction, but all there is is a desperate and frantic running around gaining a kind of knowledge without life-giving truth.

May our lives stand in contrast to the sin of the world, so that we may hold out a better way.

That's just one example, but you'll often here the argument from someone that opposes Christ that they too have faith, and a strong one at that. And I don't doubt that. The amount of your faith is not what matters, it's where you put your faith. There are only two places to put your faith, and you're going to put it in one of these places no matter who you are. You will either put it in God's Word, or yourself.

I can have all the faith in the world that a leprechaun is going to jump out of the next rainbow I see and give me a pot of gold. Does it matter one bit the strength of that faith? No. Why? Because I'm putting my faith in something meaningless.

God alone is the solid place to put your faith, everything and everyone else will fail you. God alone is unchanging and sovereign over all, even if we don't fully understand his plans.

Which we often do not. Indeed Daniel himself does not fully understand. In verse 5-8 two beings are standing with Daniel and one of them asks when all this will happen. The answer is that it will be for "a time, times, and half a time", and "when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes".

Many have undertaken to try and figure out what "a time, times, and half a time" means. It is not even clear that a "time" is to mean a year. But what we can be sure of, is that God has a set time for working out his plan. God will make it happen exactly when he means it to.

I wish I could tell you what those statements mean, but I don't know. And neither does Daniel, because his response in verse 8 is "I heard, but I did not understand". What exactly is it that Daniel does not understand? Probably actually all that the being has told him since chapter 11! Daniel is overwhelmed by this and asks "what shall be the outcome of these things?"

Notice that Daniel's faith is not based on him knowing all the answers. It can't be, because look at the answer to his question in verse 9. The being says to him "Go your way, Daniel..."

Why doesn't the being answer Daniel's question the way we think he should have?

I think the answer is clear. It is because our faith does not rest in knowing all the answers, but on God who is control of all things. Don't miss the little statement in verse 7. After one of the beings asks how long it will be until these things take place, the other one raised his hand and "swore by him who lives forever". That's the key part of these verses. Having a clear understanding of what is going on, is nowhere near as important as knowing that God is the one who is causing it to happen.

[From the perspective and life experience of an adult I find it interesting to stop for a moment and try and think of what life is like for my kids. Take my 3 year old for example. A while back our family was

able to take a trip to Florida. Now from Alana's and my perspective, there was lots of planning involved! But from his perspective, one morning he was woken up, given a snack, put in the van, and didn't come back to his house for a week. Think about that. He has no idea where he's going, how long it will take to get there, or what he's going to do when he gets there. He has no plan on what he's going to eat or what he's going to wear or where he's going to sleep that night. All things that you and I would like to know in that situation! And yet he's perfectly content (for the most part). Why? Because he has every confidence that mom and dad will give him what he needs when he needs it, and that they have it all under control.]

We need that same child-like faith as we trust our God to have it all under control, even when we don't understand what's going on.

God has ordained the events of the end, and until he is good and ready to make them happen, they are sealed up. That's the picture we see in verse 9. The words are "shut up and sealed until the time of the end". The picture here is like a vault, keeping something safe until it is needed.

Thought we don't understand all of what God is going to bring about, we can be sure he will indeed bring it about. God hasn't revealed everything to us, but he has revealed all we need to know.

Verse 10 leaves us with no excuse. There are two groups in verse 10. There are those who humble themselves before God and come to him for cleansing, and there are those who continue in wickedness and rebellion against God. There is no third option. Either you are among those who belong to God by faith and are raised to everlasting life at the end, or you are among those who are stubborn in your rebellion against him and are raised to everlasting shame and contempt. The call is before you today. Receive the forgiveness of Christ and receive everlasting life.

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Vv. 11-13 God's people persevere, because God causes them to persevere.

We come now to the final 2 verses of this entire book. The final and closing thought of the book is namely perseverance unto victory. Granted, there are numbers here that are difficult to understand. They may be referring back to the time of Antiochus as we have seen in previous chapters, or they could still be pointing to the final tribulation, even possibly to both! Though we cannot be certain of this, as always, we can be certain of something, namely that God has ordained an end to the suffering of his people.

These are countable numbers! Whether they are literal days or simply mean periods of time, they clearly refer to a time of suffering for God's people. And we know this of course because blessed is the person who makes it to the end!

Is this an indication that some Christians will *not* make it to the end? I cannot stress enough that I do not think that is what is going on here. I simply think, and this is consistent with the rest of Scripture, that genuine Christianity is only revealed to be genuine at the end.

The implication here is that there are some who will not "wait" and "arrive". This is a dire warning for those who may appear to follow Christ, and yet in reality worship themselves. A person does not belong to Christ by being nice and going to church. A person does not belong to Christ by using Christian language or knowing what the Bible says. Such a person is dead in their sins, though they may seem to

those around them like they are following Christ. No, a person belongs to Christ confessing his lordship and his work on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins. Growing in obedience comes from that faith.

It is easy fake the fruit of the Spirit in front of other people, and for such a person it also may be easy to deceive the church into thinking that such a person is so spiritual, but all that is is self-worship. Such people exist in our churches today, and if they will not repent of this it will be revealed in the end.

But for the person who does belong to Christ by faith there is a glorious promise here of perseverance! Look at what Daniel is told in verse 13. Daniel “shall rest” and he “shall stand”. There is assurance for those who truly belong to God, that they will make it. Will Daniel make it because he is better than everyone else? Nope. Will Daniel make it because done more for God or knows more about God’s plan for the future than anyone else? Nope. Daniel will make it because he belongs to God. His prayer back in chapter 9 reveals that he is a sinful person among sinful people and his only hope is to throw himself at the mercy of God.

The same is true for us today. For the soul that relies on the mercy of God, the promise of rest and victory is given them. Daniel is told he will rest and stand in his allotted place. If you are in Christ, you have the promise of rest at the end of this struggle.

This of course implies that now is not the time to rest! Please don’t misunderstand, God has given us patterns of Sabbath rest that are good for us yes, but in terms of our whole Christian experience, now is not the time to rest.

[I’ve shared before that I’ve had the privilege of coaching my oldest daughter’s soccer team the last couple of years. They meet for an hour ever week and 30 minutes of that is a practice, while the other 30 minutes is a game against another team. For the first 30 minutes we play short games to teach them the skills and have lots of fun. We take lots of water breaks and some game involve less running than others. But then it comes time for the game. I try and teach the girls that there is a time to rest, and a time to run and play as hard as you can. For the record, I aim to be a kind coach and not push these 7 year olds beyond what they can bear, but I do try and keep them playing as hard as they can while they are on the field. It happens often when a kid will get tired or disinterested. You know what I say to them? I tell them that there will be a time to rest, but it is not right now. Now is the time to run! The whistle will blow and the game is going to end and we can all go home, but now is not that time. Now is the time to give it all you have.]

We are involved in eternal matters, so how much more is it important for us to be reminded to keep running! Rest is promised to us and it will come, but now is not that time. Run with perseverance the race marked out for you.

Run too because we also have the promise of victory! When the kids play soccer, they’re not guaranteed to win, but we are. We are to run because victory is ours in Christ Jesus. Victory over our sin. Victory over the evil within and the evil without. Victory over the enemies of God. And yes, victory of death itself. This is the picture that is in mind here even with Daniel who is at the end of his life and has already run a good race. He’s not done yet, and neither are we.

And so, do you belong to the eternal kingdom? If so, are you living like it? We are in exile, in an earthly kingdom that is not ours, but we are to shine like the stars and live like who we truly are, citizens of

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God's eternal kingdom. Until that day when we hear that trumpet sound and Christ returns for his people, then we will rest and have our victory in him forever and ever.

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