

Waiting for the End

Daniel 8

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here. It is good to be with you. I'm glad that we can join together and come to worship. We can sing to our God. We can come to his word, and the portion of his word we're looking at this morning is Daniel chapter 8. So, if you have a Bible, you can turn to Daniel 8. If you didn't bring a Bible with you, we have Bibles in the chairs, as well as we project the passage on the screen. You can follow along there, and, you know, maybe you have it on your device. I just assume if you're looking at your phone, you're reading the Bible. So, you know, it's a safe place.

So, but anyway, we're in Daniel 8, and if you've been with us over the last number of weeks, then you know that Daniel's chapters 1 - 6 are giving us the narrative story, the historical story of Daniel as he's in exile, right? So, the people of God, Israel, have been taken into Babylonian exile. They've been removed from their homes, from the land of Israel, and they're dwelling in this foreign land, and so chapters 1 - 6 tells that story about how they sought to be faithful, even as they're living in exile, and we saw that they didn't assimilate to the culture, nor did they separate from it, but they sought to be faithful ambassadors of the Lord in that foreign place. Well, that was chapters 1 - 6. If you were with us last week, you know chapter 7 takes a turn, because we move out of the narrative portion of Daniel, and we move into the apocalyptic section of Daniel.

So, now we're getting into the strange and the bizarre, right? Visions, and beasts, and numbers. Last week, you remember that we had these four beasts that rose up that Daniel speaks about, and I invited us not to try to assign each beast a different nation. I didn't think that that was the point, but that the point was to talk about the scope of human history, how nations will rise and fall, but in the end, the kingdom of God will come and establish itself when the Son of Man, Jesus, comes and restores all things. So, last week was kind of these general visions about the scope of human history. Well, this week, we're going to get a little more specific, because Daniel's still in exile, and he's still under the rule of Belshazzar, and he's going to have another dream, another vision, but thankfully, this dream, this vision, is interpreted for us. So, we don't have to speculate, we don't have to guess, most of it's interpreted for us. How about that's a better way to put it, but we get a little bit more detail, a little bit more specificity. So, with that, let's go ahead and read Daniel 8, beginning in verse 1.

“In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after that which appeared to me at the first. And I saw in the vision; and when I saw, I was in Susa the citadel, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I was at the Ulai canal. I raised my eyes and saw, and behold, a ram standing on the bank of the canal. It had two horns, and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward. No beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great.

As I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground. And the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. He came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the canal, and he ran at him in his powerful wrath. I saw him come

close to the ram, and he was enraged against him and struck the ram and broke his two horns. And the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled on him. And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power. Then the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.

Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper. Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, "For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?" And he said to me, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state."

When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it. And behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." So he came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."

And when he had spoken to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground. But he touched me and made me stand up. He said, "Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end. As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king. As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power. And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit, a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise. His power shall be great—but not by his own power; and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken—but by no human hand. The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true, but seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now."

And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I rose and went about the king's business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it." (ESV)

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we need your help to understand your Word, for apart from the work of your Spirit, apart from you opening our eyes and softening our hearts, we would be in the dark. And so, we pray, Father, that you would guide us, and that you would lead us. I pray, Father, that your Spirit would allow the words that are spoken to honor you, and that you would allow all of us to meditate upon your Word and truth. And so, Father, be with us. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

The Difficulty of Waiting

Well, as the weather is starting to warm up and spring breaks are upon us, I know some kids, your spring break just ended. Others are about to start. I'm sure many of us are starting to think towards summer vacation and making plans for that time away from work and those road trips to relax. And so, we know what that will entail, right? The day will come when it's time to head out on vacation, and we'll pack our bags and fill our coolers, and we'll load up the car or the van, and away we'll go. Whether we're going to someplace familiar or someplace new, we know with certainty that as soon as we get in the car, maybe within an hour, maybe 30 minutes, maybe just 10 minutes down the road, we know with certainty we will hear a certain phrase. You know what that phrase is, of course? "Are we there yet?" Right from the farthest parts of the van, "how much longer," right? Our children are going to ask this question, right? Kids, you're going to do it.

It's okay. Your parents did it too when they were kids. And in fact, your parents would probably still ask how are we there yet or how much further if we didn't have that wonderful tool, GPS, right, that tells us exactly where we're going and exactly what time we'll be there. It's natural to wonder. It's natural to ask that question when you're on a trip or a journey. We want to know, when will we arrive? Are we there yet? How much longer? It's true on a road trip, but it's also true in life, right? We're moving towards a future reality. We heard about it last week in Daniel chapter 7, right, that there is a future that is waiting for us, the future when the kingdom of God will be consummated at the coming of Jesus, right? The son of man will come and he will constitute the kingdom of God and he will renew all things and we will dwell with him forever. That is the future that we are moving towards, but we're not there yet. Right, and so we wonder, how long? How long? Right, as we experience pain and hardship in this world, as we experience sadness and disappointment while we wait for his coming, we ask, how long?

That's a common question in the Psalms. The Psalmist asks it frequently, actually, when they're confronted with pain, suffering, difficulty, and strife, they call out to God, how long, O Lord? It's a common question in the Psalms. It's a question that we feel in our hearts and it's actually a question that's asked in this passage. But what's interesting is that it's not Daniel or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego or another Israelite who asked that question. No, it's angels who asked that question. Did you see that? Daniel's given this vision of a ram, a goat, with horns, with a little horn, and he says that there are these holy ones that are speaking to one another. These holy ones, so these angelic beings. And in verse 13, we're told this, "then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, for how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering? The transgression that makes desolate and the giving over the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot." So, you hear what the angel asked? "How long? How long will Daniel and his countrymen and the people of God, how long will they have to wait? How long will we?" Well, Daniel's going to be given an answer to this question, but before we get to the answer, I want to talk first about why it's so difficult for us to wait. The difficulty of waiting.

Because as we're waiting for the kingdom of God, it can be hard to wait for Jesus to return. It can be hard for us as we long for that day when he will consummate the kingdom. And it's hard because we know that the kingdom that we're waiting for is the very opposite of the kingdoms that we experience today. We actually see that in our passage. In our passage, these visions that Daniel is given, it's a world full of pain. Nations are at war. There is unrest. There is opposition to the Lord. I mean, think about the vision. So, we have this ram, this ram that's charging westward and northward and southward, right? He's taking land and war and he's becoming great and mighty. But then the goat comes against the ram and the goat defeats the ram. And now the goat's empire grows and it expands and becomes great and mighty. And we don't have to speculate on who the goat is or who the ram is because Gabriel tells us, right? We're given an interpretation. The angel Gabriel comes and he interprets it. Verse 20, the ram is the Medo-Persian empire. Verse 21, the goat is the king of Greece. And in history, we can look back. You know, being on this side of this vision, we can look back and we can actually see the historical realities playing out of this vision. It's easy to see who the large horn is. Pretty much every theologian I looked at would say that the goat is Alexander the Great. That it is the king of Greece. Because this Alexander the Great, the Greek king, defeated the Persian army. And then he conquered most of the known world. And then after Alexander the Great, after he died, four generals were raised up.

Four horns of verse 22. And we're told that out of these comes a little horn, verses 10 through 12. And out of this little horn, this little horn will bring down the host or the stars. I take that as a reference to persecuting the people of God. He opposes the Lord. He takes away worship. He removes the burnt offerings and overthrows the sanctuary. So this is actually a historical reality that the world has already seen. So this isn't simply something that we are looking forward to. It's something that Daniel was looking towards. Because most theologians believe that the little horn was fulfilled in the historical figure Antiochus Epiphanes. Now, Antiochus was an actual historical figure. He was one of the rulers of the four kingdoms after Alexander had died. And he hated God's people. He hated God's people. We know that he banned circumcision. He prohibited sacrifices. He defiled the altar of God with a pig's flesh. He placed an idol of Zeus in the Holy of Holies. He burned the scriptures and he killed those who sought to remain faithful to the Lord. Antiochus was an evil and wicked man who brought death to God's people and opposed the ways of the Lord.

And that is the vision that Daniel is given here. So think about that. As bad as exile was, and it was horrible, right? Taken away from their land, taken away from their homes, persecuted, opposed, the threat of death, even death itself. As bad as exile was, this vision is telling Daniel that for the people of God, the future is only going to get worse. And what's sad is that one of the reasons why it's going to get worse is because of the sin of the people – the people of God. We actually see it in verse 12. God's people are going to go through this because of transgression. Now, there is some debate, some think that transgression is the little horn. I, and there are theologians who think this as well, believe that this is the transgression of God's people. That they have sinned and rebelled against the Lord. And actually, we're going to see this theme next week in Daniel, chapter 9. So I'll hold off on, I don't want to steal next week's thunder. But what we're seeing is that the sins of the people and the persecution that's coming, that is what Daniel is given a vision of.

So do you see why it would be so hard to wait for the promise of chapter 7? For God's eternal kingdom, all the things that they've experienced and that they're going to experience, it would have been so hard, right? Of course, they would wonder, how long? The passage asks that question, but so do we. We ask that question. Not because our doors are being broken down, not because we're being taken to a foreign country, not because our lives are in danger, there

is gross sacrilege in the sanctuary. No, we ask how long because of that diagnosis that is made. Because of the gossip and the rumors and the lies that might be spoken about us. We ask how long because of childlessness and broken relationships. We ask how long because of poverty and pain in our city. We ask how long because of injustice and death in our land. We ask how long because of war and unrest in this world. How long do we wait? Because we know we will wait. So if we know we're going to wait, what do we do while we wait? What is our lives? What are they supposed to look like?

Waiting with Hope

Well, you know, we have some options. We could numb ourselves to the realities of the world. We could numb ourselves with a pint of ice cream, the bottom of a bottle. We could numb ourselves by throwing ourselves into our work or hours on the treadmill or starving our bodies or living vicariously through our children or grandchildren. We could try to anesthetize ourselves while we wait. Or we could wait with hope. We could wait with hope. Hope that as bad as exile is, as painful as the world is, there's an end. That's what we see in verse 14. You see after the angel asks how long, the answer comes immediately. For 2300 evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state. Now, I probably don't have to tell you, there's a lot of debate about what this means. I mean, a lot of ink has been spilled. I'm going to try and summarize this quickly for you. But generally, there are three different views about what the 2300 is referring to. The first is it's 2300 morning and evening sacrifices. So that would basically equal 1,150 days, actual days. So that's one view. The second view is that this is literally 2300 days. Just take it as it is. The third is that it's symbolic. It doesn't really mean this many days or that many days or this many sacrifices. It's simply symbolism.

Now, I think that the best is either going to be 2 or 3. Options 2 or 3. So, the argument for 3 seeing as symbolic is, well, it's apocalyptic literature. There's all sorts of symbolism, right? We've seen lots and lots of symbolism already. And we know in other apocalyptic literature, there's more symbolism and numbers often mean different things. So there's an argument to be made for that. The argument for the second view that this is 2300 actual days is that this equates to roughly 6 years and 4 months, which is basically the time when Antiochus, remember Antiochus, the little horn, opposed the people, destroyed the temple, sacrilege, all those things. 6 years and 4 months is roughly the time that Antiochus began his persecution and when the temple was reconstituted. It's not exact. It's not, like, to the day or anything. But it's pretty darn close. So those are the best two options. And I have to tell you, I'm not 100% settled. I'm, like, 5149 that this is 2300 literal days. But if you ask me, like, tomorrow, I might be 5149 symbolic because on Monday, I was 5149 that it was symbolic.

So, you know, maybe ask me in, like, a month and you'll maybe get a different view. But I think the point, though, is, is regardless of whether it's symbolism or 2300 literal days, the point that is being presented to us is that though there is going to be a period of struggle and difficulty and pain and persecution for the people of God, and though that will be long, it is limited. It will come to an end. We may not know the exact moment, but God does. And we can rest in that. And so this is actually an invitation for us to wait with hope. Hope that the kingdom of this world, the kingdoms of this world will give way to the kingdom of God. That is our hope. We wait with hope. And when Daniel is given this vision that is both disturbing as well as hopeful, do you see what he does? How he responds to it?

There's two things that he responds with. First, he's distressed by it. That's what we see in verse 27. He's overcome. He was sick. He's appalled by the vision. You see, the reality of evil doesn't sit well with Daniel. He doesn't simply throw up his hands and go, well, this is just the way of the world. No, he felt the weight of wickedness into evil. And friends, it's right for us to feel that as well. It's right for us to look at the evil in this world and to feel the weight of it, to feel the burden of it, to be appalled at what we see in the world. That's part of our waiting. That's why we have hope, right? That's why we have a hope that one day it will come to an end. If everything was beautiful and good and wonderful, then what would we be looking forward to, right? It's right for us to be appalled. So Daniel's distressed. But the other thing we see in verse 27 is that while in his distress, he still did the king's business. Do you see that? He continued in his work and responsibilities. So think about that. Daniel is distressed about what's coming. He also has a hope, right? A hope is presented that things will be restored. But this restoration is many years away. And so instead of wallowing in despair or idly waiting for the kingdom of God, he returns to his work. He continues to be faithful to what he was called to in the moment. He knows what's coming, persecution and restoration.

And even though he knows what's coming, he continues to labor and work. It reminds me of that answer to the question, what would you do if Jesus was coming back tomorrow? So Martin Luther and John Wesley were both asked that question. So two, you know, figures from church history, two from different theological persuasions, both asked that question. If Jesus was coming back tomorrow, what would you do today? No one shout out what you would do, but think about that for a second. Martin Luther said, "I would plant a tree." And John Wesley said, "if Jesus was coming back tomorrow, I'd go to bed tonight and sleep. I'd wake in the morning and go on my way to work." In essence, they're saying, we know, knowing what the future will bring doesn't change what I'm called to today. In fact, I would say that knowing the future and what tomorrow will bring motivates us to be faithful today. I mean, think about all the times that Jesus speaks of his return, right? He has these parables where he talks about himself coming like a thief in the night, and no one knows when he's going to come, so be ready. And in Mark 13, he says that the master will go away, but the servants, while the master is away, are given work to do. They're to give themselves as they wait for his return.

And friends, that's what we're called to do. As we wait, to wait with hope means that we don't simply sit idly, longing for the kingdom to come. It doesn't mean that we despair about the evil and wickedness of this world. No, no, we are faithful in the work God has called us to. Pursuing the Lord as individuals and as a people, growing in grace, laboring in our homes and in our schools, in our neighborhoods and in our work. You see, we wait with hope by faithfully pursuing the Lord wherever he has placed us. For Daniel, it was doing the king's business. Y'all, we have said this before, this was not a king who loved Jesus. He was not one who loved the people of God, right? And yet, Daniel served him. He was faithful in where God had placed him. And that's what we are to do. As we wait with hope, we wait faithfully, knowing what tomorrow will bring. That the kingdom of God will come. That the desolation that is promised, it will be no more. That there will be the restoration of all things.

That is what is promised. Now, how can we be sure of that? I mean, that's actually an important question. Because as we're confronted with pain of this world, desolation, this vision that Daniel is given, right? Like, how can he be so sure that it will come to an end? How can we be? We can be sure of the future because we know what's happened in the past. You see, hundreds of years after Daniel's vision and thousands of years ago, Jesus, who is the temple of God, right? The one who tabernacled, who made his dwelling place with God's people, Jesus was persecuted. And He was shamed, and He was mocked and ridiculed, and

His body was desecrated on the cross. And by His death, He brought forgiveness, and He brought grace, and He brought mercy. And Jesus, this one who promised that He would bring grace and mercy through His death, is the same one who promised that He would one day return. And when He returns, He will consummate the kingdom, and He will restore all things to the way that they were intended to be. That is what He has promised. And so, we can be sure that that will come because we are sure of what has come. That Jesus has given His life, and He has gone to the cross, and He has risen and ascended into heaven, and He is returning. And in His return, He will fully consummate His kingdom. And so, friends, that's why we can be sure of what is coming. That is why we can be so sure of the future, and that is why we can wait with hope and with faithfulness, because we know the end. Daniel was promised that the desecration that occurred would come to an end, and that is the promise that we are given in Jesus, that it will come to an end. And so, are we there yet? No, we are not there yet, but we wait with hope. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You. Thank You that our Lord Jesus is returning, and in His return, He will make all things new. He will restore this world and His people, and we will dwell with Him forever. And so we pray, Father, that You would help us to wait. That we would wait with hope. That we would be people who wait, looking forward to that day. That we would wait, being faithful in all the things that You have called us to. And so, Father, I pray that You would equip us to do that. Turn our eyes towards Christ, and let us, Father, wait with hope. We pray all this in Christ's name. In God's people's name, Amen.