

God Is in Control

Daniel 11

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Well, good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. My name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here. If you are a guest or visitor, we're glad that you would join us. Welcome. We are nearing the end of our series in the book of Daniel. This morning, we're going to be in Daniel chapter 11. So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Daniel 11. There's only 12 chapters in this book, so we're going to complete our series next Sunday. And if you were with us last week, then you might remember that what I said was that Daniel 10, 11, and 12 encompass one single vision.

So the second half of the book of Daniel is filled with all sorts of visions, with dreams, with interpretations. And the final vision for Daniel started in chapter 10, it moves into chapter 11, and finishes in chapter 12. And so last week, what we heard from this vision is that God is at work in the spiritual realm, right? That the realm of angels and demons, of demonic forces and evil powers, and good forces and good powers, that that world that is often blind to us, we were given a glimpse of, and we heard that God is battling, He is warring. He is fighting on behalf of His people, that He is in complete control of the spiritual world. Well, that vision that began last week, it continues this morning. And this morning, what we're going to see is that that the vision doesn't focus on the spiritual realm any longer, but instead on the physical realm. Upon history, about powers, and nations, princes, and kings, and potentates, and queens, about how God is in control over that as well.

Now, as we come to chapter 11, I do have to acknowledge that our work is cut out for us this morning. It's 45 verses long. John Calvin, the great reformed theologian, French theologian, he devoted 100 pages of his commentary to just this one chapter. So, that's a lot. Also, another commentator named H.C. Leopold, he once said that "this chapter might be treated in Bible classes but we do not see how it could be used for a sermon or for sermons." So, unfortunately, Mr. Leopold won't hear what I have to say today. But with those ominous words before us, we turn to Daniel chapter 11. And because it is so long, we're going to break up the reading into three parts. So, we're going to read the entirety of the chapter. We're just not going to read it all at the very beginning. So, we're going to read verses 1 through 19 now. So, follow along in your Bibles or on the screens in front of you. This is God's Word.

"And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him. And now I will show you the truth. Behold, three more kings shall arise in Persia, and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them. And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece. Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills. And as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not to his posterity, nor according to the authority with which he ruled, for his kingdom shall be plucked up and go to others besides these. Then the king of the south shall be strong, but one of his princes shall be stronger than he and shall rule, and his authority shall be a great authority. After some years they shall make an alliance, and the daughter of the king of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement. But she shall not retain the strength of her arm, and he and his arm shall not endure, but she shall be given up, and her attendants, he who fathered her, and he who supported her in those times.

And from a branch from her roots one shall arise in his place. He shall come against the army and enter the fortress of the king of the north, and he shall deal with them and shall prevail. He shall also carry off to Egypt their gods with their metal images and their precious vessels of silver and gold, and for some years he shall refrain from attacking the king of the north. Then the latter shall come into the realm of the king of the south but shall return to his own land.

His sons shall wage war and assemble a multitude of great forces, which shall keep coming and overflow and pass through, and again shall carry the war as far as his fortress. Then the king of the south, moved with rage, shall come out and fight against the king of the north. And he shall raise a great multitude, but it shall be given into his hand. And when the multitude is taken away, his heart shall be exalted, and he shall cast down tens of thousands, but he shall not prevail. For the king of the north shall again raise a multitude, greater than the first. And after some years he shall come on with a great army and abundant supplies.

In those times many shall rise against the king of the south, and the violent among your own people shall lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision, but they shall fail. Then the king of the north shall come and throw up siegeworks and take a well-fortified city. And the forces of the south shall not stand, or even his best troops, for there shall be no strength to stand. But he who comes against him shall do as he wills, and none shall stand before him. And he shall stand in the glorious land, with destruction in his hand. He shall set his face to come with the strength of his whole kingdom, and he shall bring terms of an agreement and perform them. He shall give him the daughter of women to destroy the kingdom, but it shall not stand or be to his advantage. Afterward he shall turn his face to the coastlands and shall capture many of them, but a commander shall put an end to his insolence. Indeed, he shall turn his insolence back upon him. Then he shall turn his face back toward the fortresses of his own land, but he shall stumble and fall, and shall not be found.”

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

Heavenly Father, as we come to this word, we ask that you would give us understanding. We need your help. Apart from your Spirit, our eyes would be closed. We would be left in the dark. We would be left confused. And so we pray, Father, that you would give us clarity, that you would help us to see, and that you would lead us as we come to this word. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

So one of the things that I love about baseball is the game that's within the game. So the game that takes place that many of us often aren't aware of, we don't see on our TV screens. It's the game within the game. It's the mind game that is taking place oftentimes between a pitcher and a catcher. You see, the best pitchers in the world, they don't just simply rely on high velo, and they don't just simply try to spin the ball wherever it will go. No, they try to keep the batter off balance. So they'll throw fast balls, but then throw change-ups that look like fast balls, but they're slow, and they'll make the ball move many, many inches wide, and they'll trip up the batter. This is a good pitcher. This is what good pitchers do. And one of the best at this was a man named Greg Maddox. Greg Maddox pitched for the Atlanta Braves, and in 1999, he was pitching against the Houston Astros, and Jeff Bagwell was up at the plate. Now, Jeff Bagwell at the time was one of the most dangerous hitters in baseball, and everyone knew that he could just pummel the inside pitch. And so before the game, Maddox told his catcher, do not set up inside, right? He will destroy it. And so as the game went on, the Braves had the game in victory. They had it won. There was no question about it. So

Maddox told his catcher, set up inside to Bagwell. So the catcher, thinking maybe, you know, the professor, that's what Maddox was called, knew what he was doing, set up inside, and sure enough, Bagwell destroyed it. I mean, it was mammoth. It was a towering home run. And his catcher was perplexed. He couldn't understand. This was certainly a lapse of judgment, that in this moment, Maddox, who was always in control, for this moment, he lost control of his discipline and tried to beat Bagwell on the inside corner. Well, fast forward a few months, the Braves are now playing the Astros in the playoffs, and Maddox again is facing Bagwell, but the game isn't out of reach. The game is actually quite close, and Maddox, knowing that Bagwell destroyed that inside pitch, now threw three change-ups. Change-ups, remember, look like fastballs, except they're a little bit slower, and they tail away from a right-handed hitter. And so he throws these three change-ups, and sure enough, Bagwell struck out on those three pitches. He swung and missed. And as he was walking off the mound, Maddox yelled at his catcher, "you remember months ago? He was looking for that same pitch, that homer he hit." You see, Maddox was playing 3D chess when everyone else was playing checkers. He set up Bagwell months before for that one occasion to strike him out. You see, when it looked like he was completely out of control, when he didn't really know what he was doing with that single pitch, actually Maddox was in complete control. He knew exactly what he was doing. On the mound, he was in complete control of not just that one moment, but the moment that was going to come months later.

We Can Have Hope

And that's what our passage is telling us about the Lord. It's telling us about history, because when we look at history, history looks like chaos, doesn't it? It looks like coincidence. It looks like there's no control. There's no rhyme, no reason to certain events. In fact, Joseph Heller once wrote that "history is a trash bag of random coincidences torn open in a wind." And that's what it can look like to us, right? Nations rise and fall. Leaders come and go. It seems no rhyme, no reason. It seems chaotic. It seems like there is nothing in control. And yet, our passage is telling us the exact opposite. That God is in complete control over history. And because God is in control, we can put our hope in him. That's what these first 19 verses are pointing us to. Because these first 19 verses aren't chaos. They're not God losing control. They're showing through a historical sketch events that were future to the life of Daniel, but are historical to us that God is in control of these things.

So, this historical sketch, it's actually a rehearsing, a rehashing of chapter 8. So, chapter 8 of Daniel, it tells us that kings will arise in Persia. A king will have dominion over the known world. A king from the south will rise up and be strong. He will make peace with king from the north. There will be alliances and marriages and attacks and battles and destruction and war. And we could spend all the rest of our sermon today and next week and maybe the next week going over all these details in chapter 11. We're not going to do that, okay? But if we were to do it, we would see that all these kings that are spoken of in the historical minutia, Cyrus and Xerxes, who are clearly alluded to, Alexander the Great and Ptolemy and Ptolemy II and Beatrice and her father and her brothers, that all of these things that took place in history after the fall of Babylon and after the time of Daniel, that Daniel's predicting them with great historical accuracy. And while those details in historical events would be fascinating, ultimately that's not the point.

No, the point of these first 19 verses is to show us the futility of putting our hope in the things of this world, in the powers of this world. Did you notice all the but's, B-U-T-S-es in the first 19 verses? They're all over the place. Verses 4, 5, 6, 14, 16, 19. Powers rise, but another takes

its place. Leaders come, but another leader follows, right? Leaders rise up, but he will stumble. These things, they come and they go, they rise and they fall. Even Alexander the Great in verses 3 and 4, pretty much every commentator thinks that that's a reference to Alexander the Great. You know who Alexander the Great is, right? One of the greatest military minds to ever walk the earth, one of the most powerful kings, right? He conquered most of the known world, and yet for all of his greatness, all of his power, 27 Hebrew words are devoted to him. That's it. One of the greatest military leaders, and yet Daniel gives no time to him. Why? Because Daniel is showing us the futility in putting our hope in earthly powers. That we don't put our hope in earthly powers, they come and go. We put our hope in the Lord. And y'all, we need reminding this.

We need to be reminded of this because we have a tendency to put our hope in national leaders, in political powers, in political parties, right? It's just something that we were invited to do. I mean, think about the elections that come and go, right? What do we hear almost every election? This is the most important election of the generation, right? Until two years later, when it's the most important, right? And the generation didn't change, but all of a sudden, it's now "the most", right? And what are they doing when they say this? They're saying "everything's going to fall apart. Everything's going to come down, so put your hope in me. My opponent, they're terrifying. They're scary. They'll take away your freedoms. They'll rob you of your rights. They'll do all these things, but me. I'll protect you. I'll help you. Put your trust." Come on, y'all. You know this is what they're doing. They're wanting us to put our hope and trust in worldly powers. Now, listen, I'm not saying elections are meaningless or they're not important, right? I'm not saying anything like that. So they're part of our civic responsibilities. I get that. What I'm simply saying is that whether we're talking about Alexander the Great or George Washington, Churchill or Stalin, Merkel or Trump, leaders are going to come and go. All of them. All of them. That's what we've seen throughout history, and that's what we will see going forward. No empire, no kingdom is forever except the kingdom of God. Except the kingdom of God. And that's what verses 1 through 19 are telling us. As strong as these powers are, they are only for a time. They're only for a time. That means they're only for God's time, right? God has set the parameters by which these leaders will rise and fall, for how long their kingdoms will be established.

We Can Persevere

It's inviting us to see that God is in complete control of history. And so we put our hope in him. But we don't just put our hope in him because he's in control. Because he's in control, also gives us the ability to persevere in times of trial. And that's what the next set of verses are going to be. So we're going to pick up our reading in verse 20, and I think we've got that on the screen so you can follow along there as well.

"Then shall arise in his place one who shall send an exactor of tribute for the glory of the kingdom. But within a few days he shall be broken, neither in anger nor in battle. In his place shall arise a contemptible person to whom royal majesty has not been given. He shall come in without warning and obtain the kingdom by flatteries. Armies shall be utterly swept away before him and broken, even the prince of the covenant. And from the time that an alliance is made with him he shall act deceitfully, and he shall become strong with a small people. Without warning he shall come into the richest parts of the province, and he shall do what neither his fathers nor his fathers' fathers have done, scattering among them plunder, spoil, and goods. He shall devise plans against strongholds, but only for a time. And he shall stir up his power and his

heart against the king of the south with a great army. And the king of the south shall wage war with an exceedingly great and mighty army, but he shall not stand, for plots shall be devised against him. Even those who eat his food shall break him. His army shall be swept away, and many shall fall down slain. And as for the two kings, their hearts shall be bent on doing evil. They shall speak lies at the same table, but to no avail, for the end is yet to be at the time appointed. And he shall return to his land with great wealth, but his heart shall be set against the holy covenant. And he shall work his will and return to his own land.

At the time appointed he shall return and come into the south, but it shall not be this time as it was before. For ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he shall be afraid and withdraw, and shall turn back and be enraged and take action against the holy covenant. He shall turn back and pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant. Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder. When they stumble, they shall receive a little help. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery, and some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time.”

So this section is rehearsing what we had heard in chapter 8 as well. But this one isn't going through specific nations and how they rise and fall. This section is focusing on a particular person, Antiochus Epiphanes. So these three sections are broken down. Verses 22 through 24 are the synopsis of his reign. Verses 25 through 31 are the objects of his hostility. And verses 32 through 35 are the cost of his savagery. And Antiochus was savage. He was a horrible and wicked leader. Remember what we heard about him from weeks ago. He persecuted God's people. He killed those who obeyed the Sabbath and those who practiced circumcision. He removed the sacrifices from the temple and replaced them with worship of Zeus. He desecrated the temple of God by offering a pig on the altar and he brought destruction. Antiochus was wicked and evil. And what Daniel is being told in this vision is that when he comes, persecution will come. Persecution. And some will give in to the pressure of persecution while others will persevere. That's what we see in verses 32 through 35. “He shall seduce with flattery.” That's Antiochus. He's going to seduce with flattery “those who violate the covenant. But the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. And the wise among the people shall make many understand. Though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder, when they stumble they shall receive a little help. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery. And some of the wise shall stumble so that they may be refined, purified, and made white until the time of the end. For it still awaits the appointed time.” So what we're hearing is that under this persecution there will be some who waver. They give in to flattery and they violate the covenant. But we're told that others in the midst of persecution, they will stand firm. They will take action even at the expense of their lives. That's what verse 33 is talking about. “They stumbled by sword and flame, captivity and plunder.” But, verse 35, “they may be refined, purified, made white.”

So what God is doing here is he's giving Daniel a vision of what is to come so that the people of God are prepared for when it comes. So when persecution comes and evil rises up against God's people, they will be ready to persevere. And so in many ways, Daniel 11, this section of Daniel 11, is functioning like John 16. When Jesus says to his disciples, in the world you

will have tribulation. Not you, not maybe, not perhaps, you will. So be prepared, be ready. That word was for Daniel's people. It was for the disciples who heard Jesus's words first, but that word's for us. Be ready, be prepared. Tribulation will come. Now listen, in Roanoke in 2026, we are not experiencing persecution like what they're talking about here, right? I mean, that should be obvious to us. That our lives are not threatened like the people who are living in Babylon, or the people who are under Antiochus, or even believers who are in Nigeria today who suffer persecution every day. We are generally free from this sort of persecution, this sort of opposition. And yet, that doesn't mean that we are supposed to just sit idly by, but instead that we too need to beware. Beware of the flattery that the powerful could use to woo us away from the Lord and to themselves. That we need to open our eyes to the subtle invitations that call us to deviate from God's word. We need to be on guard against those seemingly inconsequential comforts that sin affords us or offers to us. That these things, they don't seem significant in the moment, but they can lead us slowly, methodically, minutely to turn from God's word and embrace the world and to cling to our flesh.

And what this passage is doing is it's calling us to persevere, to persevere in following the Lord, to persevere in the face of mockery, of maligning, of persecution, because God is in control. God is in control even in the midst of tribulation. Verse 35, "until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time." It will come to an end. Dale Ralph Davis, the theologian, he likened this to a governor that's put on a truck. You all know what that is, right? A governor, it prevents the truck from going beyond a certain speed. So it doesn't matter how hard the driver presses on the accelerator, how long they push down upon it, the truck will not exceed 60 or 65, right? It will only go that fast and no faster. And that's what God is saying about persecution, about trial, about tribulation. It will come, but it will only come for the appointed time in which I have said it. That it will come to an end. Babylon, the people left. Antiochus, his reign ended at the appointed time. Again, God is in control. God is in control even over trial, even over tribulation, and so we can persevere. We can have hope.

We Can Have Confidence

And finally, because God is in control over history, over Antiochus, in control over our future, we can have confidence about our future. Now let's finish our reading, beginning in verse 36.

"And the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is decreed shall be done. He shall pay no attention to the gods of his fathers, or to the one beloved by women. He shall not pay attention to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all. He shall honor the god of fortresses instead of these. A god whom his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He shall deal with the strongest fortresses with the help of a foreign god. Those who acknowledge him he shall load with honor. He shall make them rulers over many and shall divide the land for a price.

At the time of the end, the king of the south shall attack him, but the king of the north shall rush upon him like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships. And he shall come into countries and shall overflow and pass through. He shall come into the glorious land. And tens of thousands shall fall, but these shall be delivered out of his hand: Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites. He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape.

He shall become ruler of the treasures of gold and of silver, and all the precious things of Egypt, and the Libyans and the Cushites shall follow in his train. But news from the east and the north shall alarm him, and he shall go out with great fury to destroy and devote many to destruction. And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain. Yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him.”

Now some think that this is talking about Antiochus still, that it's continuing on, that his evil only becomes more evil. But I actually think, along with many other theologians, that this is pointing to someone else. That there is someone more wicked than Antiochus who will arise. That Antiochus is actually the model for the final wicked king who will oppose God and his people. The reason I think this is because some of the things that are taking place here never came to fulfillment with Antiochus. That actually they go far beyond anything he did. For instance, in verses 36 and 37, this man, this king who rises, he deifies himself. He “exalts himself over the gods.” In verse 38, he “honors the god of fortresses”. This means he's the personification of war. In verse 39, he “seduces.” In verses 40 and 44, he will “have dominance.” What this is telling us is that as bad as Antiochus was, there's greater trial and greater tribulation to come.

Now, some have associated this with the man of lawlessness of Thessalonians, others the Antichrist. Regardless, what it's telling us is that when this man comes, when this tribulation rises, it will seem like all is lost. But for God's people, we can have confidence. We can have confidence because though it may seem like all is lost, we're told in verse 45, “he shall come to his end with none to help him.” Have you noticed that at every section that we have read, we have heard something similar as to that? Things are horrible, things are chaotic, things seem out of control, things are terrible, there is persecution, there will be evil. Until the end. Until it is brought to a close. That God is in control. Time and again, over and over, what we are being told, God is ruling over history. He ruled over Antiochus. He's ruling over our future. Wickedness shall come to an end. You know, when I quoted John 16, some of you know that I stopped mid-verse. Jesus said, “in this world you will have tribulation.” It's coming. Be prepared. Be ready. It will come. And then he went on. He said, “but take heart. I have overcome the world.”

We can have confidence. Confidence that as bad as things may get, as great as evil might be, they are no match for the Lord. That Jesus has overcome the world. That God is over this world and he is in control. Jesus has overcome it by going to the cross. He has overcome the world by rising again. He has overcome it by ascending into heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father. And he will overcome it one final time when he returns. And he will bring to an end all evil and wickedness and establish his kingdom forever. God is in control. Ian Duguid, the theologian, put it this way. He said, “there's an old saying. All good things must come to an end. But fortunately, the same is true of all bad things as well.” Tyrants rise and fall. Empires come and go. But the Lord's kingdom endures forever. And with it, those whom God has redeemed by his grace. And y'all, that is the message of Daniel 11. That we can have hope. That we can persevere in the midst of trial. That we can have confidence. Because in the face of history, in the face of evil, in the face of our futures, God is in control. Amen.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you that for all the seemingly, seeming chaos of our world and the difficulties that we face and the struggles that may come, that you're in control. That you hold your people in the palm of your hand and nothing, no one can remove us from it. And so

we pray, Father, that you would help us to have hope. That you would help us to persevere. That you would help us to have confidence. Not in ourselves. Not in earthly powers. But in you. The God who reigns. The God who's in control of history. Of trial. Of the future. Let us rest in hope in you. And it's in Jesus' name we pray. And God's people said together, Amen.