

Go Your Way

Daniel 12

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Well, good morning. It's good to be with you this morning. My name is Tobias. I'm the associate pastor here at CTK, and it's my privilege to open up God's Word with us this morning. If you've been with us through Daniel, then you know that we've been on quite a journey, haven't we? We've watched Daniel's friends walk into a furnace rather than bow down. We've watched Daniel himself defy the King's ordinance against prayer, emerge from a lion's den, interpret dreams no one else could interpret, and receive vision and vision of kingdoms rising and falling like waves. Through it all, Daniel has trusted God faithfully, and God has answered. But chapter 12 is different. Here, the answers stop. The visions are sealed, and the word Daniel receives is simply this: the deliverance will come but only through the deepest suffering God's people have ever known. And at the end of everything, he's simply told, "go your way." What makes that possible? Go your way. That's the question this final chapter is answering, so let's go ahead and read it together - Chapter 12 of Daniel.

"At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."

Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on this bank of the stream and one on that bank of the stream. And someone said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, "How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?" And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished. I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?" He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days. But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days."

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let's pray.

Oh Father, we thank you. We thank you that you have given us the opportunity to gather and study this book. We thank you that you have preserved Daniel for us to teach us about who you are, what you've done, what you call us to. We thank you, Lord, that we can come here

today, open it freely, worship you in spirit and in truth. And Father, we pray now that as we end our series on the book of Daniel, we pray that its truths will land. We pray, Lord, that you will open our eyes and our ears to hear and to see a final message from you coming through this book. Enlighten us through your spirit, Lord. And may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

So, Terrence Malick. Terrence Malick is a polarizing film director. Some of you might know that. Some people love what he creates, others have zero appreciation for it. Full disclosure, I'm in the former camp. In fact, his film, *The Tree of Life*, is one of my favorite films. I've watched it many times, and each experience has brought me to tears, as my wife could tell you. It opens with a single voice, a woman's voice, Mrs. O'Brien's. It's quiet, internal. She's talking to God rather than to us. "I will be true to you," she says, "whatever comes." It's a vow, a commitment to the way that receives, a way that trusts God's goodness, even when it's difficult to see. And she means it, but she has no idea what it's about to cost her. Because what immediately comes is a telegram. Her son is dead, 19 years old, R.L. his name, the second of three boys. He was kind and creative. He's gone. And this mother, this woman who'd made that vow years before, wanders weeping and aimless, her grief rising through shadowy treetops as if the earth itself were grieving with her. Then later, still wrestling with his loss, we find her walking through sunlit woods, looking up through the branches. She closes her eyes, and she asks, "Lord, why? Where were you?"

She doesn't receive an answer. Instead, what she gets is a vision of creation unfolding before her, unfolding before you and me. Not an explanation, but a glimpse of the one who holds everything. The God who laid the foundations of the earth, who calls the stars by name. He simply shows her who he is. It's the same thing Job received from the whirlwind. Peter Lightheart, reflecting on the film, says something profound. "Faith doesn't ease questions of suffering. Faith intensifies them." Mrs. O'Brien's anguish comes precisely because she believes in a God with hands big enough to hold her son. But if there's a God, if there's a good God, then what she's experiencing isn't just painful, it's bewildering. You see, the questions she's asking isn't really about information withheld. It's a deeper thing. She's asking, "Why did this have to happen? Why does the path run through this darkness and not around it?" Near the end of the film, there's a moment to me that's haunting in its beauty. Flanked by two women, Mrs. O'Brien raises her hands to the sky and opens them. She whispers simply, "I give him to you. I give you my son." She doesn't have the answer, but she knows the one who holds it, and her hands are open.

Malick's movie is about two ways of moving through suffering. One responds with clenched fists at God, at the world, at anything within reach. The other opens its hands to God, even without explanation. And friends, Daniel 12 is calling us to the second. And the question I've been asking myself is, "How? How does she do that? What has to be true about her, about God, about the relationship between them before that moment becomes possible, before she can open her hands around the thing she loved most and release it back to a God who hasn't explained Himself?" That, I think, is what this chapter is really after. Not the timetable questions or the cryptic numbers. At the end of this chapter, God says to Daniel, "go your way." It's as if he were saying, "I know what must happen before the end. I've determined. You don't need to understand why or how. You have me. Go."

Friends, what makes that possible? Well, we have to start at the beginning. And it's not where Daniel's standing. It's where Michael is. You see, chapter 12 opens mid-sentence. "At that time," it says, at the time of the king we met last week, a king of terrifying arrogance who

exalts himself above every God and makes war on God's people. Most immediately, that king is Antiochus Epiphanes. But as we saw, the language outruns him. It takes on a scale that the historical Antiochus never achieved. Biblical prophecy does this. It telescopes, like a collapsible instrument that looks like one piece until it's fully extended. The prophecy highlights one historical moment but reaches toward another, a larger fulfillment coming. Antiochus is real, yes. But he's also a type, an anticipation of something worse and more final that awaits the people of God before history ends. So at that time, holds two realities simultaneously. The immediate crisis of the second century BC and the final crisis at the end of the age. Chapter 11 ends with the king coming to his end, with none to help him. And Michael stands up into that moment. The king's collapse and Michael's rising are the same event seen from two different vantage points, one earthly and one heavenly. His rising here isn't incidental. He's a warrior, a prince who fights on behalf of God's people. The northern king falls because something's happened in the unseen realm.

I've always loved the moment in 2 Kings 6 when Elisha's servant wakes to find the city surrounded. Horses and chariots of the enemy as far as he can see. He's not merely puzzled, he's terrified. Everything visible tells him it's over. And Elisha prays one of the most remarkable prayers in scripture: "Lord, open his eyes that he may see." And when the servant looks again, the hills are full. Horses and chariots of fire, the army of the Lord already there, ready to fight. The servant's eyes had been opened to see the lair behind the lair. Chapter 12 is doing the same exact thing. Michael stands up and behind the threatening visible world, there's another reality ordered and overseen by the living God. From above, from below, what's coming looks like catastrophe. But seen from above, it's the battlefield on which God's people will be delivered. We need to hear that. Because we live in a world that makes it very easy to believe that the visible layer is all there is. We watch the news and it tells us who holds power. We look at our circumstances and they tell us what's possible. And slowly without realizing it, we begin to reason from what we can see rather than from what we know to be true. When suffering bears down, we lose sight of the lair behind the lair. And faith turns out to be harder to hold than we thought.

Friends, the book of Daniel here and throughout reminds us that no power in history has ever held ultimate control. God does. Nebuchadnezzar didn't, Belshazzar didn't, Antiochus didn't. But then there's another book. Everyone whose name shall be written in the book, it says in verse 1. This is the book of the living, the citizenship list of those who belong to the true Jerusalem. It appears throughout Israel, Israel's story from Moses at Sinai, to the Psalms, to the prophets. It's the record of those who are gods held in his hands and known by name. And when we hear it, it wouldn't surprise me if our minds run to another book, the Lamb's book of life in Revelation, where every name there is safe and every name absent isn't. And this raises a question for each of us in this room. "Is my name there?" But behind that question, there's another one. The one Mrs. O'Brien's open hands are asking, "do I trust the one who holds it?" Well, Daniel 12 has an answer to that. Verse 2 says, "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

This to me is the clearest statement of bodily resurrection in the entire Old Testament. Yes, there are hints of it, like Ezekiel's valley of dry bones coming to life. But these are images of Israel's national restoration here in Daniel 12. The language is unambiguous. The dead will rise and their rising will divide into two destinies, one of everlasting life, one of everlasting contempt, and there's nothing between. We need to feel that weight. You see, the resurrection isn't mere decoration here. It's the foundation of everything else, the chapter says. It's what makes faithful endurance something other than foolishness. Paul understood this. If the dead

aren't raised, what did he say? Our faith is futile. We are of all people most to be pitied, and the same is true for Daniel. If the dead aren't raised, his refusal to compromise was irrational. The three friends should have bowed, and the martyrs under Antiochus, they died for nothing. But if the dead are raised, if everlasting life is real, and everlasting contempt is real, then everything changes, and it's precisely that reality that gives grace its full weight. We can't understand the mercy of God in Christ without reckoning first with the gravity of what we deserve. And Jesus understands this too. In John 5, he quotes Daniel directly: "All who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out," he says. "Those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." Notice what he does. He reads the many as all. Every human being who's ever lived will stand before God. Names are either written or they're not. And this brings us to verse 3: "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever." Daniel's language is significant here. The wise are those who turn many to righteousness. That word many is the same exact word running through Isaiah 53. That beloved passage about the suffering servant. The servant who bears the sin of many, makes many righteous, pours out his soul so that many might live.

Friends, that's not coincidence. That's Daniel deliberately casting the wise in servant-shaped terms. Their vocation mirrors the servants. Suffering, faithful witness, working together to bear righteous fruit. And just as the servant's path ran directly through crushing, not around it, so does theirs. Friends, we know who that servant is. And the wise in every age are those who follow him down that same path, called to faithfulness through the crushing by the same one who raises them out of it. And yet, look at what's waiting on the other side: "The wise shall shine like the brightness of the heavens, like stars forever and ever." This is the language of vindication, of glory, of an exalted state that cannot be touched by death. That's the promise. And it's inseparable from their mission. The ones who shine are precisely those who turned many to righteousness. You see, the reward and the vocation belong together. The servant-shaped faithfulness, this servant-shaped faithfulness, it runs from Isaiah's suffering servant through Daniel's wise ones here to the witnessing church in Revelation, persecuted for their testimony, yet drawing the nations toward repentance. It's one vocation deepening across centuries. And this vocation rests on every follower of Jesus in this room, not through a special role or gifting, and not through our own power, but through our witness as those who are held by a faithful God, and who because of that keep our hands open even when everything in them wants to close it into fists.

Mrs. O'Brien made a vow: "I will be true to you, whatever comes." She couldn't see what whatever comes would cost her. What it cost her was her son. And she bore witness through it, not after the grief had passed, or once she'd received an explanation, but inside the pain itself, in her grace, and in her refusal to close her hands into fists against the God she trusted. Friends, that's what it looks like to turn many to righteousness. It's a life that continues to trust the one who is trustworthy, even when the cost is real and the reasons for it haven't been given. But then the well runs dry. Shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end. Verse 4 says - I want you to put yourselves in Daniel's shoes for a moment - "The knowledge that's defined his vocation is now being deliberately withheld." It's not lost, withheld, sealed. It's out of reach, and not just from him, from everyone. "Many will run to and fro searching for answers and knowledge," the text says, "will increase." But don't misunderstand the point. This isn't a promise of understanding.

In Amos 8, the prophet called it a famine, not of bread, but of the word of the Lord, when people would run to and fro, seeking it and not finding it. Daniel's using the same language.

Their running is futile because God's seal on his word will hold. But Daniel doesn't run. He listens. In fact, he listens to a conversation between three figures, one on each bank of the river, and a man clothed in linen hovering above the water, his hands raised to heaven, ready to swear an oath. We met this figure in chapter 10, where Daniel's description of him, wearing linen, a voice like roaring waters, a face like lightning, anticipates the language John will use in Revelation 1 for the risen Christ. And then one of them asks the question Daniel's people have been asking for generations, "how long shall it be until the end of these wonders? The suffering and the triumph, all of it, how long?" The answer the man in linen gives is a cryptic one, "a time, times, and half a time." But notice it's half. It's a broken number. It's a sequence that never completes. The suffering is bounded and can't run its full course.

John reaches back to this same phrase in Revelation 12, and he applies it to the whole stretch between Christ's resurrection and his return. So Daniel's timetable here, it's not just for the second century BC. It's a word for God's people in every age, and yet in his answer there's a harder word. It's not a new one. In chapter 7, Daniel watched the horn make war with the saints and prevail over them before the Ancient of Days arrived and turned the tide. The pattern is the same here. The end will come when the power of God's people has been completely shattered. Did you notice that in verse 7? Not rescued before the pain, but broken and then delivered. The comfort is real, but like John's scroll in Revelation, it's sweet in the mouth and bitter in the stomach. It runs through the suffering, not around it. Friends, that's the harder word the man in linen gives to Daniel. And so Daniel turns to him in verse 8. "My Lord," he asks, "what shall be the outcome of these things?" It's an understandable question. He's just been told his people will be shattered before they're delivered. He wants to know how can it end well if we're first destroyed? The outcome's already been stated. Some rise to everlasting life, some to everlasting contempt. The wise shine, the faithful are vindicated. Daniel knows this, but he can't make sense of it. What he gets instead is this. "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the end of time." Go your way.

Throughout this book, Daniel's been the model of wisdom, but now at the end of everything, the man in linen doesn't resolve his confusion. He simply sends him on his way without explanation. And that tells us something. Wisdom isn't about the ability to decode the timetable or to find the reason why the suffering had to come. The wise in Daniel aren't those who figure these things out. They're those who keep trusting while others turn away. They endure. They maintain their faithful witness. They go their way because they have something that clenched fists can't create. They have an intimacy with God that remains open to him when the answers don't come, even when the suffering does. There's a moment in *The Tree of Life* that captures this. Jack, Mrs. O'Brien's eldest son, has been following a guide through the desert, and she leads him to a doorway. On the other side, there's nothing but more desert. It appears to lead nowhere. He can't see anything better beyond it, and he hesitates. Why go through it? But the guide is calling him forward, and so trusting nothing but her, he steps through.

Friends, that's go your way made visible. Not explanation or resolution, but a person to follow when everything you can see, including the suffering, recommends staying put. And the cryptic numbers in verse 11 and 12, 1290 days, 1335 days, these don't resolve cleanly. Scholars have been working on them for centuries without consensus, but there's a message for us in this. God isn't inviting calculation. He's inviting trust. They're not a puzzle for us to solve. They're a boundary for us to accept, and that acceptance, the willingness to walk faithfully into suffering, whose reasons God hasn't disclosed, is itself an act of worship. It's

the open hands of one who is reverently submitting to a God who hasn't given us all the answers. So how did Daniel respond? Well, I think he went. After all, there's no hint of resistance or further demand at the riverbank, and in his quiet obedience, I think he modeled the very wisdom the chapter has been describing all along. Not rescue from the suffering, but faithfulness through it. The active trust that says, "I know who holds this, and that is enough." And what awaited him at the end of his days? Verse 13 returns to the command, but now with a promise detached. It says, "but go your way till the end, and you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days." This is the last thing Daniel hears, not explanations for the suffering or the decoded timetable, but the outcome he pressed for in verse 8, given to him now as a personal promise, spoken to an old man at the end of his life who will die in exile far from home without seeing what he's been shown. But friends, it's enough. His allotted place. The language reaches towards something no political restoration could deliver. Daniel's watched empires rise and fall his entire life. He knows earthly restorations don't hold. The only hope that doesn't eventually collapse under the weight of history is one that transcends it. His allotted place, resurrection life, the dust of the earth awakening.

It's the promise of verse 2, coming home to him and not on the basis of his own righteousness. Remember, in Daniel nine, he identified with the sins of Israel, confessed with empty hands and appealed to nothing but God's mercy. His name is written, his place is secure, not because he earned it, but because God had set his love upon him. And yet we're not standing at that distance. What Daniel received as a barely visible light on the far horizon, we stand on the near side of. The resurrection of Jesus has happened. It's a past event. It's dateable, testified to by witnesses who prefer death over silence. Friends, the hope Daniel carried in the dark, we carry in the light of that empty tomb. And that hope isn't wishful thinking. It's the very ground we stand on. The cross absorbs the everlasting contempt we deserve and the resurrection guarantees the everlasting life we don't. Those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life even now in the security of his completed work. And this brings me back again to *The Tree of Life*. In one scene surrounded by friends mourning with her, we hear Mrs. O'Brien moving between two psalms in the same breath. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" to "I will fear no evil." She's torn between desolation and trust. The why hasn't been answered, but she knows who holds her in her not knowing.

That's the emotional world of Daniel 12. And that's where many of us live. Friends, most of us in this room are carrying something we haven't been able to resolve. A situation we didn't choose, a loss we didn't see coming, a suffering that's grabbed hold and won't let go. I know for some of you, that weight is a present reality. For others, you've been carrying it longer than seems possible. And what we desperately want is the answer to this. Tell me it isn't pointless. Tell me something's being worked through this darkness that I can't see. We want the suffering to mean something. We want to know that the pain isn't the end of the story. We're not asking for an explanation. We just want a word that we can stand on. The word that comes to us is the same word that came to Daniel. "Go your way."

Not because all the questions have been answered, but because our names are written and our allotted place is secure. The dust of the earth that's wearing out is the very dust God intends to raise. Friends, he doesn't discard what he's made. He redeems it. Well, as we close, I want to return to where we began: Mrs. O'Brien. Near the end of the film, we see what it looks like when everything in you wants to clench your fists at God and you open your hands to him anyway. She raises them to the sky and she whispers, "I give him to you. I give you my son." It's not a performance. It's a genuine release of the thing she loved most into the hands of a

God she's trusted through everything. The why hasn't been answered. Her son, R.L., he's still gone, and yet her hands are open. At the beginning of the film, she said, "I will be true to you, whatever comes." Now we know what whatever comes cost her and we know what it looks like to mean it. Friends, how does she do that? In the middle of the film, there's a church service and the pastor's preaching on Job. Even in the darkest moments, and there were a lot of dark moments, Job never turned away from God. Yes, he accused and he pressed for an audience, but when the whirlwind came, God didn't explain the why. He simply revealed himself. And Job, who'd heard of God by the hearing, a hearing of the ear, he now saw him. That encounter, not an explanation, but a presence was what opened his hands.

It was the knowledge of who he was dealing with. Friends, that's where Job lands, but Paul pushes beyond him. In Romans chapter 8, he's writing to people who know what it is to be crushed, and he says something striking. "For your sake, we face death all day long. We're considered as sheep to be slaughtered." That's Paul's description of the vocation of God's people. The same calling Daniel has been urging us to embrace. The suffering isn't an interruption, it's the path. And then Paul asks in verse 35, "who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution? Shall the crushing?" And the answer he gives is this: "In all these things, not around them, through them, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Friends, that's how Mrs. O'Brien does it. Not explanation, but the unshakable conviction that God is not only good, but sovereign. That he works all things, including this, including the pain, together for the good of those who love him. A relationship with God so deeply rooted in that reality that suffering can't sever it. Hands open, not because the weight has been lifted, but because they know who holds their pain and that he redeems it. That's Daniel's ground too.

And yet our ground is deeper still. The scroll that was sealed for Daniel has been opened. Not by a clever interpreter, but by a Lamb who was slain and found worthy, who alone could break its seals. What Daniel saw dimly, we've been shown clearly. The servant has come, born the sin of many, risen and standing now at the right hand of God. He's the first fruits of all who will follow. Daniel goes toward him. Mrs. O'Brien opens her hands toward him, and so do we. Not because the questions have been answered or the pain has stopped, but because we know the one who holds what we can't. Friends, the dust of the earth is not the end of the story. An allotted place is waiting for you. Go your way. Let's pray.

Almighty God, Father, we thank you. We thank you for your promises of an allotted place. We thank you for your love placed on sinners. What precious promises, Lord. Oh Father, we pray now that you will send these truths home and that you will deepen our trust in your love for us, in your commitment to us, in your holding us, and help us to open our hands to you, even in the midst of the trials that we face. And we ask all these things in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.