Our Hope for the Future Part 1

Daniel 12:1-13 (Today we will cover vv. 1-3)

**Introduction**

 Today we are going to begin discussing the final chapter of the book of Daniel. This book has opened our eyes to the ways in which God is sovereign over all history, the past, the present as well as the future. For the past several weeks we have been looking specifically at the events that would be unfolding in the days after Daniel as well as the events that will be taking place at the end of the world. What we will be learning today is that the people of God do not have to fear the events of the future because God has a plan for all of it that He will make certain is fulfilled. There will be four applications that will guide our discussion in this chapter, the first two of which we will cover today. 1. God does not promise to save us from times of trial, but He does promise to secure us as we endure it. 2. As we live our days in this life, we need to do so keeping eternity in mind. We must not allow the worries and concerns of this present world to dominate our thinking. 3. Even though God’s Word may not give us every specific detail regarding the future we can still face the future with confidence because we serve a God who is faithful to His people. 4. The people of God are refined through the fire of trials and persecution, but after those trials have ended the story concludes with His people being given rest and an eternal reward.

**Setting and Context**

 Before we begin to read the words of chapter 12 together, we need to make certain that we have established the setting and context for it. As a reminder, both chapters 11 and 12 were visions that were given to Daniel after he prayed to God in chapter 10 when he heard about the difficulty that the people who had returned to Jerusalem were having as they were working to rebuild the temple as well as the city. Daniel was praying, fasting and mourning to ask the Lord to be with the people as they faced that opposition and difficulty. This shows us that the people of God will always face persecution and tough times in this world. Why is this the case? As we learned in chapter 10 there is a spiritual war taking place between the forces of God and the forces of Satan. In this fallen world there is always the existence of evil that works to oppose the work of God. You and I are in the middle of this spiritual warfare, and we will always experience this until Jesus Christ returns to finally defeat Satan. Until that day we need to remain faithful and keep sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

 The other point we need to make regarding the context is that chapter 12 is giving Daniel a vision of the future, but this vision will be somewhat limited by God. Daniel will be given a glimpse of what will be taking place in the future, but that vision will not give all of the details. The remainder of the details regarding chapter 12 will be given to the Apostle John as he records the words in the book of Revelation. As we discuss the chapter today, we will also be referring to passages in Revelation that will give additional information we need to interpret this passage correctly. Now, let us begin studying chapter 12 together.

**God will Deliver His People from Distress (v. 1)**

**Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.**

 As we have already said, this chapter refers to events that will be taking place at the end of the age. We begin in verse 1 by reading about the Archangel Michael. Daniel is told that Michael is the prince who stands guard over the nation of Israel. In other words, God has placed Michael to be their protector. In chapter 10 we learned that Michael had to come to the aid of another angel who was attempting to liberate the people from the kingdom of Persia. The demons of Satan can delay the plans of God, but they cannot stop His will from happening. Now what exactly is Michael going to protect the people from?

 As we continue in verse 1, we read that a “time of distress” will come “such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time.” What time is this referring to? I believe that this is referring to the time of tribulation that will take place near the end of time. During the tribulation the Antichrist will come to power and be given authority for a time to wage war on the nation of Israel and against the people of God. He will be successful for a time, but he will eventually be defeated. Revelation 13:1-7 says this of the Antichrist **“Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten crowns, and on his heads were blasphemous names. 2 And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne, and great authority. 3 I saw one of his heads as if it had been fatally wounded, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; 4 they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?” 5 A mouth was given to him speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. 6 And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. 7 It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority was given to him over every tribe, people, language, and nation.** As we have just read, this figure will be given authority to rule over the earth by Satan. His power will be unmatched, and he will be given names that will blaspheme the God of heaven. He will also miraculously heal from a fatal wound to his head. This will catch the attention of the world and then he will speak blasphemies against God. Because of his success he will be worshiped by the world. His authority will last for 42 months, which equals three and a half years. During that time there will be persecution against the people of God that has never been seen before. It is Michael who will keep watch and at the appropriate time take action to deliver the people from this tough time.

 We further read that after the time of the Antichrist has come to an end that those whose names have been written in the book will be rescued. What book is the angel referring to? This is the book of life that John writes about in Revelation. Here is what John tells us about the book of life. **“8 All who live on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written since the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slaughtered” (13:8).** The book of life records the names of those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and have been sealed by the promise of salvation that is available through His name alone. A point that we need to make here is that not all of the Jewish people will have their names written in the book of life because there will be many who are Jewish by ancestry, but not through faith in the Messiah. The Apostle Paul writes about this event as well in **Romans 11:25-27 “25 For I do not want you, brothers and sisters, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written: “The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.” 27 “This is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”** This partial hardening is the part of the Jewish nation that has rejected the Messiah. They will not be saved, but at the end of the age those who have accepted Christ will be written in the book.

 This leads us to our first application for this morning. *God does not promise to save us from times of trial, but He does promise to secure us as we endure it.* This fact has dominated much of the book of Daniel. As we have been going through this book together, we have seen that this world is broken and that there is no way to fix it but through recreation. What I mean by this is that all of us know and daily experience life in this broken world that has been cursed and marred by sin. It is not only those who believe in God that know something is wrong, but all people know there is something broken because all of us are wrestling with the same questions. Why is there so much suffering in this world and why do we see so many helpless people dealing with trials that do not seem to make any sense? I know that Colton’s family has been going through a very difficult ordeal with him for most of his life. He has spent most of his life in the hospital. He is so young and has not had the opportunity to enjoy his life. The question that we want answered is why is this happening? I have to be very humble and tell you that I do not know why children like Colton suffer and why specific things like that are happening. Even though we may not know why these things happen, there is something that we do know. What we do know is that we worship a God who understands the suffering we are facing and can relate to the tough times in our lives because He chose to wrap Himself in human flesh and come to this world to experience life in a mortal body. The mystery of the incarnation is so deep that I do not think I can give it justice. However, what I would like to try to provide for you today is a way of thinking about this that can help us process why there is suffering and trials in this world. I would like to share a thought by a very well-known Christian Apologist and Mathematician from Oxford University in England who has given an eloquent response to the problem of suffering. His answer is helpful because it gives us a framework in which to process this essential human question. The name of the professor is John Lennox, and he has answered the question in this way. He says that God has addressed the problem of suffering by coming to this world in human flesh and taking on the role of the suffering servant. Jesus Christ suffered in this world in such a brutal fashion that He has shown humanity that He both understands and can empathize with those who suffer in this world today. The cross of Christ is the way that God addresses the problem of suffering. This is why we can say even though we will face persecution and suffering in this world we do not serve a God who cannot understand it. As we discussed last week with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, God walks with us during times of despair and disappointment as well as during our times of suffering. He has experienced it Himself and therefore can relate to what we are going through. When we weep, He weeps and when we suffer, He suffers with us. Our loving God not only said that He loves us but has proven it with His actions.

**The Hope of the Resurrection and Eternal Reward (vv. 2-3)**

**2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. 3 And those who have insight will shine like the glow of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.**

 As we continue to verse 2, we now read that there will be a great resurrection of the dead at the end of the age. This resurrection is what is referred to as the resurrection of the dead. For us to understand this better we need to look at what exactly Scripture teaches regarding the resurrection. Let us begin with what Jesus taught when the disciples asked Him about the signs of His return at the end of the age. Let’s once again open our Bibles to Matthew 24. Jesus is telling the disciples what would be taking place that would show a sign that His return was getting close. In verse 14 we read **“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.”** This is the age that you and I are living in right now and has been ongoing since Jesus ascended to heaven. The gospel is being preached throughout the world calling all to repent and believe in Christ. Once the gospel has reached the entire world, then the end of the age will come. Jesus also says that there will be time of tribulation coming. In verses 9-12 He gives these words **“Then they will hand you over to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. 10 And at that time many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will rise up and mislead many people. 12 And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will become cold.”** We are also seeing these signs in the culture today. There is a continual attack against the church of Jesus Christ. Many Christians all over the world are targeted for killing and are being persecuted for their faithfulness to Christ. In our own country we see attacks in the form of mockery and intimidation. To be a Christian in some areas of the country will lead to someone being mocked and removed from social groups. In the movie industry many Christians are afraid to speak of their faith because it will result in them being black listed. This is the hatred that Jesus spoke of.

 He next makes the point that many will fall away from the faith which will result in brothers betraying each other. We are seeing this in the culture today with several people in the Christian music industry announcing that they are no longer believers. I am not trying to say that the Christian music industry is the place where we should find our encouragement, but when we see those who have proclaimed Christ in their music for several years now saying they no longer believe that is shocking. There are also former pastors who have announced they no longer believe. This is taking place in fulfillment of Christ’s words.

 We also are seeing today an increase in the number of false teachers appearing in the culture. These teachers are wolves in sheep’s clothing because they claim to love everyone yet that are teaching a false gospel that if followed will send people away from the presence of God for eternity. Any teacher who openly endorses or affirms behaviors, lifestyles or doctrine that is not clearly taught in Scripture has blood on their hands and is leading those who listen to separation from God. We must stay obedient to Gods Word that will sustain us until He returns to take His church home.

 Finally, Jesus said that most people’s love will become cold. This is the indifference we see in the culture today. There seems to be less love and more division in our nation today because of political differences or personal preferences. What once was known as tolerance has been replaced with an attitude of intolerance where people are no longer willing to have discussions or consider other viewpoints in a respectful manner. We as Christians are called to love others and to be sympathetic to the troubles they have, but we are not called to accept all other worldviews as being equal in authority to God’s Word. We can be loving while at the same time stand on the authority of Scripture. When you love someone, you need to tell them the truth regardless of whether it may offend them or not. It is non-loving to lie to others, but it is loving to tell them the truth.

 Now, let’s get back to the resurrection. Daniel is told that there will be a resurrection of both those who are in the book of life as well as those who have rejected God’s plan of salvation. What we learn is that there will be a resurrection of the dead for both the saved and the unsaved. The Apostle Paul confirms this teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 **“13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as indeed the rest of mankind do, who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. 15 For we say this to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore, comfort one another with these words.”** This resurrection event will take place after Christ returns. Paul says that these words should comfort us because it is then that the faithfulness and work done by followers of Christ that will be rewarded.

 Now let’s look quickly at verse 3. It speaks of those who have insight who will shine and those who lead others to righteousness will be like the stars forever. Once again, Daniel is told that those who are faithful to the gospel of Christ and who teach it to others leading them to saving faith in Christ will experience an eternal reward. The Apostle John says this regarding the saints who have died in the name of Christ **“26 The one who overcomes, and the one who keeps My deeds until the end, I will give him authority over the nations; 27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are shattered, as I also have received authority from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star” (Revelation 2:26-28).** Jesus has promised that faithfulness to the end will result in a reward that will last for all eternity. These are words of comfort.

 Our second application today: *As we live our days in this life, we need to do so keeping eternity in mind. We must not allow the worries and concerns of this present world to dominate our thinking.* The Word of God is reminding us that we need to be focused more on eternity than on the challenges of this time. In what ways can we do this? Firstly, we need to live in a way where others will see our faith and will be attracted to Jesus. We must let our light shine so that God will be glorified (Matthew 5:16). Secondly, we need to live seeking God’s kingdom first. Our priorities need to be focused on eternity rather than temporary concerns such as wealth, status or comfort. All of these things will pass away, but our eternal reward in Christ will never pass away. Thirdly, we must invest in eternal things such as showing generosity to others, sharing the gospel message with them, and being obedient to Christ even though it will cost us something. Jesus said we should not store up treasures on earth but store up treasures in heaven because it is those treasures that will never rust or be destroyed (Matthew 6:19-20). A fourth way that we can live keeping eternity in mind is by living in light of the judgment seat of Christ. All of us will one day have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of our life. If we spend the limited time, we have here on earth doing the good work of evangelism leading others to the hope for their salvation then when we stand before Christ we can do so with a clean conscience. Even though it is not our deeds that save us, we will be able to say that we did the most with the time we were given. All of us want to hear these words of Christ on that day “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23). Living in obedience to Christ is not something done just to win approval, we do so because we appreciate the sacrifice paid for us and through that obedience, we can give Him the glory He deserves.

**Conclusion**

As we conclude this first part of our discussion of chapter 12 today let us think carefully about what God’s Word is teaching us. The end of the world might sound like a scary phrase, but for those who trust Christ as Savior this is the time when they will be united with their Lord for eternity. As we continue to learn more about this time let us look forward to the return of our Savior with hope and anticipation. Just like the groom awaits the arrival of His bride, may we the bride of Christ look forward to seeing Him return to take His church back to heaven with Him. I think it is a great thing to know that all of us will be able to be together forever in the presence of Christ. What a fantastic reward, especially for us who are not deserving of it. Our God is an awesome God!