

**Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**October 9, 2016**

**Daniel's Troubling Visions**

**Daniel 7 and 8**

**Prayer:** *Father, again, we just thank you for your grace and your goodness and we just again, I thank you for your word, I thank you that, Lord, as we look around at the world outside we can again take solace in the fact that your word is steady as a rock. And again we find ourselves back in the book of Daniel, and so Lord, I thank you for that. I pray again as we reopen this book that you would give us the grace and the wisdom that we need. Without your Holy Spirit's power, Lord, these are just words; and so we pray that your spirit would just take these words and make them of permanent value and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well as you know, we spent most of last year going through the first six chapters of Daniel, and so as we go forward I want to do just kind of a quick recap. We followed Daniel's life and we followed his career from his kidnapping as a young man in Jerusalem through his captivity in Babylon and basically through the bulk of his life. And we saw a whole set of unique parallels between Daniel's life and our own. God tells us that we are to be in the

world but not of the world, and Daniel demonstrated for us just really how to do that. He went from a being a young Jewish captive in Jerusalem to a high government official in Babylon; and along the way he was tempted and he was tested many, many different ways and his reaction to each and every one of those different crises was to trust God, and if you remember, it was just to do the very next thing.

And so we look at his first temptation was, if you remember, it was the king's food. Daniel and his companions Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they rejected the rich food of Babylon for vegetables and water, trusting that God is going to give them the energy that they need and the health that they need. And if you remember, Daniel's first test was to ask his overseer for the right to prove that God would sustain him by these vegetables. And so we look at *Daniel 1:12*, Daniel says: *"Test your servants for ten days, let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see."* So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. Well that was

the first test and it proved to be one of many for Daniel and his companions. They go on to get enrolled in one of Babylon's finest institutions and they are taught how to be wise men and counselors to the king.

That sets the stage for the very next crisis when the king is troubled, he has this disturbing dream about a gigantic statute with a head of gold and feet of clay and the statute gets shattered by a stone and the king demands that his counselors not only interpret the dream but they describe it for him as well. And when the wise men object, the king flies into a rage and he sends out an edict to the whole country that all of the wise men in Babylon are to be executed. Well, we see Daniel respond to this challenge the same way he responded to the first one, he just does the next thing. He gathers up his companions and they pray and they seek God's wisdom and God gives them not only the interpretation of the dream but the dream itself. And we pick up at *Daniel 2:46* after Daniel has given the king the interpretation, it says: *Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is the God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."*

Now that dream incident is followed by yet another crisis of faith when Nebuchadnezzar demands that virtually everybody bow down and worship this ninety-foot idol that he has constructed. Well as you remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused and the king once again in a flat outrage has them thrown into a furnace and it's a furnace that's heated so high the very ones who throw them in are killed in the act of throwing them in. And so we pick up at *Daniel 3:23*, it says this: *And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.*

Crisis number 3. The next crisis comes after Nebuchadnezzar

receives yet another troubling dream, and he wants Daniel to interpret it. And so Daniel comes to the king and he hears the dream and he instantly realizes that God's going to punish Nebuchadnezzar's pride and he's going to -- what he's basically going to do is take away his sanity and he's going to turn him into an animal for a period of approximately seven years. And we pick this up at *Daniel 4*. Daniel is speaking to the king, says: *"This is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that heaven rules. Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may be perhaps a lengthening of your prosperity."* Now Daniel gives the interpretation to the king and absolutely nothing happens. And life goes on for a full year until Nebuchadnezzar publicly brags that the greatness of his kingdom comes not from God but from the king himself, and instantly, God's judgment descends on the king. And we pick up on that at *Daniel*

4:30. It says: *And the king answered and said, "Is this not great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles feathers and his nails were like birds' claws. Well, at the end of those seven years, Nebuchadnezzar's sanity returns to him just like God said that it would and he ends up saying this in Daniel 4:34. He says: At the end of the days, I Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*

Well the next crisis occurs when Nebuchadnezzar's successor Belteshazzar decides he's going to have a feast. Now at this time he has completely forgotten who Daniel is, Daniel's been sent out to pasture. Daniel has no influence at all for a number of years in the king's court and this Belteshazzar has fully and 100 percent embraced paganism once again and he's at a celebration. And in the celebration he begins to mock Daniel's God and he does it by toasting his gods with the very vessels that were stolen from God's temple in Jerusalem. And so in the midst of his drunken reverie, he sees a hand formed and the hand starts to write something on the wall. It writes a statement that no one can interpret. Now this king is in an absolute panic. He needs to know what exactly that handwriting is all about. And so they seek out Daniel and they find him and they call him in and he gives the king the terrifying news that he has been found -- he's been weighed in the balance and found wanting. And that very night the kingdom is overrun, the king is killed, and a new king begins to rule. And that brings up the last of Daniel's crisis which occurs when Daniel's under this third king. And this is the crisis that everybody knows Daniel about, everybody knows the story of Daniel in reference to this crisis. Daniel's contemporaries hate the fact that he's now the sole leader in Babylon. He becomes the de facto prime minister under this king and so they devise a plan to take him out. He's 90 years old at the time but they know that even at 90 he's still

faithful to God, he still prays three times a day and he often prays before an open window. And so they devise a plan that any prayer to any other God except the king is now a crime punishable by death. And they pass this law and Daniel of course knowing full well what would happen continues to do exactly what he's always done; he does the next thing. And for him the next thing is to pause and to pray for God and he does it before an open window and he's arrested and he's brought before the king. The king realized that he's been boxed into a corner by his governors and he reluctantly agrees that a law is a law and that the sentence has to be meted out regardless of the fact that he loves Daniel and he really doesn't want to see him harmed. Well, this sets the stage for the one story about Daniel that everybody knows, and this is Daniel in the lions' den. Daniel's thrown into this lions den and the king spends a sleepless night hoping against hope that Daniel somehow miraculously survives, and in the morning he makes his way to the lions' den.

And we pick up the story at *Daniel 6:20*. It says: *As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and*



*they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm." Then the king was exceedingly glad and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions -- they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: "Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions."*

Well this is where we were at the end of our summer break, and I was planning on basically ending our study of Daniel after we had covered the lions' den. And my reason for ending the study of Daniel at chapter 6 is because the historical descriptions, essentially they end there, and from that point forward the book becomes extremely prophetic. And now true confession, I'm not a

person given much to a study of prophesy. I mean I certainly recognize its importance and I appreciate the people who spend hours and hours of study going over all of those different end times scenarios but I'm a child of the 70's. I'm a child of the 70's when it comes to that particular type of scripture and I distinctly remember being so enthralled with *The Late Great Planet Earth*, anybody ever read that book? Raise your hand. We're dating ourselves. Most people here have no idea what that book is. I read that book and I read it over and over again and I was so absolutely certain that in 1975 we had two or at most three years before Christ was coming. So far I've been off by almost 40 years. And Christ himself said in *Mark 13*: "*But concerning the that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.*" Well, I've since learned that there are many, many different ways to understand prophesy and that people get highly exercised over each of their own interpretations and I personally feel that the more people get enthralled about end time prophesy, the less inclined they are to focus on living in the here and now. So I decided that it would be best to end our study of the book of Daniel at chapter 6 and turn to something else, something perhaps from the New Testament. Well, I was explaining my reasoning to the elders, and one of the elders took me to task. I won't say who he was; I'll just give you a hint, his name is

Steve. That narrows it down to a couple. He had just finished reading a book about the life of Daniel, and it was a great book and he was very excited and he was excited that I was preaching about it. And I said, well, I want to stop preaching about it. He said, wait a minute, you're the one who told us how important it is to do expository preaching. And if you don't know, expository preaching is where you take a section or a whole book or a piece of scripture and you go methodically through it verse by verse and you do that very specifically because it forces you to deal with portions of scripture that you might not want to deal with. And so Steve said now that you're coming up with a portion of the scripture that you don't want to deal with, it sure seems to me like you're just wanting to bail out. So I pointed out to Steve that the portions of scripture that I was referring to were parts that had to do with difficult subjects that preachers like to avoid, you know, things that have to do with divorce or gay marriage or homosexuality or politics, things that are controversial, things that cause people to get mad and leave. I said, I don't really want to preach the second part of Daniel not because I want to avoid difficult and controversial subject but because this topic is so tilted so heavily towards end time prophesy. And listen, it's perfectly legitimate to preach about that, it's just that I didn't want to contribute to people's fascination with end times when I felt it was so critical that we

be learning how to live in the here and now. But I did have to agree with Steve that he had a point. I did come to a section of scripture that I didn't want to preach on, so I was indeed seeking to avoid it. So I told Steve that he had made his point and that I was interested in checking out the book that he was so excited about, the book about Daniel that he wanted me to read, 'cause I wanted to know how this author had treated the prophetic stuff and Steve said, well, I'm not really sure, the book ends with the sixth chapter.

So here we are -- here we are at the seventh chapter of Daniel. You'll see my point. Let me just read to you, this is *Daniel 7:1-8*. It says: *In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. The first was like a lion and had eagles wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told 'Arise, devour much flesh.'*

*After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.*

Well, all I can say is, thank you, Steve. I mean this dream, it's a dream that leaves Daniel so befuddled it says in verse 15: "As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me." Well, the whole of chapter 7 consists of visions that made Daniel anxious and they extend further into the next chapter and we're confronted at first with these four different beasts. Now we know that animals are frequently used to represent nations. I mean, after all, we're the eagle, and Russia is the bear. So using animals for symbols of nation is no surprise. And furthermore, God tells Daniel through an angel that that's exactly what these animals symbolize. In verse 16, it says: "I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth

*concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. "'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth.'"*

Now for the purpose of discussion, I just want to give you the standard understanding of what each creature means and there's many different discussions over the finer points of who thinks what, but this is primarily what most biblical scholars think. And they think that the lion with eagles wings, that's the Babylonians, that's the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. This bear-like creature that has three ribs in his mouth is the kingdom of the Medes and Persians which overran Babylon. The leopard with four wings is the kingdom of Greece with Alexander the Great who conquered the entire existing world, and then there's the other creature with ten horns and iron teeth, and that's the kingdom of Rome which stretches from the time of Daniel all the way forward to the advent of the birth of Christ at the height of the power of Rome. Now just one more vision I want to give. This is chapter 8. This is Daniel's other vision in chapter 8 starting at verse 3, he says this: *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 with 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 was cast 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 towards the four winds of heaven. Out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great towards 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."*

Okay. Well, this dream that Daniel is speaking about is actually easier to interpret than the other one. And one of the reasons is because God through the angel Gabriel gives Daniel the interpretation of the dream. In verse 20, it says: *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.* Now you can probably imagine, it's extremely easy to get stuck in some very deep weeds here. I mean, we have dreams and visions that crisscross with events that are taking place historically in Daniel's life and with events that have to do with the end of the world and coming of Christ. But there are some historical facts here that we need to pay some attention to because they are indisputable. You see, we know for a fact that the kingdom of Babylon was overtaken. And we know that it was overtaken by the ram who was the king of the Medes and the Persians. Verse 4 says: *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. We also know for a fact that Alexander the Great was the goat with great swiftness and power and that he was one of the greatest warrior kings of all time and he ruled with great swiftness and power until he was cut down prematurely in his prime. We also know that he was replaced by four lesser generals who divided up his kingdom. And again, verse 8, it says: 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. Well, we also know again for a fact that one of those generals became extremely powerful and directed his energy and attacks towards Jerusalem and towards God's people. Verse 9 says: 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. And he said to me, "for 2,300 evenings and morning. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state."*

This one little horn was a particularly odious king, went by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes. And his claim to fame was that he went after the glorious land and he went after the starry host which was a reference to Jerusalem and the Jews who God said would

become like Abraham's offspring as numerous as the stars. This was a king who brutalized the Jews in Jerusalem. And as Bryan Chapell notes in his book *The Gospel According to Daniel*, he "slaughtered thousands, murdered any circumcised infant, sacrificed a pig on the altar of the Lord, put a statute of Zeus in the sanctuary, and cut up and threw down the holy scrolls of the law of truth. And this desecration of the temple lasted just over six years -- or, to be precise, 2,300 days, just as verse 14 says." Now this "little horned king" was an absolute abomination as he attacked God's people. But Daniel's vision, it predicted him and it accurately predicted his end. This is what it says in verse 25. It says: *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.* Again we know for a fact precisely how Antiochus Epiphanes died. He was suddenly afflicted with a bowel disease and died screaming in agony. No human being caused that death.

So here's the point about all of these different dreams and visions that we find in the book of Daniel. All of these visions that Daniel had predated the actual historical event literally by hundreds of years. And the accuracy with which these predictions unfold is so uncanny that for years the enemies of the Bible have

used its very accuracy as the primary weapon against it. I mean nothing could be that accurate unless it was supernatural. And we all know that the Bible is just a series of myths assembled by fallible human beings and therefore it can't possibly be supernatural. You know, the conclusion for years of the enemies of the Bible is that Daniel is a fraud. And he was a fraud who was clever enough to write known historical facts as if they were future prophecies. You know, if I waited until November 9th and then wrote a fake prediction about who won the presidential election, I could pull it off as astonishingly accurate as long as I could trick you into thinking that the event had not already happened. Now I'd have to be a fraud and a liar to do that and unfortunately that's what many critics think of Daniel. And why is that so? Well, you think about it, if the Bible has that uncanny a level of accuracy when it comes to predicting the future, it certainly implies that its author might have a firmer control of the events of history than we all give him credit for. You see, it's incredibly easy to take for granted or to ignore or deny that history is not some random, purposeless unfolding of events but rather a purposeful, directed march of events that began, as far as man is concerned, with his fall in the Garden of Eden and it continues through the patriarchs, through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, through the nation of Israel, through the birth of Christ, the birth of his church and on into the future that we're a part of

right here and right now. As one Bible teacher put it once: "The gospel is a freight train and it's moving from eternity past through the eternal present and into eternity future, and you can either get on board or not. But nothing you do is going to slow it down or ever stop it." And we learn about God's utter and complete control of history through the Bible, and as such, that makes the Bible a threat. After all, the Bible has an awful lot to say about who we are, about who God is, and what our lives are supposed to be all about. Far better to dismiss it as a series of myths put together by primitive people than as the living, breathing word of God that speaks authoritatively into each of our lives.

Now the book of Daniel is a combination of macro and micro revelations given to Daniel about God's complete and absolute control over all of history. I mean there's a macro vision and there's a micro vision. And the micro vision is God's assurance to Daniel that he has complete and absolute control over Daniel's life and that with great love and great care, he's going to guide and direct it for Daniel's good and for God's glory. If you remember the opening statement -- this was going back almost a year -- the opening statement in the book of Daniel speaks about the battle that ended up with Daniel being kidnapped and shipped off to Babylon where he'd wind up spending the rest of his life. And the book opens with this verse in *Daniel 1:1*, it says: *In the third*

year the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came into Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand. That's not just a figure of speech. You see, Daniel was in Babylon because God had given the king of Judah into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. And you see what God is saying is it's not military superiority or a general's cleverness that guided the outcome of that battle. Rather it was the sovereign hand of God in all of history. And over and over again in the pages of the book of Daniel we see kings who wanted nothing to do with God, kings who were absolute pagans acknowledging God's sovereign hand. King Nebuchadnezzar, we're talking about a terrifically murderously awful king, a king who attacked the very temple of God and stole the sacred temple vessels. This is what he says after encountering God through Daniel in *Daniel 2:47*, he says: "*Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.*" And then we go to chapter 4 after God has returned his sanity to Nebuchadnezzar, we find Nebuchadnezzar saying: "*and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done'.*" This is no

ordinary Joe saying this, this was the most powerful man on earth; a man who up to that moment had nothing to do with wanting God as "his savior." See, God's command of all of the earth extends from the inner workings of Nebuchadnezzar's brain all the way to shutting down the killer instinct of starving lions that God turns into pussycats at the sight of Daniel. And even the pagan king Darius is forced to say of God after he sees that Daniel has been saved from the lions, he says: *"I make a decree that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions."* Darius is an absolute power recognizing complete absolute power.

You know, many of us struggle with how powerful God is. And we struggle with issues of power. I know many of us spent a good deal of this week tuned in to *The Weather Channel* to find out what was going to happen with Hurricane Matthew. We wondered is this hurricane going to make landfall? Is it going to stay a Cat 4? Are my relatives going to be okay? Is my property going to be okay? And you know, I was just everybody else, and watching the news about Hurricane Matthew reminded me that hurricanes are one of the last great "boogie men" that we face in the 21st century. It's

one of the few things that has so much strength and so much power that all you can do is hunker down or flee. And if you hunker down, you have to pray that it's going to spare you because there's nothing else you can do. There are very few things left in the 21st century that have that kind of power. And I was watching the reporters on TV and they're standing in the howling wind and I thought of Jesus asleep in a boat. Mark 4 says this, it says: *And the great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"* See, the only thing the disciples feared more than that storm was a God whose power was so great that even a mighty storm cowed before that power. And this is the very same God who says to us in Hebrews 13: *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* So we can confidently say, *"The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"*

See, most of the Christians that I know, they feel like the hurricane is bearing down on them and it's not a physical

hurricane, it's a spiritual hurricane. They see a culture that is crumbling in front of their eyes. They see simple truths that they once took for granted now being mocked and touted as evidence of small mindedness and bigotry. They see Isaiah's words coming true: *Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.* They see all of this going on all around them. And I don't know if there's a better book for studying today than the book of Daniel. You see, he, too, was thrust into a culture that didn't think, act, or speak like he did. I mean he was forced to trust over and over again in a God who's sovereignty many would have questioned. I mean after all, having the king desecrate the temple, I mean when Daniel first got captured, he said, Oh, all is lost, here's the temple and the king has stolen the very sacred vessels. And yet throughout the book of Daniel, we see God's hand steady as it goes, and what's it doing? It's guiding and moving history exactly the way he intends it to move. He gives Daniel a grasp of history so profoundly accurate that now people use that accuracy against him, claiming this has to be a fraud. I think that's only because people are more afraid of the Bible and the God of the Bible than they are of things like hurricanes. They don't want to consider a God they can't control, one who was far bigger and more powerful than anything they could even imagine. But what if this same all-powerful God loved his people so much that he



became one of them? That he was willing to be born of peasant parents in a barn in Bethlehem and then live out his life perfectly so he could offer up that perfect life as a substitute for our life of sin? You know, it boggles the imagination to think of a God so powerful that a hurricane like Matthew would cower in his presence and yet picture that very same God stripped naked, beaten and hung on a cross, so he could pay the price of our iniquity and present us to his Father with our sins fully paid for. But that is the God who authored the book of Daniel. And Daniel models for us what it means to live our life day in and day out, knowing that God is ultimately in charge and also knowing that life itself as a child of God is going to be full of challenge, full of stress, full of difficulties. You know, Daniel ends chapter 8 and all of the visions that he had with this statement. Listen to what Daniel says: *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.*

I spoke at length in this year that we've spent looking at Daniel about how Daniel handled all of the stress, all of the difficulties, all of the crises that he encountered and time and time again we saw that he simply did the next thing. Well, in this case it's very clear. It says he *rose and went about the king's business*. And that is knowing the big picture, knowing that God

was in charge, Daniel simply does the tasks that God has laid out for him to do. Even when faced with extraordinarily difficult circumstances when his government has passed a law forbidding prayer to anybody else except the king, what does Daniel do? He just does the next thing, and for him it was praying to his God and not the king as he always did, in front of an open window. So Daniel does what he always does and it winds up putting him in the lions' den. But God did what he was going to do and in this case it was a rescue. But either way, it didn't matter to Daniel because he knew who was in charge. And for us the task is exactly the same. You see, when life or circumstances or this culture or our government, when it throws you a curveball, you just do the next thing. And if you're a doctor, the next thing is heal, you heal. If you're a housewife, you do the next thing which is caring for your kids and for your household. If you're a short order cook, you flip burgers. You do the next thing. The long and the short of it for Daniel is no different than it is for us, and that's why we're back at the book of Daniel. And that's why we're studying the book of Daniel to learn that no matter what life throws at us, we trust in God's sovereignty, then we rise and we go about the king's business. Let's pray.

*Father, we just thank you that we do have in this incredibly stormy environment, in this spiritual hurricane that swirls all around us,*

we have a Rock, we have someone who is absolutely secure and steady, someone who has an absolute and complete and total grasp of history who is actually marching a history that appears to us in this present day to be chaotic but one who is marching this history towards its appointed end. I thank you, Lord, that we know who the Rock is. And I thank you that it is you, Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that you would give us the confidence to trust in you no matter what the circumstances are and to simply be willing to do the next thing as God instructs us. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.