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Daniel's Final Vision

Daniel 11 and 12

Prayer: *Father, I just again, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for the gift of Christmas. Just the gift of your son, Lord, the fact that you'd be willing to enter into this same world that we now occupy, Lord, is just beyond comprehension. And Father we just again continue to praise you and thank you for the love that you continue to scatter down amongst us, and again, I just think of it reflected in your word, I think of it reflected in what you've given to us, to be able to understand and know your kingdom. And this morning, Lord, as we are again opening up that book, looking for the final time at the book of Daniel, I just again pray for the wisdom that you alone can provide and the power that your Holy Spirit provides and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Chapter 11 of the book of Daniel opens up with a very cryptic verse. This is Daniel 11:1. It says this: "And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him." The question is who is it that stood up and who is it that

is being confirmed and strengthened? Well for the answer to that, you have to go back to the previous chapter to this vision that Daniel has been given. And we learned last week that Daniel has been told that he has beloved, he has been touched by the angel and he has been taught by the angel of the Lord and this angel is none other than an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ. And at the end of chapter 10, Daniel describes this encounter. He says this, he says: *Again, one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, "O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage." And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me." Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell what is inscribed in the book of truth: There is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince."*

Well the angel tells Daniel that he is greatly loved and then he asks Daniel this very important question, he says, *"Do you know why I have come to you?"* Well the answer to that question comes in the next two chapters and it consists of an incredibly complex and detailed unfolding of events, some short term, some long term and some involving the end of time. And what we have here is God

laying out a blueprint for the future of Israel and for all of mankind and for all of the stuff that is about to happen in the present and in the future, and in that blueprint there is a bigger answer than just the details of about what's going to happen next. And it has to do with God's interaction with us. You see, there are three different ways to understand the stuff that is about to happen. And I use the word "stuff" descriptively because the basic two-word description that everyone can describe their life experience around centers on two words. Those two words are "stuff happens." Stuff happens. You may have seen bumper stickers that explain it a little more explicitly, but the fact is and remains for every one of us that stuff, and by that I mean all kinds of stuff, questionable stuff, good stuff, tough stuff, bad stuff, evil stuff, it all happens to every single one of us. And life for all of us consists of moving from event to event enjoying the times of relative peace and calm when bad stuff is not happening and then looking for varying ways of coping when it does. And there are three basically different ways of understanding God's responsibility about how this works out when stuff happens. There's three different ways of understanding his interaction with it.

The first is the way most people react and respond to it and it's why there are bumper stickers with those two words on them in the

first place. The first way simply says "stuff happens," and there's nothing that you or I or even God can do about it. Just accept it and move on. Well, the next level says stuff happens, and for sure God is aware of it. You can call this the foreknowledge position. Now God is perfectly aware of the stuff that's going to happen but he neither causes it nor prevents it. He simply observes it. Well the third level is that God ordains all things. Well, let me take a little longer look at these three.

The first level, the "stuff just happens and there's nothing you can do about it" level has an evangelical component and it's called open theism. It's the radical view that God himself doesn't -- he, himself doesn't know the future because the future has not yet taken place, and that God simply reacts and he reacts to our free will choices, the ones that we all make. And according to this view, God can and does make bad decisions, decisions that he regrets. And sometimes he changes his mind based on the freedom that he sees us expressing. Well, we reject this view out of hand as sub Christian. And Daniel's vision, well, that's one of the reasons why we reject it. The last three chapters of Daniel are filled with particular and specific predictions about the future that open theism says God can't even know about in the first place. But he does, that is unless you believe that Daniel was a fraudulent book written after the fact and designed to look like it

predicted events that had already taken place.

Now the second view of why stuff happens is the foreknowledge view. And when it comes to the idea of salvation, this is the view that says that God sees down through the corridor of space and time and it's all laid out in front of him and on the basis of what he sees, he chooses some for salvation and others he passes by. But we reject that notion as well. And we reject it because God says when he looks at mankind through that lens, through that lens that sees all of time past, present and future, he sees nothing at all that points to a man choosing rightly. Foreknowledge of the future gives God the very same bleak picture of man's ability to turn to him as it does in the past and the present. And that's why God says in *Romans 3:10*: *As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* Well, the foreknowledge view would have God fully aware of all the events that are taking place in Daniel's life, but he's there simply as an observer. He has no interaction with the future other than that of an observer.

The third view, well the third view insists that God ordains all things. Now to ordain something is not the same as causing it to happen. There's a fine line of discrimination in this and you need

to understand. John Piper says it as well. He says, "God has the ability to stop anything from happening that might happen, and he is able to cause anything to happen that he wants to happen. So, whether he permits or causes a thing directly, he wills it, because he allows it to happen or brings it about himself. Therefore, all things that happen, fall under God's sovereign will." Now, it's risky to say that God ordains all things because all things includes earthquakes, and wars and famine and every other terrible thing that you can think of. And the risk is of course the notion that if God could stop these bad things from happening and he doesn't, well then God can't be all loving. And you might be aware that the other side of the argument is equally bad. It says, well, maybe God is all loving but he lacks the power to do anything about stopping these bad things. Well that in fact was a very popular notion a few years back. There was a book by a Jewish rabbi entitled: *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. You may have heard of it, it was a New York Times best seller. And that was his basic premise. His basic premise was that God is really a good God but he lacks the power to do anything about all these awful things, and so he sympathizes with us and he feels the pain that we feel but there's not a thing that he can do.

See, these problems that you have between understanding who God is and how he reacts to these things happen when you pit God's love

and his power against each other. When you do that, you wind up saying that God is either all loving or all powerful but he could never be both. Well in fact we believe that God is indeed all loving and all powerful and that there is a vast area where our human reasoning simply fails to grasp or see or understand what God is doing or why he is doing it. And when really bad stuff happens -- and I guarantee you it's going to happen in every one of our lives -- what do we do? Well, we believers look to the cross. We look to the cross for our assurance of God's love. See, we worship a God who does not stand apart from our suffering. We worship a God who entered into it and he lived through it and experienced suffering on a level you and I will never begin to comprehend. God himself became one of us and then he lived this life perfectly and then he assumed the role of our sin bearer. And in doing that, he experienced the maximum when it comes to psychological, spiritual and physical torment and he did it all for you and me. *Hebrews 4* says: *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* See, that willingness on God's part to suffer to that extreme is what we focus on when bad stuff happens. And when the enemy starts whispering in our ears that our God is powerless or that he's absent or he's even cruel,

because that's what's going to happen when bad stuff happens, we take those whisperings to the foot of the cross. God insists over and over again that the cross is his proof that he loves us. He says in *Romans 8:32*: *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* And so when bad stuff happens, because of the cross, we have a reason to trust him. And God says in *Proverbs 3:5*, he says: *Trust in the Lord with all of your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.* I tell you what happens when I lean on my own understanding. My own understanding tells me that, well, if I try my best to do the right thing, then good stuff should happen to me and bad stuff shouldn't. Well, here's the fact of Daniel. No one lived a better life than Daniel and almost every single thing this angel has to tell him in this vision consisted of bad stuff, bad stuff that God had ordained. We know that God ordains all things and that means all things and that makes God responsible for even the bad things. Now I once heard a story about a funeral that was being preached for an evangelist and his son who were tragically killed in a plane crash. And the pastor was going on and on at the service and he was explaining and he said to the crowd, this large crowd that had gathered, he said one thing we know for certain and that is God had nothing to do with this awful set of circumstances. And the person recounting the story, I think it was Jerry Bridges

but I'm not positive, he was saying he thought of this scripture in *Matthew 10:29* where Jesus says this, he says: "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.*" And he said to himself, how could it possibly be that the same God who says that a sparrow can't fall to the ground apart from his sovereign will can somehow miss a plane crashing? It just can't be. You see, it's so hard to accept the idea that a sovereign, all-powerful God would allow bad things to happen especially to his people. But here's the problem. It's harder still to accept an idea that we worship a God whose own weakness makes him unable to do anything at all about it.

That is not at all what occurs in these final chapters of Daniel. God's answer to stuff happening is not like what most of the world thinks and that is to be absent, uninvolved. And it's not about what else the world thinks and that is to be sympathetic but powerless. God's response is to take everything that the bad stuff is made up of and promise that by his sovereign power alone that he will make it work for good. That's the *Romans 8:28* approach to bad stuff. God says: *We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.* So rather than simply observing what is taking place, God here in the book of Daniel is actively engaged and he's participating in every single aspect of history as it is unfolding.

And we see that in the answer to the question that I raised at the beginning of this message. It's the question that the angel is asking of Daniel. He said this, he said: *"Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: There is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince."* This is amazing. This is what God is trying to get across to us here this morning. You know the angel says, do you know why I've come to -- come to see you? And instead of waiting for a reply, the angel tells Daniel that he, that is the angel, that he's got to go back and return to do battle with prince of Persia. And he tells him that in his absence, the prince of Greece is coming. Well, this is hardly the reaction of someone who is absent. This is hardly the reaction of someone who is merely observing the future without participating in it, or a God of imminent weakness who sympathizes with our situation but really just can't do anything about it. This is the angel of God. This is the pre-incarnate Christ engaging in battle with the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece. And he's fighting the good fight on our behalf. And these are not good guys. I mean the prince of Persia is a demon prince and the prince of Greece is a fallen human leader. You know, the prince of Persia refers to a demonic authority in that area and the prince of Greece refers to an

earthly king who is about to come into power. And the angel goes on to tell Daniel that he's going to explain what is inscribed in the book of truth and that accompanying him in this battle with the prince of Persia will be Michael, your prince. Michael is the Archangel Michael. He's the one the Spirit of Christ is encouraging in the opening verse of chapter 11. It says: *"As for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him."* That's the Spirit of Christ standing up to confirm and strengthen Michael who is his ally in his battle of the prince of Persia. And then the chapter begins to just unfold with this incredibly long vision that describes the near and distant future in incredible detail. Verse 2 says: *"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."*

You say, whoa, what are you talking about? And I can go on and on throughout the entire chapter and what you would hear, what would

probably leave you mired in confusion, because what God is describing in chapter 11 is a very detailed account of how history is going to unfold to the Jews of Daniel's day to Israel's future and to the future that includes even us, and it's so detailed it's easy to get lost. Let me give you some example. The vision says in verse 2, it says: *"Three more kings shall arise in Persia and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them."* Well we know from secular history the kings who rose up in Persia and we also know that Xerxes was the wealthiest of all the kings and we know that he rose up against Greece. The vision says: *"When he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece."* Well, at the time Daniel received this vision he couldn't have possibly known that. We also know that another king rose up to take control over the entire known world, and history tells us that was Alexander the Great. The vision says in verse 3: *Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills.* Again, when Daniel received that vision, there's no history that was informing him of who Alexander even was or what would happen to him. But again, we know from secular history that Alexander was cut down in his youth and that his kingdom was divided up and it was not divided amongst his family, it was given to four smaller separate kingdoms. And again the vision says in verse 4: *"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."

And so we're looking at a vision that takes through a tour of Babylonian history with much of it clearly laid out hundreds of years before it was to take place, and it's so complex and complicated that unless you understand the history of what's going on, you're going to say what in the world is going on? Let me give you another example. This is *Daniel 11:6*. It says: "*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.*" Well, we know again from history the daughter's name was Berenice and we know that her father was Ptolemy II and that he arranged a marriage between Berenice and Antiochus, the Seleucid king of Asia Minor and he did it so that the Middle East would be united with Asia Minor just as the vision described it. And it didn't endure, just as the vision said. It ended with the former wife of Antiochus poisoning him and having Berenice and her son murdered. Now all of chapter 11 and much of chapter 12 continues laying out a vision of what is going to happen in contemporary Babylon and it's a vision that is so detailed that the enemies of scripture just demanded it be seen as a fraud. Nobody could be

that accurate.

As we go through this vision we get to verse 20 and onward, we come to a character who's described as a "contemptible ruler." Well this was another Antiochus. This was Antiochus IV, the one that history knows as Antiochus Epiphanes. Well, Intervarsity's Bible Background describes him this way. It says: "The text calls him contemptible, and indeed he was. His title, 'Epiphanes' means 'god manifest.'" Now understand, this is the title that he gave for himself. He said I am the manifestation of God, god manifest. "But the people preferred 'Epimanes' -- (which means) 'mad man.'" The more you learn about Antiochus Epiphanes, the more you understand that he was either insane or demon-possessed. And this is the same contemptible character that I spoke about back in chapter 8. Back there I said Antiochus Epiphanes was a hate-filled madman. And Bryan Chapell in *The Gospel According to Daniel* gives a good description of him. He says this: This is Antiochus Epiphanes, who invaded Israel, profaned the temple by putting a statue of Zeus in the holy of holies, took away the regular burnt offerings, put a pig on the altar, and with these abominations made Israel desolate not only by defeating the men in battle but also by killing every circumcised infant -- hanging the babies outside their families' homes. This horrible ruler give himself the name Epiphanes meaning "God made manifest," and nothing could have been

more contemptible to Israel than to so address him.

Well, Antiochus is clearly represented in the eighth chapter as the first antichrist. And we know that he's not the only one referred to as antichrist. And back then I said it's best to understand him as a type or a model of what all the subsequent antichrists would be. And we know that antichrists are all marked by an intense hatred of all things having to do with God and God's chosen people. Antiochus Epiphanes is just one of many antichrists who have appeared in history and those enemies of the kingdom are going to play a pivotal role at history's end. It was John who pointed out in the New Testament that there will be many antichrists. This is what he said in *1 John 2:18*. He said: *Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.*

So Daniel's vision addresses this first antichrist who is coming and he does it through Antiochus. And then he addresses the final antichrist and this vision of Antiochus Epiphanes of Babylon begins to change and it changes as he's describing it from a contemporary threat to the Jews of Daniel's day to the ultimate threat to the kingdom of God as it approaches judgment day. Again it's very complicated. Let me just read to you how Bryan Chapell puts it. And I think this -- you got to listen hard because this is

complicated stuff. He says: The culminating prophecies in chapter 12 (which are the continuation of Daniel's vision in chapters 10 and 11) seem to be describing the rise to power of a "contemptible person" prior to a great tribulation of God's people that is yet future to Antiochus. That is how Jesus also interprets this portion of the book of Daniel when he speaks to his disciples (in the Olivet Discourse just before his crucifixion), saying, "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place, flee to the mountains. In Jesus's only reference to the book of Daniel, he looks forward to the abomination predicted, not backward to Antiochus's profaning of the temple. From the details that ultimately emerge in Daniel's vision and from Jesus's use of those details, we come to understand that the evil of Antiochus Epiphanes, though past, models evil to come. That's a lot to say. I just want to finish, he goes on to say this, he makes it a little bit clearer. He says: What I am suggesting, because of the way these various Bible passages treat these events and persons from Daniel's vision, is that Antiochus Epiphanes is a lens by which we are able to see and understand great evil that persecutes, profanes, and seduces. Antiochus becomes a prototype of all that is "Antichrist" to show us the patterns or the "spirit of antichrist" in every age that will culminate in the greatest evil before the end of all ages.

Well, that's about as deep in the weeds as I care to get. And what I don't want to lose here is the forest for the trees. Just to back up a little bit to the ten thousand foot level, what we see here Daniel is receiving a lengthy vision from the spirit of the pre-incarnate Christ, and it's a vision that is full of bad stuff, stuff that's going to affect Daniel negatively for the rest of his life. But what God is saying is, Daniel, in the end this will all work out. God summed it all at the beginning of the final chapter of Daniel. In *Daniel 12*, he says: *"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."* Here's God explaining to Daniel the flow of the events of the future and he's not explaining it as an absent observer or a passive observer but as an active participant. And what it tells us is that God is still here actively moving in the good stuff and in the bad stuff that his people experience. And what I want us all to see here is what I think God is trying to tell us here. And that is the God who shaped and molds history

itself is the God who loved you so deeply that he entered into history itself and then died on a cross so that you and I could have a relationship with him, and that very same God assures us through this vision that he has given Daniel that his hand on Israel's history is but a promise and a proof that his hand on my history is just as steady, just as caring, and just as powerful no matter what kind of stuff I'm going through.

Let me give you a personal example as to why it is so crucial to understand that God is an active participant in the corporate history of Israel and your personal history as well. You know, I've said before that all of us are going to go through periods of time when everything seems to consist of nothing but bad stuff. And when that happens -- and believe me, it will inevitably happen -- how will you respond? Again, let me give you a personal example. Now, this has been a great couple of weeks for most of my family, I mean, I've gained three new grandchildren in just the last month. And Owen and Levi are doing amazingly well now that they're home. We're celebrating the birth of the arrival of Nolan. But I want to talk about another one of my kids right now. I want to talk about Daniel. He and his wife Abby at present have no children, and again, it is not for want of trying. They have faced their fertility issues. At first they decided to adopt. So they started out trying to adopt a child from Ethiopia, having gone

there on mission trips, having fallen in love with those folks and literally they spent years and years going through red tape and going through thousands and thousands of dollars of home studies and working just cross culturally to try and get this thing to happen, working with the adoption agencies. And that vision collapsed when the Ethiopian government cut off all adoptions. And so they shifted their focus from Ethiopia to Uganda where they went next and again just fell in love with the people and they were hoping that that would work out, but those hopes were dashed as well when that government enacted similar legislation. So again after enormous amounts of time and money and energy were spent trying to adopt a Ugandan baby, they decided to try to go for local adoptions in the state of Colorado that they were living in. And quite frankly, I need to tell you, because we abort our children here in this country, there is a precious little supply of babies anywhere. And one of the things that you have to do if you want to adopt a child is you have to kind of write out your life story and just submit it, and they'll tell you that, hey, you've been picked. You're selected. You're one of three or four people and the parents are going to decide whether you make it or whether you don't. And two or three times they were brought through that and said, unfortunately you were cut, you didn't make it. So they lost over that. And you know, Abby, my daughter-in-law's the kind of person who has a heart for the downtrodden and the broken and they

are -- just they poured themselves out for them. I mean she went to Thailand as a videographer for a sex slavery rescue mission. And while they were in Colorado, they opened up their house, and they opened up their house all of the time to people who are broken and downtrodden. And one such person contacted them a few years back telling them that she was pregnant with twins and that she had no ability and no intention of keeping them and she wanted them to become their adoptive parents. Most of you know what happened with that. It turns out the girl had serious mental problems and she actually fabricated the entire story and she was -- she was so good at promoting the deception that she actually wound up attending a pre-adoption party in her honor having put on a fake baby bump that she encouraged everybody at the party to feel. And when the actual day arrived, she just disappeared. And eventually Dan and Abby were able to track her down and she said, well, both of twins have died. Well they eventually got the police involved and after everything came out in the open, the entire thing was a fraud perpetuated by a very, very sick person.

Well after that, Dan and Abby decided maybe God wanted them to move in the direction of foster care. And so they began to take in children and they quickly saw how incredibly broken the foster care system was. And so time and again they would see people just arrive with a child, you know, sometimes it would be a boy, they'd

have a whole collection of girl's clothes to accompany the boy and they'd just kind of pass him off and then move on to the next thing. They could tell these people were just overburdened and anxious to move on to the next case and the kids that they usually received were kids who were like one and two years old, and kids who were obviously reacting to the chaos that they were in, they frequently find kids who were screaming and throwing things and just incredibly hard to love but they proved to be incredibly caring foster parents. But the effect on them was -- was that repeatedly seeing these women who should have never, never had a baby, giving birth to babies that they would not or could not care for, and so they -- they found that happening over and over again and they say, Lord, I don't get it. We're desperate to have a baby to love and here these people who don't care at all about their children, why would you say "yes" to them and "no" to us? I just don't get it.

And so this -- during this past year after much prayer they decide to look into snowflakes. And if you don't know, snowflakes are the fertilized embryos that folks who have fertility problems wind up having and they keep them frozen in liquid nitrogen, so hence the name "snowflakes." So they contacted a family in California that had a number of these embryos and they were very concerned that they would go to just the right family. So they -- Dan and Abby

invited them from California to Colorado to spend a weekend with them to see that they were simpatico and they hit it off and both families worked through all the legal details of what it would mean to adopt an embryo, have it implanted and then go through the nine months it would take to carry to bring the babies to delivery. Twice she had to fly out for Los Angeles for expensive and painful tests just to make sure she would be receptive. And a few weeks ago, two of these embryos were implanted in Abby's womb. Well just this week amidst the backdrop of the birth of Levi, Owen and Nolan, Dan and Abby learned that their pregnancy had failed. That's what I call bad stuff. That's what bad stuff consists of.

So I had a conversation with Dan and he allowed me to share this, and it has to do with how we handle the bad stuff that comes into our lives. You know, Dan asked, he said, "Okay, Dad, what do I do now?" Well, my answer goes back to Christ's answer to Daniel. You see, the Spirit of Christ told Daniel that he was beloved, he touched him with a physical response and then he taught him from the scriptures. I tried to do the same thing. I told Dan, first thing that you need to do is comfort your wife and then the next thing you need to do is the next thing, whatever the next thing is. Don't get caught up with the big picture, Dan, focus on the next thing and what is the next thing? Well, the next thing for them is moving back here. I mean after ten years in Colorado, Dan has

decided to take a job at Young Life up in Glen Spey and they're moving back. But I told Dan something else, actually I told him a number of things. I told him every person that I know at some point in their Christian life goes through seasons of bad stuff. They go through seasons of good stuff and they go through seasons of bad stuff. And I pointed out to him people that we both knew that had gone through seasons of difficulty and stress and strife, I mean his own sister Lydia went through a period of about a year and a half of incredible stress and is now in a period of incredible blessing. And so we talked about that, and he said, "Yeah, but mine has lasted seven years." I said to him, I said, I really have no idea about the length of these seasons, but almost everyone I've ever known that's gone through a bad season has come out of it and enjoyed a season of blessing. And I told Dan, I said, Dan, your mother and I have been through many, many of these until we finally arrived at a place where Peter found himself in John 6. Let me just bring you back there for a second because this is where teaching from the scripture is so incredibly important when you're in that bad stuff. Jesus is addressing a whole group of people. These crowds have now started to form around him because he had been doing all of these miracles and the miracles attracted the people who are attracted to the miracles. And so he's around this enormous crowd and he does these miracles and then he challenges them, telling that he is the bread of life that came

down from heaven and the people begin to balk. And they say, what do you think, you're better than Moses? And the more they balked, the more difficult Jesus's language becomes until he tells them in *John 6:53*, he says: *"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."* I mean Jesus just doubles down. They balk, he doubles down. They balk again, he doubles down on doubling down. He says: *"For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."* When the people heard this, they just shook their heads. *John 6:60* says: *"This teaching is hard! Who can accept it?"* They began to abandon Jesus in droves. And so Jesus responds to his disciples this way in *John 6:67*, he says: *So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."*

See, I told Dan that everyone in their Christian life is going to reach a stage like Peter reached. The stuff becomes not just hard but almost unbearable. And when that hard stuff happens, the inevitable question is just what Jesus asked of his disciples, "Do you want to leave? Do you want to go as well?" And I said to him,

you know you have arrived in your walk with Christ when you can look at that awful stuff and say back to God, "I've got nowhere else to go." Those are the words of someone who knows that in spite of what the world or the flesh or the devil may want to be telling you, that just as Daniel knew even in Babylon, that God is still sovereign and he still loves me even when events and circumstances are screaming otherwise. So I told him, I said, look, it's okay to feel awful and it's okay to feel dismayed because this news is awful. And as much as we would love to see a happy ending, none of that is guaranteed. But here's what is guaranteed by God to you. It is the grace necessary to get you through whatever it is life is going to throw at you. And I told Dan something else as well. I said, you know, there's very little in this life that we can ever give back to God. I mean he owns the cattle on a thousand hills so he doesn't need our money. I mean, he made the Grand Canyon, he made black holes, he made great white sharks and there's nothing that we can make that he's going to be impressed with. So what could we ever give back to God? I told Dan there's one thing. There's only one thing that you can offer. It's what Job's -- it's what Job offered to God when his wife's reaction to all the horrible stuff that he was going through was to say, "Why don't you just curse God and die." Well, he refused and he said in *Job 13:15*: "*Though he slay me, yet I will trust him.*" Job had no place else to go. And what he was saying is God, you

can kill me but you're not going to stop me from trusting you. That's Job giving God the greatest gift a human could ever give to God. I told Dan the only currency we will ever have that will ever be of any value to God is our willingness to trust him when everything is shouting that that's insanity. I honestly believe that heaven erupts in cheers when we respond to bad stuff with simple trust. I think that delights our God.

So what does this have to do with Daniel and the vision he's received about the bad news that's soon going to follow for him and his people? Well, it's just this. It's the sheer certain fact that God is not absent, that he is not uncaring, and that he is sovereign, and that he causes every single thing in our lives to work together for good even when it doesn't look that way or feel that way. The last three chapters in the book of Daniel are a testimony to that. They cover every single aspect of the unfolding of history for the people of Israel all the way up to you and me and the end of time. The vast majority of it is not good news. But all of it is given by God who endured the ultimate bad news on our behalf and it is given for us to be able to turn to him and rely on him when we think things are spinning out of control. Daniel's vision was so full of bad stuff that it literally made him sick. He said in *Daniel 10*, he said: "*My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength.*" You know, the news

was bad but the giver of the news was good and powerful and involved. And he told Daniel and he showed Daniel that he was still greatly loved and that's what sustained him, and that's what will sustain us as well.

Let me conclude with Bryan Chapell's conclusion that sums up well the book of Daniel. He says: We do not know all that will happen until that final day, but we know that our end is sure, glorious, and blessed. We shall be at rest in the place allotted for us. So certain are we of that day that we can know the beauty of living this day by the seat of our pants. We can glory in faithful, bold, courageous decisions in the face of uncertainty because the end is so certain and good. God has it all mapped. He is never panicked. There are no emergency meetings in heaven. Our God says to us, "Go your way. Live your life in the fullness of my service, because you know that I know the end." Let's pray.

Father, we do know that you know the end and we are so thankful that when the bad stuff happens and we are tempted to listen to the whisperings of the enemy who wants to tell us that you are absent or uncaring or powerless or any of the host of other wicked things that we can say, "I've got nowhere else to go." We can agree with Peter that you are the end, you are the final saying of all that we need to have said. Father, when life begins to spin out of

control, give us the ability to trust in you, to trust in your promise of Romans 8:28, that all things work together for good to those who you love you, who are called according to your purpose. Give us the grace, the strength, the peace, and the power to trust and to share that trust with others, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.