

“Beginning at the End”
Daniel 11:1-13
May 15, 2016

INTRODUCTION:

We come today to the end, not only of our study of Daniel, but also to a description of the end of the world as we know it. This world will end with the return of Jesus, the bodily resurrection of both the righteous and unrighteous, and then their judgment by Jesus that will lead either to everlasting life or everlasting shame and contempt.

I have a friend who’s a big sports fan. When his schedule prevents him from watching a big game on television that he wants to see, he will record the game on his digital recorder to watch it later. He informs everyone that he doesn’t want to know how the game ended before he can watch it, so he asks them not to tell him or talk about the game in his presence. Knowing how the game ends would spoil it for him. The Bible is just the opposite. God wants us to know how it all ends. Not knowing how it all ends would spoil it for us. I believe, by the way, that this is the meaning of verse 4 of our text. **“Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”** Some have taken this to mean that the end times will be characterized by a burgeoning level of both travel and knowledge. Pointing to the explosion of knowledge made possible by the computer and of widespread air travel, they conclude that surely we must be close to the return of Christ. I don’t think that’s what this means. It is a picture of those who don’t know the end because they reject God’s truth. The result is restlessness in the frenzied attempt to figure things out and find meaning in life. But when God’s truth is rejected, such meaning proves elusive, even though knowledge itself will grow.

By God’s grace, we are those who know the end because God has revealed it to us. He doesn’t tell us the “when” of the end, but he tells us the “what” and “how.” That is, we do not know when the end comes, but we know how it will come and what will happen when it comes. In his love and wisdom, that is what God has chosen to reveal to us. Knowing and believing this will make a difference in our lives in the present. So let’s look now at this end and how knowing about it helps us.

I. The End of the Story

This is the only place in the Old Testament that speaks of a double bodily resurrection. A time will come when both the righteous and unrighteous will be raised bodily, after which they will face Jesus at the last judgment. The Bible teaches here and elsewhere that all the dead will be raised, both those who go

to heaven and those who go to hell. The biblical view is at odds with the naturalism of our day that says death is the end of everything. The Bible calls death a sleep from which everyone will one day awaken and spend eternity in one of two places. The word “awaken” here should not be understood to teach soul sleep. It is not the soul that sleeps at death, but the body, until the resurrection spoken of here. The Bible teaches in many places that when we die, our souls do not sleep but enter either the presence of the Lord where there is everlasting joy or the place where God is absent, which is everlasting torment and thirst.

Some are confused by the word “many” in our text, where it says “**many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.**” Why not “all”? Many commentators have noted that in Hebrew the word “many” can have the sense of our English word “all”. I think that is right, because it is compatible with the clearer statements of this in the New Testament. Jesus said, “**An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment**” (John 5:28-29). The apostle Paul said the same thing. “**There will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust**” (Acts 24:15).

A second matter that needs to be cleared up about this resurrection and the judgment that follows is the Bible’s teaching about the basis for this judgment. In almost every verse which speaks of the judgment, the Bible teaches that judgment will be based on our works. You can see it here as well, where it is written that it is the wise and those who turn many to righteousness who will shine like the stars. Jesus taught the same in many places, such as in John 5 above where he said that it those who have done good who will enjoy the resurrection of life and those who have done evil who will suffer the resurrection of judgment. The sheep and the goats of Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25 are separated based on how they have treated the “least of these.” But doesn’t the Bible also teach clearly that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone? Yes, it does, in many places. One of those places is right here in our passage where it says that God’s people are those whose names “**shall be found written in the book**” (v. 1). This book of life is mentioned several times in the Bible, and in one of those passages it says that this book was composed before the creation of the world (Rev. 17:8). If your name was written there prior to your own life, then entrance into heaven must not be based on good works you have done.

So how do we reconcile these two things? We do it by recognizing that we are saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone, and not by any works of our own. But one of the inevitable results of such faith will be a heart that is gradually changed to want to serve God. So good works become the evidence of genuine faith.

This bodily resurrection leads to **“everlasting life”** or **“to shame and everlasting contempt”** (v. 2). This is the first and only time the Old Testament uses that phrase “everlasting life.” But it appears repeatedly in the New Testament. The people of God during Daniel’s day, and continuing today, are often marginalized and even persecuted. They may have little earthly power, money and influence. But their future is a bright one.

It’s another story for those who are not numbered among God’s people. Their bodies are raised to shame and everlasting contempt. Shame is one of the strongest of all human emotions, and I think the experience of shame here is what is experienced by the lost on the day of judgment. The shame is due to the fact that judgment is public. The nature of shame requires not simply failing, but being seen as failing. When I ride my road bike, my feet are clipped in to the pedals. When I was first learning to ride with these kind of pedals, I fell several times when I failed to disengage my feet when I stopped the bike. You look a bit foolish when you do that because you simply stop and then fall over. But each time I fell when I was learning, I was by myself and no one saw me—except for one time. There was an occasion when I pulled up to a busy intersection at a traffic light. The road was sloped a little to the right, and I normally disengage my left foot and lean the bike over in that direction. But because the road was sloped in the other direction, my bike went over to the right where my foot was still clipped in, and I fell over in a very clumsy manner. Everyone stopped at that red light saw me, and I felt some shame and didn’t want to make eye contact with anyone. The feeling of shame at the judgment will be multiplied many times over. It will be so strong that those condemned on that day will cry out to the mountains, **“Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb”** (Rev. 6:15). They will prefer being buried alive to the shame they feel.

The Bible tells us that Jesus despises shame (Heb. 12:2). He hates what it does so much that he went to the cross to end it. That’s the good news. All who have trusted in Jesus will feel no shame on that day. Our lack of shame will not be due to our pure lives but to the covering of our sin by Jesus, a covering that is available to any who stop trying to cover their own sin and rest in Jesus.

They are also raised to everlasting contempt. Contempt is another word for hatred. They will spend an eternity growing in hatred, hatred for God and for his people. Hatred does far more harm to the one hating than to the one hated, and that will be the case here, for an eternity.

II. Before the End of the Story

The verses in this last chapter are very consistent with what is taught in the rest of the Bible, including the description of a great period of tribulation for God's people just prior to the end. We have seen in a couple of different places in Daniel the description of one the New Testament calls the antichrist. The time when he is in power just prior to the end will be a time of unprecedented distress for God's people. But if you consider the Bible as a whole, it teaches that this entire era is marked by tribulation for God's people. It's just that the tribulation escalates just prior to the end.

Why does God let things get to this level of difficulty? Jesus gave an answer in the parable of the wheat and the tares. A man's enemies sought to do him harm by sowing weeds in his wheat field. When the weeds appeared, the man's servants asked him if he wanted them to pull up the weeds. He answered that he didn't so that the wheat might not be inadvertently uprooted in the process. **"Let both grow together until the harvest"** (Matt. 13:30). That is what we can expect during this entire time before the return of Jesus when the harvest of judgment occurs. James Denney summarizes it like this.

The question is sometimes asked whether the world gets better or worse as it grows older, and optimists and pessimists take opposite sides upon it. Both... are wrong. It does not get better only, nor worse only, but both. Its progress is not simply a progress in good, evil being gradually driven from the field; nor is it simply a progress in evil before which the good continually disappears: it is a progress in which good and evil alike come to maturity, bearing their ripest fruit, showing all that they can do, proving their strength to the utmost against each other; the progress is not in good itself or in evil itself but in the antagonism of the one to the other.

God's people become the victim of their own success. As the Church grows, the forces of evil get more panicked, and in their fear they attack with great energy. But God always delivers his people, and deliverance comes from two sources. The first one is listed in verse 1, from Michael the archangel. His job is to protect the people of God during this time of unprecedented trouble and also through this entire age. Some will be delivered from death and others through death, but all will be delivered. We get a glimpse of Michael's work in a New Testament reference to him in Jude 9. **"But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'"** This puzzling verse is an allusion to an extrabiblical apocalyptic work called *The Assumption of Moses*. In this work, Satan claims Moses' body as his own on the grounds that Moses had been a murderer in earlier life. Michael was dispatched to deliver Moses from Satan's unlawful claim. Angels continue today to come to our aid in both the heavenly and earthly realms.

The other source of deliverance we have is our Lord Jesus. We are told at the end of chapter 11 that the antichrist **"Will come to his end."** Paul tells us

clearly in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 how he will come to his end. **“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.”** Jesus will destroy him by breathing on him.

III. The Present in Light of the End

The book of Daniel concludes as it began, with an emphasis on being faithful to God’s calling to us and leaving everything else to God. It makes this point in an interesting way. Beginning in verse 5, Daniel overhears these heavenly creatures having a discussion. One of them asks the man in linen (v. 7), a reference to God, the very question Daniel wanted to ask. **“How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?”** An opaque answer is then given to that question: **“a time, times, and half a time”** (v. 7). Daniel’s response to that answer was the same as ours: **“I did not understand”** (v. 8).

Like Daniel, it is not given to us to understand when the end will occur. But there is something that is for us to understand, and it is repeated twice in this closing paragraph. **“Go your way, Daniel”** (v. 9, 13). There was a way for Daniel that God had authored. He was called to be a politician in two of the great kingdoms of his day, and his focus needed to be faithfulness to that calling. He was to let God run the world and focus his attention on what God had called him to do.

God calls us to do the same. It is way beyond our ability to solve all the problems in the world, and God doesn’t call us to do so. He does call us to be faithful. If you’re not sure what God is calling you to do, just do what you need to do today. Maybe that’s nothing more than getting up and going to work or taking care of the people God has put into your life.

CONCLUSION:

We can focus ourselves on the present because God says he will take care of the future and he has made promises to us in that future. For all who know Jesus, these promises are the same as for Daniel. **“And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days”** (v. 13). Can you receive that promise? God has an allotted place for you. It is reserved for all who simply give up trying to control everything and rest in God’s control of his world. The only future life worth living is the one authored by God. The future life I would author for myself is the one ending in shame and everlasting contempt. God’s future ends in everlasting life, and this life is the opposite of the contempt and hatred of the wicked. It is a life of everlasting love, love for God and for his people. That’s the life worth living.