

Present Pain but Future Glory

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[0 : 00] Well, I'm not sure if I've told you this story before. I'm forgetting what I've told you and what I haven't told you. But some time ago, well, it was quite some time ago, it was 4 a.m. in the morning when my wife, Michelle, went into labour with our youngest child.

We rang some good friends who kindly agreed to come over and look after the elder two children while we rushed to hospital. When we arrived at hospital, it was about 4.30 in the morning and Michelle's labour pains were pretty close together, contractions were pretty close together, which, well, as you know, meant the baby was about to arrive.

But as I parked the car, I realised I hadn't quite parked between the lines. You know the lines of the car park? And so Michelle was about to bolt out of the car, bolt, waddle out of the car.

I said, hang on a second, let me straighten up the car. And she just looked at me and said, are you kidding me? It's 4.30 in the morning, there's no one around, I'm about to give birth, park the car.

But she said none of that. She graciously closed the door and I straightened up the car. Now, upon reflection, perhaps I'd missed the bigger picture. Perhaps I'd forgotten what was more important. Perhaps I needed a better perspective on my parking.

[1 : 13] Anyway, we went into the hospital and the contractions were so close that she couldn't have an epidural. And instead, there was just pain. I found it painful just watching Michelle go through labour.

Of course, there was nothing compared to her pain. And then after 30 minutes of pushing, we had this glorious bundle of joy who made up for all that pain. Well, mostly.

Now, I tell you this story for two reasons. First, when it comes to present pain in this life, we need to remember to have God's perspective on it. And second, that perspective includes a future glory that will help us persevere through the present pain, like the birth of a child and labour.

And this is particularly what we see in the last vision of Daniel today. Now, if you've just joined us, we've been working our way through the book of Daniel in the Bible. We've already gone through those better-known stories of the fiery furnace and Daniel and the lion's den, the writing on the wall.

And then we've come to these visions that God gave Daniel, which are often symbolic. And today's vision is the fourth and final one, but it's also the longest one.

[2 : 23] It's three chapters long. And so it has three parts to it, one part per chapter, roughly. Now, given its length, there's no way we're going to be able to do what we normally do, and that is systematically work our way through the text.

We won't have time to do that. Instead, today we're going to have to fly over a lot of it and occasionally land to soak up some of the detail. So we're at point one in your outline, and we'll start at chapter 10, verse 1 in your Bibles.

Do grab a Bible to follow along. So chapter 10, verse 1. In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel, who was called Belteshazzar.

Its message was true, and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision. He was told that it's the third year of Cyrus.

Remember, Cyrus is the king of Persia who conquered Babylon in 539 BC. And in that same year, the first year, he announced that all people could go back to their own countries, rebuild their own temples, including the Jews.

[3 : 33] So the next slide, I showed you this last week, should be the Cyrus Cylinder, which is in the British Museum today, and that's what his decree is inscribed on.

And in fact, on the next slide, I didn't realise this, but on the next slide, there's a statue, a monument of Cyrus the Great in Sydney at the Olympic Park. I didn't realise this, but it is.

It's there. And there's a plaque beneath it, which you can't see, but on the next slide, you might be able to see it a bit better. You've got the Cyrus Cylinder in the background, and the plaque is there because they reckon he was the first one who instituted human rights, allowing everyone to go back and have their own religion and so on, which is not quite right.

Other kings let people have their own religion as well. And of course, God created everyone equal, but we can't have a plaque or statue or plaque to God. But anyway, they've got one to Cyrus.

And the point is, this connects with history. And now it's three years after that date when he let people go back to their own countries. Daniel would have been in his 80s by now, and so perhaps he's too old to make the journey, so he stays in Babylon.

[4 : 44] Yet instead of rejoicing, look at what he's doing in verse 2. You know, see, Daniel is not rejoicing, he's mourning, which is odd given that his people, the Jews, have been allowed back home.

It's odd until we remember what we've seen before in the earlier visions, particularly in chapter 8. Because in those earlier visions, particularly chapter 8, they told Daniel that while his people would go back home, they would suffer greatly in the future.

And it's likely that Daniel is mourning over this because that's what today's vision will talk about as well. And so it's likely that Daniel is mourning over this future for his people and praying for God's understanding, as we'll see in a moment.

And so God sends a messenger or an angel, the word angel just means messenger, to give Daniel an answer to his prayer. And not to know everything about the future, but to know what is important about the future.

And so we're going to skip over for a moment to verse 11. Daniel sees this magnificent angel in the following verses. He turns to Jelly, the angel helps him up, and in verse 11, the angel said, Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.

[6 : 20] And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. Then he continued, do not be afraid, Daniel, since the first day that you have set your mind to gain understanding, that is the first day you started mourning and praying, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I've come to respond to them.

But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me 21 days. That's the three weeks. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me because I was detained there with the king of Persia.

Now, I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.

You see, this messenger has come to answer Daniel's prayer. And in fact, did you notice in verse 12, that from the first day that Daniel started praying for understanding, his words were heard by God.

As I said last week, when I pray, it can sometimes feel like my prayer goes via snail mail or gets lost in the post because it feels like God takes forever to answer. And yet here again, just like last week, we see that God answers prayers straight away.

[7 : 35] The answer might be no, or not yet. And so it feels like it takes forever, but he does answer straight away. And here God's answers, Daniel's prayer by sending an angel to tell him the answer, but the angels delayed for three weeks or 21 days.

Why? Well, because it seems that there are other princes or spiritual forces who are in conflict with God's spiritual forces. Now, while our minds are drawn to this kind of spiritual realm, either out of interest or disbelief or whatever, notice it's only a passing comment by the angel.

Daniel. So while there are things that we can say, like it reminds us that there's a spiritual side to life that this world has forgotten, and there are some verses on your outlines, which remind us what to do in light of that, I'm going to pass over it as well, because it is a passing comment.

And we're going to focus on what the angel does say to Daniel in answer to his prayer. So it brings us to point two, the second part of the vision, and chapter 11, verse two. Have a look there.

Now then, says the angel to Daniel, I tell you the truth, three more kings will arise in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others.

[8 : 57] When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece. And now again, we know from the history books that the next four kings of Persia, after Cyrus, were Cambyses, Bardia, another Darius, and then Xerxes.

And we also know that Xerxes was super rich. What's more, we know that he really went to town against the Greeks. You can look up the Persian-Greek wars on the internet.

And then about 150 years pass, and verse three happens. Remember this type of writing? Kind of jumps stages in history. Verse three. Then a mighty king will arise, who will rule with great power, and do as he pleases.

Now this mighty king arises in the kingdom of Greece. And can you remember who that mighty king of Greece was? Anyone? Alexander. Alexander the Great.

We've met him before. I think I've got a picture of his bust in the British Museum there. That's Alexander the Great. And he died though at a young age. He died in 323 BC.

[10 : 10] And his sons were murdered. And his four generals ended up taking over the kingdom, which is what verse four is talking about. Do you see verse four? After he, that is Alexander, has arisen, his empire will be broken up and parceled out towards, that notice, four winds of heaven.

It will not go to his descendants, his sons who were murdered, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.

And so on the next slide is a picture of the kingdoms as they ended up in 300 BC. Now he died in 323 BC. So there was 20 years of fighting between his generals.

He had more than four generals. There was lots of fighting. In fact, the guy in the yellow, Seleucid, he didn't actually rule that area to start with. In fact, he was on the run from another general and he went down to the green part, to Ptolemy's empire.

It's a silent P, Ptolemy, which is Egypt in the green. He became a commander in Ptolemy's army and they together kicked out the other general and Seleucid went back, regained the territory and in fact, even more, which was the yellow part.

[11 : 27] And that's exactly what verse five is talking about. See, the king of the south, that's, we'll leave the slide up there for a while, Barry. The king of the south, that's the green, in Egypt, will become strong.

But one of his commanders, who happens to be Seleucid, will become even stronger and he will have his own kingdom, the yellow kingdom, with great power.

That's what happened in history. Now, I don't have time to keep working through each verse and showing you how they match up in history, but hopefully I've shown you enough for you to see that this vision predicts what would happen in history with some remarkable accuracy.

There's a lot of history that matches up with what we've got here. But the vision then in chapter 11 focuses on the kings of the north, that's the yellow kingdoms, which is kind of northeast really, and the kings of the south, that's in Egypt, Ptolemy's kings, the Ptolemaic Empire.

And it focuses on those two kingdoms in particular because in between them is the land of Israel, which is where God's people dwell. And sometimes they'd be ruled by the green, sometimes they'd be ruled by the yellow.

[12 : 41] That's why the vision focuses on those two dynasties or kings. And so for verses 6 to 20, the vision speaks about political intrigues between the kings of the north and the kings of the south, between marriages, between conflicts, and so on.

In fact, in chapter 11, verse 17, there's a reference to the king from the Seleucid family, the king of the north, who gives his daughter in marriage to the king of the south, makes an alliance.

The only problem was his daughter ended up loving her husband, the king of the south, more than her father, the king of the north, so it didn't work, as verse 17 says. And the daughter's name?

Cleopatra. Cleopatra I. Not the famous Cleopatra we know, but her great, great, great, well, Cleopatra we know is Cleopatra VII, so however many that is.

Back. And again, you can look up this on Encyclopedia Britannica or even Wikipedia, has it? And the point is, the vision predicts what would happen in history with remarkable accuracy, but for verse 21, the vision narrows even more to a particular king of the north, a contemptible king whom we've met before.

[13 : 55] So have a look at verse 21. He, that is the previous king, will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honour of royalty.

He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue. Again, we're pretty sure that this is referring to King Antiochus IV, who I think is on the next slide.

Well, there's a picture, a bust from the British Museum of this guy. He was not given the honour of royalty in the sense that he was not due to rule the kingdom. He was from the royal family, but he was not due to have the crown.

His older brother, Seleucus IV, was ruling, and then his son, Demetrius, was due to be the next king. In fact, at the start, Antiochus IV was actually in house arrest in Rome.

But through political manoeuvring, he managed to get out. He had his nephew, the next rightful king, take his place in Rome as prisoner. And then he just decided to rule the Yellow Empire just for his nephew, just while he was in prison, until he grew up and got out.

[15 : 08] That was 175 BC. But then he made no attempts to get him out. He just positioned himself and five years later, he simply announced he was now the true king while Demetrius was stuck in prison in Rome.

And so verse 21, he really did seize the kingdom while people felt secure through intrigue. And it was not long after this that he really started to persecute the Jews as well. So turn over the page to chapter 11, verse 29.

I'm sorry about this. We just have to keep skipping bits for time. Have a look here at what happens. At the appointed time, he, that is Antiochus, will invade the south again.

He's already done it before and he was successful. That's verses 25 to 28. But this time, the outcome will be different from what it was before. He'll be unsuccessful.

Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant, Israel.

[16 : 12] He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant. Here we know, again from history, that Antiochus invaded Egypt for a second time in 168 BC.

But he was not successful. Rome was growing in power. Rome was off to, it was up here, it was the northwest and it sent ships and an army.

And in fact, the story goes that the Roman commander, the general, came up to Antiochus, drew a circle around him in the sand and said, before you step out of that circle, think very carefully of what you will do next.

And so he thought, all right, I won't invade. He lost heart and he went back. But as he went back from the borders of Egypt, he passed through Israel and he vented his fury on Israel.

He outlawed Judaism because he wanted to turn the world Greek, including Israel. He showed favor to those Jews who had turned their back on God and his covenant.

[17 : 13] He stopped the daily sacrifices. He turned the temple into a brothel. And on top of the Jewish altar, he set another altar to Zeus, the Greek God. He wanted to turn the world Greek, you see.

And that, for the Jews, was an abomination. He even, historians think, put a statue in the temple of Zeus but gave Zeus his own face because he thought he was God.

Remember, he changed his name to Antiochus Epiphanes which means Antiochus, God manifested on here, in other words. And he sacrificed pigs which were unclean for the Jews on them.

And so in verse 31 to 35 we read, his, that is Antiochus' armed forces, will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice.

Then they will set up the abomination, the altar that causes desolation. With flattery, he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, those other Jews. But some Jews who know their God will firmly resist him.

[18 : 18] Those who are wise, the faithful ones, will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered.

When they fall they will receive a little help and many who are not sincere will join them. Some of the wise will stumble so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, that is the end of the persecution, for it will still come at the appointed time.

And so the future for God's people was looking pretty grim, wasn't it? Yet references like the appointed time mean that God still has it in hand.

You see, while evil kings like Antiochus will rise up in this world because, well, we live in a world where there's evil, just turn on the news and you'll see it there, while wicked will continue and evil kings will rise up, God will put an end to it.

He has set the time and what's more, verse 35, he will use it to refine his people and to sort out those who are really wise, who believe his word and help them grow through it from those who do not believe his word and will abandon him.

[19 : 34] But nonetheless, this part of the vision only confirmed what Daniel saw earlier, which spoke of a horrific time for Israel's future and it was horrific. Thousands upon thousands of Jews were slaughtered and yet, the vision doesn't end there.

There's good news which comes to the third part of the vision, point three, chapter 12, verse one. At that time, the time of this great persecution, Michael, the great prince who protects your people will arise.

There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time, your people, everyone whose name is found written in the book will be delivered.

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life and others to shame and everlasting contempt. Here, the angel tells Daniel that Michael, one of the chief angels who protects God's people, will arise, verse one, and deliver God's people during this time of distress under Antiochus.

While it will be such a terrible time in Jewish history, such as has not happened since the beginning of nations, God will deliver them. Now, historically speaking, God used Judas Maccabee.

[20 : 51] I think on the next slide is an artist's impression of Judas. We're not sure if that's what he really looked like. But his nickname was the Hammer. What a nickname.

Because he fought against Antiochus and eventually won. He restored the temple three and a half years later in 164 BC. In fact, the Jews today celebrate his victory with the festival of Hanukkah.

Mel Gibson actually was going to make a movie about Judas until Warner Brothers shelved the project. But anyway, many, God delivered historically his people through Judas.

But many faithful Jews still died. So how were they delivered? Well, their names were written in the book of life and verse 2, they will rise to everlasting life.

More than that, verse 3, those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end.

[21 : 57] Many will go here and there to increase knowledge. You see, Daniel is told that despite this great persecution, God will deliver his people by ultimately raising them to everlasting life in glory.

This was the ultimate deliverance. And in fact, chapter 12, verse 2 is the only clear verse in the whole Old Testament that talks about resurrection to everlasting life.

And then in verse 4, Daniel is told to seal up this vision until the time of this great distress so that people might break it open, read it, and be encouraged to persevere, to stay wise, to remain faithful, knowing that God would deliver them to everlasting glory.

And Daniel himself, well, come across to verse 9. The angel said, Go on your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end, which is the end of the visions talking about, I think.

Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand. From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.

[23 : 13] But blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days. As for you, go on your way till the end. You will rest and then at the end of days, the end of days, you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.

You see, while the world continues, so will the wicked continue, verse 10. But God will use the wicked to purify his people until the days are up.

The numbers here of days are symbolic and it simply shows that God has set a limit down to the day on how long this persecution would last and in fact how long all of history would last.

And when the days are up, he will raise his people to receive our allotted inheritance in glory. But in the meantime, this future glory was meant to help God's people persevere through present pain.

And it seems it did. For in the Jewish history books of the Maccabees, named after Judas Maccabee, we read about Jews who remain faithful to God's word because of the resurrection here in Daniel 12.

[24 : 21] And let me read one account to you. It's about a family with seven brothers. I read it to my Bible study group last Thursday night, although I cut out some of the gory details for you today.

So they've just killed their oldest brother in a rather gruesome manner. And so we pick it up here. It says, After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport and asked him, Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?

Gives you an idea of what they did. He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, No. Therefore, he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done.

And when he had breathed his last, he said to the king, Antiochus, you accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the king of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life.

Well, next slide. After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched out his hands. Gives you another idea of what they were doing.

[25 : 30] And said, Nobly, I got these from heaven. And because of God's lords, I disdain them. And from God, I hope to get them back again.

When? At the resurrection. And as a result, the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

And the last bit of the story on the next slide. After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. When he was near death, he said, one cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and notice to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him.

But for you, Antiochus, there will be no resurrection to life. It's pretty full on, isn't it? But did you notice the references to the resurrection?

And given that the only clear verse in the whole Old Testament about being raised to everlasting life is here in Daniel 12, what do you think they were reading?

[26 : 35] You see, they cracked open the seal. They read what would happen to them and could see it matching up with what they were experiencing, but they also read of their future.

And their future glory helped them persevere through their present pain just as it was meant to. And it's the same for us, except we have even more reason to believe our resurrection and glory.

Why? Because Jesus has already done it. As we heard from our second reading on the next slide, I think it is, from 1 Peter, we have been given a living hope, that is a certain hope, how?

Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That is because Jesus rose from the dead in history, for which we have evidence, then we can be even more certain that God will raise us too, to our inheritance.

And for us who believe in Christ, that's what we've got to look forward to. For us who are wise, whose names are written in the book of life. And for us who believe, then we have to remember that, we have to remember our future glory, so that when pain or persecution comes in the present, we might persevere and remain faithful.

[27 : 54] On the next slide is Nabil Qureshi, who passed away last weekend. He grew up in the US, he was a devout Muslim, he was a medical student, so a clever guy, but he investigated the claims of Christianity, who Jesus was, his death and resurrection, and he became a Christian.

He wrote the book there, which made it on the New York Times bestseller list in 2015, Seeking Allah but Finding Jesus.

And last year he was diagnosed with cancer. And what I want to do now is play a video clip of him preaching, so Graham, you might need to make sure that the USB volume is up.

Have a listen to this. Guess what? It's actually only beginning. Because of what Christ has done for us on the cross, it is just the beginning of our real life.

Though we're seeing life as if through a veil right now. And we see beauty, we see colors, we see sunsets, we taste tastes, we hear music, we see art, we think this is all so beautiful, this is nothing compared to what waits for us on the other side of this life.

[29 : 07] And we have assurance that we will be there because of the work of Jesus Christ. So how can we ask the question, God, why is there suffering if you're a loving God?

The only way we can ask that question is if we're so hopelessly myopic and short-sighted on our own pains instead of seeing who God is, what He has done for us, and what He has procured for us in the afterlife.

If we stop being so hopelessly self-centered and micro-focused on the pain that we experience in this life, we will begin to see the greatness of God and the eternal picture in which He has procured for us life and life ever more.

in the face of an eternal life of bliss with our Creator, no amount of suffering or pain on this earth can shake our confidence in Him.

You see, for Nabil, he looked at his suffering, his cancer, from God's perspective, didn't he? He had a certain hope of everlasting life and the new creation resurrection because of the real historical work of Christ.

[30 : 23] And it gave him confidence to persevere through his present pain, which he did until he passed away last weekend. For him, it was the pain of cancer. For God's people in Daniel's day, or actually a little bit later on, it was the pain of persecution.

And for us today, well, it could be both. Whether it's persecution for loving people but still gently voting no, I mean, poor old Tony Abbott, who has a faith, was head-butted in the face last weekend in Tasmania because he is voting no, though the attacker claims now that it was nothing to do with the marriage vote, even though he was wearing a vote yes badge.

And then there's the text messages that some of you may have received reminding you to vote yes. I don't know if you got those, I've got those. Either way, there's a growing intolerance of Christianity and Christian views in Australia. And perhaps God will use this persecution to refine his church as he did for Israel in that day.

But whether it's persecution or pain for sickness, we have to persevere in the present, not only knowing that God is with us, not only knowing that we are part of a family who can support us, but also knowing as Nabeel did, that our future glory will far outweigh our present pain.

Our gracious Father, we do thank you again for your word and for this vision that you gave Daniel, which encouraged your people Israel. Father, we thank you that it points towards the Lord Jesus who rose from the dead and by his resurrection gives us a living hope, a certain hope that we too will be raised one day and will shine like stars in the sky.

[32 : 00] And so Father, we pray that with this future glory in mind that it would help us to persevere through any present pain we are feeling this day or in the days that come ahead.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.