

Present Pain but Future Glory

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[0 : 0 0] Well, again, it's great to see the family and friends of Ryan here. He did well today. I'm not sure what time he was born in the morning, but when our youngest was born, Megan, she was born at 4 a.m. in the morning.

We rang some good friends, and they kindly agreed to come over and look after the older two children as we rushed to hospital in the early hours. And when we arrived at hospital, Michelle's contractions were pretty close together, which meant the baby was about to arrive.

But as I parked the car, I realised I hadn't quite parked between the lines. And so, you know, Michelle was about to bolt out of the car, bolt, waddle out of the car, and with the baby on the way.

And I said, oh, hang on, let me straighten up the car. Michelle gave me this look like, are you serious? It's 5 a.m. in the morning. There's no one around. Just park the car. But she said none of that.

She graciously closed the door. I straightened up the car. And upon reflection, perhaps I've missed the bigger picture. And forgotten what was more important. Perhaps my approach needed a little bit better perspective.

[1 : 0 6] So we went in the hospital. The contractions were too close for an epidural. And instead, there was just pain. I found it painful just watching Michelle go through pain. Although she felt the brunt of it, as you mums know.

But after 30 minutes of pushing, this glorious bundle of joy made all that pain worthwhile. Well, mostly. Now, I tell you this story for two reasons. First, when it comes to present pain in this life, as Christians, we need to come to it with God's perspective.

And second, that perspective includes a future glory, a bundle of joys, so to speak, that will more than make up for any present pain. And this is particularly what we're seeing in the last, or what we will see in the last vision of Daniel today.

If you've just joined us, and I know we've got a number of visitors here, we've been working our way through the book of Daniel in the Bible. We've already gone through those better-known stories like the fiery furnace, Daniel and the lion's den, even the writing on the wall.

And we've come to some visions, which are a bit weird and wonderful. And we've come today to the fourth and final vision that Daniel is given. But it's also the longest one.

[2 : 1 5] I'm sorry. It's three chapters long. It has three parts to it. So we're not going to be able to go all the way through it. It's too long to do that. We can't do our usual practice of working through each section.

Rather, what we're going to have to do today is kind of fly over a lot of it, occasionally landing to soak up some of the detail. You've also got an outline you would receive when you came in, which you might find helpful.

At least you can pace yourself to know how long we've got to go. So at point one in your outline, and we'll start at chapter 10, verse 1 in your Bibles. So it's page 894. Page 894.

Chapter 10, verse 1. In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel, who was called Belteshazzar. That was his Babylonian name, if you remember. Its message was true, and it concerned a great war.

The understanding of the message came to him in a vision. Here we're told it's the third year of Cyrus' reign. Remember, he was the king of Persia who conquered Babylon in 539 BC.

[3 : 18] In that year, he announced that all people could go back to their own countries. And so I showed you this slide on the next slide. It's called the Cyrus Cylinder. It's in the British Museum today.

And inscribed in between those ridges, you can't see it, but there's this minute writing, which captures Cyrus' decree that happened in history, where everyone went back home. In fact, in Sydney, at Olympic Park, on the next slide, they've even put a monument to Cyrus, king of Persia.

I didn't realise this, but in Sydney at Olympic Park, that's king of Persia, Cyrus. And the reason for that, on the next slide, is the plaque. You can see the Cyrus Cylinder in the background. And the sculptor reckons, or the person who did it, reckons that he was the first king to kind of promote human rights, where everyone could have their own religion and go back to their own countries and that sort of thing.

It's not quite right. Other kings let people have their own religion. And certainly God is all for equal rights, but we can't have a plaque to God in Sydney, but we've got a plaque to Cyrus, but there you have it.

The point is, this connects with history, and it's now three years since that event. So some of Israel, the Jews, have gone back home to their country. Daniel, who would have been in his 80s by now, perhaps too old to make the journey, he stays in Babylon, which is now running by the Persians.

[4 : 36] And yet, instead of rejoicing that his fellow countrymen have gone back home, have a look at what he does in verse number two. In verse number two, Daniel is mourning, isn't he?

Even though his people are allowed to go back home, instead of rejoicing, he's mourning. Why? Why is he doing that? Well, if you've been with us over the last few weeks, we would have seen from his earlier visions that although the Israelites, the Jews, could go back home, something terrible was going to happen to them in the future.

There was going to be a period of great persecution and pain. And it's that that Daniel seems to be mourning over and praying for God's understanding on, as we'll see in a moment.

In fact, the whole vision, as we'll see, is about this period of persecution. So I suspect that's what he's mourning over. And so God sends a messenger or an angel, the word angel just means messenger, to give Daniel a message to answer his prayer that he was praying while he was mourning.

And not to know everything about the future, but to know what was important about the future. So skip over to the next column in your Bibles, to verse number 11, towards the top of the page. Verse number 11. So he sees this amazing angel.

[6 : 05] He turns to Jelly. The angel kind of gives him strength to stand up. And then verse 11. He said, Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I'm about to speak to you and stand up for I've now been sent to you.

And when he had said this to me, I stood up trembling. Then he continued, do not be afraid, Daniel, since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding that he started praying to God for the beginning of those three weeks.

And to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard from the first day. And I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me 21 days.

Then Michael, one of the chief princes or angels, 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, it comes in answer to Daniel's prayer. In fact, in verse number 12, did you notice that Daniel was heard by God from the first day he started praying?

[7 : 12] As I said last week, when I pray, it feels like sometimes my prayers go via snail mail or get lost in the post to God because it feels like God takes so long to answer. And yet here again, like last week, we see that God answers prayer straight away.

It's just that sometimes his answer is no or not yet. But here God answers Daniel's prayer straight away. Yet the answer is delayed because the messenger was delayed for 21 days.

That's the three weeks. Seven threes, 21. Why was this messenger delayed? Well, it says because, verse 13, the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me 21 days and I was detained.

In other words, it seems like there's some sort of spiritual conflict happening in the background. Now, while our minds can be drawn to this out of either interest or disbelief, like, yeah, right, or whatever it is, it's worth noticing that this is just a passing comment.

It's worth noticing also that it wasn't that long ago that we were actually more spiritually minded as a society. I mean, even the phrase, the devil made me do it, is not true. But there was an awareness, although today it seems like society has moved even more further away from that.

[8 : 28] But the point here is that it's only a passing comment. And so we're going to pass by it too. They're giving you some references you can follow up on your outlines. We're going to come to what the answer was to Daniel's prayer.

So it brings us to point two, the second part of the vision. And come with me to chapter 11, verse 2. Okay, so Daniel prayed, angels come, and now he's about to tell him the answer.

Chapter 11, verse 2, top of the page. He says, Now we know from the history books that the next four kings of Persia, after Cyrus, were Cambyses, Bardia, another Darius, and then Xerxes.

Xerxes was super rich. What's more, we know that he really went to town against the Greeks. In fact, it's the historical backdrop to the next slide, to that movie, 300. I'm not recommending that movie, by the way, but that's the least bloodthirsty shot I could get of it.

But what we're talking about here is the period of history that is the backdrop for that movie, where Xerxes attacked the Greek states. And the Spartans, one of the Greek states, stood up with him, and the 300 soldiers delayed him, although they were defeated.

[9 : 53] Oh, sorry, spoiler alert. They were defeated in the end. And then from that, 150 years pass, and we have verse 3. Remember, this type of writing is very symbolic, and it kind of skips over history.

Verse 3. Then a mighty king will arise, from Greece that is, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. Now, can you remember who that mighty king of Greece was in history?

We've met him before. Anyone? Alexander the Great. That's right. I think we've got a slide on. So this is a picture of his bust in the British Museum today. He united the Greek states and ruled the known world.

But do you remember what happened to him? He died quite young. He died in 323 at the age of 41, and his sons were murdered. And his kingdom was divided amongst his generals, which is what verse 4 is talking about.

Do you see verse number 4? It says, After he has arisen, that's Alexander, his empire will be broken up and parceled out towards, notice, the four winds of heaven, the four generals.

[10 : 55] It will not go to his descendants, because they murdered his sons, nor will it have the same power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.

And so on the next slide, we have a picture of his kingdom and how it ended up being divided amongst four generals. Now, it didn't start off like that. He died in 323 BC, and there was more than four generals, and they all fought with each other.

In fact, Seleucus, with the yellow empire, he was kicked out of that area pretty quickly, and he went down to Ptolemy. That's a silent P. Ptolemy in the green, in Egypt.

He actually became a commander in Ptolemy's army for a while, and then they kicked out the other general, and Seleucus went back and regained the yellow part of the land. That's what the history books tell us.

And it matches with what we see in the next verse. Have a look at verse number 5 in your Bibles. Just leave that map up there for a moment, Tina. Verse 5, the king of the south, that's Egypt, the green part, it's the most southern part, south, west, will become strong.

[11 : 58] But one of his commanders, Seleucid, will become even stronger than he and will rule his own kingdom with great power. That's the yellow kingdom.

That's what happened in history. Now, I don't have time to keep working through this verse by verse, showing you how it matches up with history, but hopefully I've shown you enough for you to see that this vision predicted what would happen in history with quite a bit of accuracy.

We can match it up quite easily. But the vision then focuses on the kings of the north, which were the yellow bit, the yellow empire, and the kings of the south, the green in Egypt.

And it focuses on those two kings because between those kingdoms, about where the green and the yellow meet, well, that was Israel. That's where God's people were.

That was God's people's land, the land of Israel. And so that's why the vision now focuses on what happens between the yellow and green, because as they fight, it has implications for God's people.

[13 : 01] In fact, if you have a look at verse number 17, chapter 11, verse 17, it talks about a king of the north who makes an alliance with the king of the south by giving his daughter in marriage.

It didn't work because his daughter ended up loving her husband, who was in Egypt, more than her father. And so that's why verse 17 says that it will not succeed or help him. And that daughter, her name was Cleopatra.

Cleopatra, Cleopatra I, from whom came the famous Cleopatra we know, who's actually Cleopatra VII. Again, you can look up this encyclopedia Britannica online.

Even Wikipedia has this stuff, right? The point is, this vision predicted what would happen in history with remarkable accuracy. But then from verse 21, the vision kind of narrows even further to one particular king of the north, a contemptible person who we've met before.

Have a look at verse number 21. He, that is, one of the kings of the south, will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honour of royalty.

[14 : 10] That is, he doesn't deserve to rule. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure. And he will seize it, not through battle, but through intrigue, political manoeuvring and the like.

And again, from history, we know who this is. It's this guy on the next slide, I think. It's Antiochus IV. Again, it's in the British Museum, that bust of him.

He was not supposed to rule. He belonged to a royal family, but his brother was the king. And that meant that the brother's son, Demetrius, was next in line. Antiochus had no claim to the throne.

In fact, at the time, he was a prisoner in Rome. And yet somehow, through political manoeuvring, he got his nephew, Demetrius, to be exchanged for him. He got set free and the rightful next king went to prison in Rome.

And then he went and took over the kingdom when his brother died. And he kind of said, look, I'll just rule for Demetrius until he gets out of prison from Rome, and then I'll hand it over.

[15 : 11] So he started off by saying, I'll just rule as a co-regent. And that was 175 BC. But five years later, after he made no efforts to free his nephew, after he'd positioned himself through political manoeuvring, he just claimed, when the empire felt secure, he just said, no, I'm the true king.

That's it. And left Demetrius in Rome. You see, verse 21, he really did seize the kingdom while people felt secure. And he did it through intrigue. And it was not long after this that he really started to go to town on the Jews.

So turn over the page in your Bibles. Turn over your page to number 29, verse 29, the left-hand column there. In verses 25 to 28, he invades Egypt.

And there's some references there. In verse 29, at the point of time, he'll again invade the south, Egypt. But this time, the outcome will be different from what it was before.

Before he won the battle, but this time he doesn't. 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 : 21] He will return and show favor to those Jews who forsake the holy covenant. And again, that's what happened in history. Antiochus tried to invade Egypt for a second time and to plunder its wealth.

But he was stopped by ships from the western coastline. And the nation that was west was Rome. Rome sent ships to stop Antiochus. In fact, the Roman general came to Antiochus.

He stood him in the sand and drew a circle around Antiochus and said, Now, before you attack, before you leave that circle, I want you to think very carefully. Look at my troops. Think very carefully. And so Antiochus went, OK, I've got the point.

And he went back home. But as he went back home north, he passed through Israel. And he went to town on the Jews. He outlawed Judaism. He wanted to turn the world Greek.

He showed favor to the Jews who turned their back on God. He outlawed the daily sacrifices. He turned the temple into a brothel.

[17 : 25] On top of the Jewish altar, he set up another altar to Zeus, the Greek god, because he wanted to turn the world Greek. And he made a statue, historians believe, of Zeus, but with his own face, because he thought he was God.

In fact, he even renamed himself Antiochus Epiphanes. And Epiphanes means God manifested. You know, I'm here. I'm God. I'm Zeus. And so we read in verse 31 to 35, His armed forces, that is Antiochus' armed forces, will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress in Jerusalem and will abolish the daily sacrifice.

Then they will set up the abomination, his altar to Zeus, that causes desolation. With flattery, he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, those Jews who turn their backs on God.

But the people who know their God will firmly resist him. Those who are wise, that is, the faithful Jews, will instruct many other Jews, 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, but until the appointed end, for it will still come an appointed time.

[18 : 48] And so the future for God's people looked pretty grim, didn't it? Yet the references to appointed time mean God still had it in hand. You see, while evil kings like Antiochus will rise up, because we live in a world where there's good and evil, I mean, just turn on the news, and you can see it there.

While evil kings like Antiochus will rise up, God will put an end to it. More than that, he will use it, verse 35, to refine his people, to sort out those who really are wise and trust in him, and those who don't.

But nonetheless, this part of the vision only confirmed Daniel's earlier visions that spoke of a horrific future for his people. And it was horrific. Thousands upon thousands of Jews were slaughtered.

And yet, the vision doesn't end there. We come to the third part, chapter 12, verse 1, which is good news. At that time, Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise.

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

[20 : 02] And so here, the angel tells Daniel that the chief angel, Michael, will arise and protect his people, and deliver them. And in history, we know that happened through a guy called Judas Maccabee.

So I think on the next slide, we've got an artist. We don't know if that's really what he looked like. His nickname was The Hammer, because he really went to town against Antiochus and defended the Jews and actually liberated Jerusalem, restored the temple three and a half years later in 164 BC.

In fact, today, the Jews still celebrate his victory over Antiochus with a festival called Hanukkah. Mel Gibson was actually going to make a movie about Judas Maccabee, but then Warner Brothers shelved the project.

But again, this is what happened in history. And yet, many faithful Jews still died. So how were they delivered, verse 1, if they still died? Well, we're told in verse 2, Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and others to shame and everlasting contempt.

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who led 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 : 24] Many will go here and there to increase in knowledge. Daniel is told that despite this great persecution, God would ultimately deliver his people by raising them to new life in the world to come.

This was the ultimate deliverance that's on view here. And in fact, verse 2 is the only clear verse in the whole Old Testament that talks about resurrection to everlasting life.

There are other allusions to it in the Old Testament, but this is the only clear one that talks about resurrection to everlasting life. And then in verse 4, Daniel was told to seal up this vision until the time of this great persecution by Antiochus so that the people might break it open, read it, and realize what their future is going to be.

That their glorious future might help them to persevere through the present pain. And Daniel himself, well, look at verse number 9 towards the end there. The angel replied, Go on your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end.

The time of this end-time persecution was end-time for us, but it was for the vision. 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.

[22 : 42] From the time the daily sacrifice is abolished by Antiochus and the abomination that causes desolation, his altar, is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

As for you, Daniel, go on your way until the end of your life. You will rest and then at the end of all days, you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.

You see, we're told here that while the world continues, the wicked will continue. There'll be good and bad people in the world. Again, we know that. But God will use various wicked people to purify his own people until the days are up.

The numbers there, remember this is symbolic writing, it's really to show that God has actually numbered down to the day how long these things will take place. We don't know.

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

[23 : 51] You know, like the joy of a child being born, helping the parent mum persevere through the pain of labour. And it seemed that's what it did for God's people because in the Jewish history books called Maccabees, written after Judas Maccabee, the hammer, we read about Jews who remained faithful to God's word because of the resurrection.

Let me read to you one account. It starts on the next slide. It's about a family had seven brothers and they appear before Antiochus who wants them to eat unclean food.

They've just killed the first brother in a rather gruesome manner, which is why I've skipped that bit. It's a bit MA15 plus kind of thing. And so we pick it up on the next slide. This, oh, sorry, this one here. Sorry, Tina, the back one, verse seven.

Yep. As I read, you'll get an idea of how they killed them anyway. But after the first brother had died, this is from the Jewish history books, in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport and asked him, will you eat this unclean food rather than have your body punished limb by limb?

There you go. You've got an idea. 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 was at the last breath, he said to the king, you accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but notice, the king of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life.

[25 : 11] Take a look at the next slide. Yeah, verse 10. After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded that he, of him, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, in idea of what they were about to do to him, and said nobly, I got these hands and tongue from heaven and because of God's laws, I now disdain them because from God, I hope to get them back again.

When? At the resurrection. 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 then one more, after he, too, had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth brother in the same way.

And 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, King 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 since the only clear verse about resurrection to new life is here in Daniel 12, what do you think they'd been reading? You see, they'd cracked open the scroll during that time in history and read what their future was.

[26 : 33] And it encouraged them to persevere through their present pain like we saw. And it's meant to be the same for us, except we have even more reason to believe our resurrection and glory.

Why? Well, because Jesus has already done it. As we heard in our second reading on the next slide, we have been given a living hope, that is a certain hope, through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

That is, because Jesus rose from the dead in history, then we can have even more certainty God will raise us to. Now, I need to say, this is not blind faith. As I said before, we have evidence that Jesus really did rise in history.

More evidence than people realize, actually. So much so, that a now-retired Supreme Court judge in New South Wales said there is enough evidence to rule in favor of the resurrection in a court of law.

That's how much evidence we have. I don't know if you realize that. You see, the Christian faith is not blind faith, even though the resurrection seems pretty way out there. It's faith based on evidence, good evidence at that.

[27 : 39] And that means, since God raised Jesus from the dead in history, then we too can be certain he will raise us if we trust in him. And so, the first question for us this morning is, do you trust in Jesus?

In Daniel's words, are you wise? It's only by trusting in Christ that we can have the certainty of heaven. The certainty of being raised again in the new creation where there will be no more pain or suffering and evil.

Do you trust in Jesus? There's good reasons to. And for us who already do, then we are to remember our future glory so that when present pain comes our way, we might persevere and remain faithful.

On the next slide is a guy called Nabil Karishi who passed away last weekend. He grew up in the US. He was a devout Muslim. He was a medical student.

So he was a clever guy. But he investigated the claims of Christianity, who Jesus was, his death and even his resurrection. And he became a Christian. And so he wrote that book which made it onto the New York Times bestseller list.

[28 : 46] Seeking Allah but finding Jesus. But last year he was diagnosed with cancer. and he was speaking at his church in the US in Houston.

And he was talking about even if he does die, he knows what he's got to look forward to. So I'm going to play a video clip of him. Should the worst happen. You can see chemo has taken effect on his head.

Should life end. 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. And we have assurance that we will be there because of the work of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 46] 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 evermore.

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 suffering, his own suffering, in fact, from God's perspective. He had a certain hope of everlasting life in the new creation because of the real and historical work of Christ.

And it gave him confidence to persevere through his present pain right up until his death last Saturday. For him, it was cancer. For God's people, in Daniel 12, it was persecution.

[31 : 07] For us, well, it could be either. whether it's persecution for loving people and, yeah, I'm going to be controversial and still gently voting no. I mean, poor old Tony Abbott, who has a faith, was headbutted in the face in Tasmania last weekend by a guy who was wearing a badge saying, vote yes.

And some of us, I don't know, people received text messages to vote yes recently. I don't know how they got my number, but anyway. Either way, there's a growing intolerance of Christianity and Christian views in Australia.

We're to be loving, yes. Stand up for the truth, though. Perhaps God will use this growing intolerance and persecution that is starting to happen to refine his church.

I don't know. But whether it's the persecution or whether it's pain of sickness in our own life or our family's lives, then we ought to persevere through that present pain, not only knowing that God is with us, as we sung in one of our earlier songs, not only that we are part of a family here who can support us, but also knowing, as Nabil did, that our future glory will far outweigh our present pain.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank you for the real and historical work of Christ, both his death for us, which paid for our sins, and his resurrection, which guarantees ours.

[32 : 29] And so, Father, we pray that you would help us to persevere and remain faithful to you through whatever this fallen world throws our way, knowing that our future will be glorious. In the words of Paul, our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that will far outweigh them all.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.