

Your People Will be Delivered December 1, 2019

Daniel 12:1-4

1 "At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. 2 Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. 4 But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end. Many shall be running back and forth, and evil shall increase" (NRSV).

Today's Scripture is from the Old Testament book Daniel. This book contains some of the most well known and favorite stories that we learn as children: the writing on the wall, the Lion's den, and the fiery furnace. Daniel is one of four major prophets. You know the others, they are: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Daniel is about a righteous hero. Because he is both wise and righteous he receives divine communication - revelation and interpreting dreams. Daniel and his friends are Jews that are captured in Jerusalem and exiled in Babylon. The text provides role models for people to follow; observant Jews that are unwilling to compromise with idolatry. They set an excellent example for others to follow. They thrive because they remain faithful while serving a foreign king. Daniel serves the purpose of encouraging and consoling people that are facing persecution.

The book is unique because it is in the apocalyptic genre. There are only two in Bible; the other one is the New Testament book Revelation. Apocalypses are narratives, stories that reveal secrets that are disclosed through visions or angels. These stories allow the readers to experience the supernatural world. They bring a word of hope and encouragement to those who suffer from evil, oppression, and injustice in the world, to a future glory with a triumphant God. Daniel does not map out the future. What it does is provide a picture of God's redemption. Daniel is a book of faith - faith in God's success and faith in God's promise. Faith is what makes the book valuable to us. We have faith that God will not fail and faith in redemption.

The theological theme is the same as all of the of the books of Bible; the divine struggle against evil. It is in essence about the relationship between God and God's people. Whereas, God is righteous and maintains covenant, the people struggle to maintain covenant. The people are rewarded for devotion and punished for transgression.

The setting is the exile. It is a time when Israel and Judah were punished for rejecting God. They worshiped idols and failed to head God's call for repentance. The history unfolds like this - from slavery to forty years in the wilderness, to the judges, kings, the divided kingdom, and then the exile. It is very important for us to know about the Exile. It is during this time that God promised redemption. While it is not a part of today's text, the exile also sets up the promised redeemer - the Messiah.

It all goes back to the covenant, the basic premise that sets up all the events that happen throughout history in the Bible. It is a very unique relationship that Israel has with God. Other nations have kings that they made into their gods, like North Korea today, but for Israel, God was their king. This is a unique and special relationship. So, God made a covenant with them. The covenantal promise is a binding promise that is based on a relationship made between God and humanity. Genesis 17:7 I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your

offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant (NRSV). The gift from God for keeping the covenant is promised land. Genesis 17:8 I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan (NRSV). The commitment of the people is in Genesis 17:9 you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations (NRSV). The promised land is a condition of the covenant. Break the promise and you get kicked out of the promised land - exiled. The exile happens because the people fail to keep covenant.

Looking at their history it is easy to see where the problem originated. The monarchy was established because the people want a king like their neighbors. They were in a very unique relationship with God being their king but then they wanted an earthly king like their neighbors. This goes against the premise of God being their king. So, what they get are problems of the earth. The kingdom is divided and conquered. The famous question is, Why does a loving God let this happen? Well, I will explain it like this. It is like a parent and child relationship where there is a loving parent with a child that refuses to obey. For example a kid wants car and the parent makes a deal where if the kid gets good grades and does not get into trouble the parent provides a car. The child's grades slip, the parent repeatedly cautions the child to get the grades up. The go up but then back down. Again the parent warns the child. The grades go up but then go back down. This repeats over and over again until there is nothing left for the parent to do. When the kid gets a speeding ticket, the parent takes the car away. So, Babylon invades Judah 605 BC, Daniel is captured and taken to Babylon.

The Scripture today is at the end of the book. It concerns prophecy of the future. The good news is that the conflict between good and evil will be resolved where God is the victor in the struggle of history. Michael the archangel will rise up to fight evil. We know him as the one that fights the devil. Jude 9 records him disputing with the devil and in Revelation 12 he fights against the devil. The main point of today's Scripture is your people shall be delivered. They will be delivered from persecution. The wise will shine, but notice this very important characteristic - they will lead many to righteousness. That is our job. it is not just a matter of being righteous. The characteristic that shines is leading others to righteousness.

This brings us to our contemporary lesson for today. We have the ethical responsibility to lead others to righteousness. The problems of world exist because of evil. Our job is to heed the word of God and lead others to righteousness. God wins in the end. All who seek to keep the faith with God are winners, the reward for those that lead the way to righteousness. God rules supreme. The adversaries of God's people will be defeated. The righteous will live in union with God forever. This chapter deals with final judgment. Christ quoted part of this chapter in applying it to the destruction of Jerusalem with reference to final judgment. Perhaps the most important point is that after the exile God did something truly special. God offered to the world a wonderful gift of love.