

Turn with me to Daniel chapter 12. We finish the book this morning reading from verses 5-13, the final paragraph and the conclusion of Daniel's seventh and final vision which began at the start of chapter 10. Because our series has come to us in starts and stops over these past 24 months I thought I would use tonight to recap the high points and summarize its message.

When this vision finally ends there are two questions asked. One is "How long before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" in verse 6 and then in verse 8 this is Daniel's question "What will the outcome of all this be?" Not surprisingly, the answer he is given is somewhat cryptic. Scholars are not agreed if the Lord's time table is referring to Antiochus Epiphanes day, the 165 B.C. timeframe, or if we are projected into the future referring to end times days and events.

Regardless, we are not left in complete mystery as to how to profit from this text. In the end Daniel is charged to go his own way, that is, keep walking humbly with his God, live by faith. As if the Lord tells him, "Daniel be content to live without answers to all your questions. You don't need to know them in order to live well and for life to make sense."

In this conclusion Daniel is given broad stroke answers to his second question, "What will the outcome of all this be?" In particular what will his "outcome" be, what can he still expect? In broad outline, he can expect to be further *refined* until he meets his *rest*, then his body will be *raised* and finally, he will be *rewarded*. Refined, Rest, Raised and Rewarded and that describes what we can expect too. We all will pass through these four stages or periods of everlasting life, some stages will last longer than others, but each one is better than the one that precedes it.

Follow along with me as I read from verse 5 to the end of the book. Would you join me in prayer?

I. We will be *refined*. Daniel 12:10

So the first thing that we see Daniel to expect is that he will be *refined*. If he is to carry on in this world it means refinement, and so we too should expect that as Daniel serves as a model for us. To be a Christian is to be loved by God and to be loved by God is to be washed by him, cleansed, sanctified, purified, and made spotless and refined. So verse 10 reminds us. Why? To what end? Because we are engaged to be the Lord's and are being made ready for our wedding. We are being beautified as a bride and not just any bride, heaven's bride!

The time period from our conversion until we cross the Jordan could be labeled "Refinement". We are in the Refiners Fire. Isaiah 48:10 says "See, I have refined you, though not as silver, I have tested you in the furnace of affliction."

The Refiner has a variety of crucibles and furnaces. In the Daniel context the furnace is one of persecution. God's people are being abused, even killed. We just read of the furnace of affliction in Isaiah 48. Affliction has many faces, trouble, loss of all kinds; disability, pain and suffering are all kinds of affliction. Any time we are being called to persevere, persist and endure under painful, discouraging and contrary pressure, we know and feel ourselves to be in the Refiners Fire.

The Refiner not only has many crucibles and furnaces he also has many temperatures. In his infinite wisdom he knows just what heat will burn away this kind of dross and that kind of impurity. He heats his furnace never one degree hotter than it need be. I say there are many kinds of furnaces with varying degrees. Listen to this quote from David Powlison from a book that he contributed to called “Suffering and the Sovereignty of God”.

“Consider the slow fire of aging. Aging is not for the faint hearted. Every single reader, should you live so long, will experience a landslide of losses and disabilities. Live long enough and you may outlive everyone you love: parents, friends, spouse, even children... You may outlive your money. You outlive your usefulness in the workplace and other productive arenas. You outlive your health as every bodily system breaks down. You may outlive your memory and your ability to put thoughts together and even remember who are.”

There are all different kinds of furnaces with varying degrees. Saints through the ages have been called to similar furnaces as we find ourselves in. Maybe their flames were hotter or cooler but there is nothing new under the sun and we must not think that we are the only one being called to endure this kind of affliction and at this temperature. We have only to look around us or read or hear about one who has had to endure far more than ourselves are called to.

I am ashamed to say all too often when I know myself to be in the Refiners Fire and feel the heat rising, often my first question is why? Why me? Why this? Why now? I desperately need heavenly perspective, a God centered view. I need to come to a new set of questions. Lord, why you? Why would you enter this world of evils? Why would you go through loss, weakness, hardship, be a man of sorrows and death? Why would you put yourself in the Refiners Fire? Why would you do that for your bride?

And when the new set of questions have been pondered, better questions come. Why not me Lord, chief of sinners? Why not this Lord, infinitely wise refiner, you know exactly what I need? Why not now Lord, your timing is perfect and there is no time like the present?

Our Puritan fathers used to speak of “improving their illness” something that is foreign in our speech today. “Improving their illness” that is, considering how they were to profit under the particular affliction the Lord has them in at the time.

From that same book I just mentioned John Piper has an appendix and in the very back he titled that appendix “Don’t Waste Your Cancer” and after having read that it sparked these thoughts.

We will waste our affliction –

- if we fail to recognize our Refiner is our heavenly father
- if we fail to recognize our Betrothed went through a far hotter furnace for us
- if we linger and justify our self-pity, which is so easy to do
- if we do not choose to embrace the flames as for our own good, even as a disciplined son is called to “kiss the rod”

I don't say any of this is easy and natural, only necessary, necessary for growth, progress and spiritual health.

Does your furnace have a name? Is it trouble or some kind of loss or disability, pain, or suffering? What difficult, discouraging or contrary pressure are you being called to endure? Please hear these words of Jesus, actually of an anonymous hymn writer, who cast these famous words in the voice of Jesus speaking to a saint who knows and feel himself or herself to be in the furnace.

“Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed; for I am your God, and will still give you aid; I'll strengthen you, help you and cause you to stand, upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.”

“When through the deep waters I call you to go, the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow; for I will be with you, your troubles to bless, and sanctify to you your deepest distress.”

“When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie, my grace, all sufficient, shall be your supply; the flame shall not hurt you; I only design your dross to consume and your gold to refine.”

Beloved we have all been put in the furnace for a good reason, the best reason. May the Lord grant us grace to embrace the flames, knowing we, as heaven's bride, are being beautified for our Groom. We are all going to wish we had been more beautified on that great day. This is the first and the hardest period of our everlasting life.

II. We will *rest*.

The season of rest comes after the season of refinement. “Go your way Daniel, you will rest.” Daniel 12:13. This, of course, is an allusion to his death. The term itself is welcoming to the weary pilgrim. What weary pilgrim does not long for rest? Rest and sleep are the Bible's terms for the Christian's death and should be welcomed, not feared. Who is afraid of rest and sleep?

“Our soul is separated from our mortal body. We enter what is known as the “intermediate” or “interim” state that is, at death the souls of believers are immediately glorified, made perfect in holiness and enter into the presence of Christ to enjoy a continuous, conscious, personal existence while awaiting the final resurrection of the body.” R.C. Sproul

For the believer, death is immediate emancipation from the conflict and turmoil of this life! What weary warrior does not long for the end of conflict? Think of it! No longer will we win our bread through “painful toil and by the sweat of our brow”. No more unemployment or under-employment, no more conflict with our sin nature, no more losses to our besetting sin, no more groaning, finally out of Romans 7 and never to return. Frustration, discouragement and despair will be gone. Emancipation! Free, free at last! Take off the armor Christian, retire your weapons, the conflict is over.

Can you wait for that word? “Weary of earth and laden with my sin, I look at heaven and long to enter in.” When we have the Biblical mindset, we agree with the Apostle Paul heart and soul and know *to die is gain* and we welcome the next phase of our everlasting life.

III. We will be *resurrected*.

After rest this interim state, comes the resurrection of the body. It just keeps getting better. “You will rest, and then at the end of your days, you will rise...” Daniel 12:13

J.I. Packer says, “As life in the ‘intermediate’ or ‘interim’ state between death and resurrection is better than the life in this world that preceded it, so the life of the resurrection will be better still.”

We were made body and soul and the perfected soul longs to be clothed with immortality. Our soul yearning for its fit companion to be disembodied forever is loss not gain. Bodies are for expression and experience and in the beginning it was made “very good.”

J.I. Packer again, “The bodies that we have now are at best poor tools for expressing the desires and purposes of regenerate hearts, and many of the weaknesses with which the saints struggle are closely linked with our physical constitution. The bodies that become ours will be bodies that perfectly match our perfected regenerate characters and will prove perfect instruments for our holy self-expression throughout eternity.”

These present bodies, these earthen vessels, these jars of clay we serve God in are subject to all manner of infirmities. We have experienced many each of us. We have heard of the 18th century hymn writer, William Cowper, how he lived under a dark cloud of depression which no doubt prevented him from feeling and thinking and doing all that his regenerate heart wanted to do. Now he is emancipated from that body of depression.

I wish we could have all been there on that day and at that moment when he was separated from that cloud of gloom and doom. To see that cloud pass away until it is entirely gone and all he could see is sunshine everywhere he looked. And now his face flooded with peace and joy and finally optimism. I never thought that I, myself, was affected, my moods were affected by the weather. But when we get a clear, sunny day in February I find I have a new spring in my step.

Think of William Cowper now eagerly awaiting the outfitting of his soul with a body that no longer sinks and drowns him but gives him wings. What could be better than the happy marriage of perfected soul to perfected body? This will be a happy reunion indeed. Our soul will be adorned with gladness. But there is more! After the resurrection of the body comes the time to receive rewards, gifts, presents, Christmas! “At the end of your days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.” Daniel 12:13

IV. We will be *rewarded*.

After the resurrection of the body comes the time to receive rewards, gifts, and presents. Christmas! “At the end of your days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.” Daniel 12:13. “When God rewards our works he is crowning his own gifts, for it was only by grace that those works were done.” [J.I. Packer] This is evidence that our God loves to give and is a cheerful giver. The scripture is emphatic that salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned or in the least bit deserved. But it is equally emphatic that God through Christ will give to each person according to what he has done. Romans 2:6, Psalm 62:12, Matthew 16:27, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Revelation 22:12. Daniel has a lot to look forward to. There are lots of presents under the tree with Daniel’s name written on them.

The reward that each of us will receive will be in perfect accordance with the deed or good work. The reward fits the deed perfectly. For example, it is not hard for us to imagine that we will be rewarded to a lesser degree for bearing up well when we receive an unjust reviling word and a greater reward for being subject to the same treatment day after day after day.

Likewise it is not difficult for us to imagine that we are actually laying up more treasure in heaven on a day that we are living a more others centered life than on a day in which we are living and thinking only of ourselves. We have experienced both.

The godlier we respond to a situation the greater the reward. The reward fits the deed perfectly. It is therefore reasonable and biblical to think that some will be rewarded more. The tireless Christian whose life is one continuous industry of one good deed after another will receive more rewards than the sleepy Christian.

Listen to Jonathan Edwards on this topic. "There are different degrees of happiness and glory in heaven... The glory of the saints above will be in some proportion to their degree of holiness and amount of good works here. 'He that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully' (2 Corinthians 9:6). And the Apostle Paul tells us that as one star differs from another star in glory, so also it shall be in the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:41). Christ tells us that he who gives a cup of cold water unto a disciple in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise lose his reward. But this could not be true, if a person should have no greater reward for doing many good works than if he did but few. How should we respond to this and how should this truth impact us?

At the end of the school year Covenant High School has an awards ceremony honoring academic achievement, effort and character. It has become for me an annual reminder of my squandered youth. I wish I had those days back. I wish I worked harder. On the day of rewards I regret I did as little as I had to in order to get by. My rewards or lack thereof, show it. I have no one to blame but myself. But it doesn't have to be that way for the remainder of our days. We have today and maybe we'll get tomorrow, maybe.

The Covenant High School awards assembly is a foretaste of heaven where all our good deeds great and small will not go unnoticed but openly acknowledged to receive their just rewards. How is that going to make you feel? How will that make me feel when I see you receiving more and greater rewards than my own? How will I feel when I see your presents stacked up towering over my own on that Great Day?

This is Edwards again, "...all shall be perfectly happy, [and] every one shall be perfectly satisfied. Every vessel that is cast into this ocean of happiness is full, though there are some vessels far larger than others; and there shall be no such thing as envy in heaven, but perfect love shall reign through the whole society. Those who are not as high in glory as others will not envy those that are higher, but they will have so great, and strong, and pure love to them, that they will rejoice in their superior happiness; ...so that instead of having a damp to their own happiness, it will add to it..."

We will be partakers in each others happiness. And me seeing you justly rewarded and honored will not make me envy but make me all the happier. Your joy will be mine and mine yours. If one of the members is honored, all the members rejoice with him or her. Rather than chafing and withholding applause when another member receives their reward, we will be grateful, satisfied and perfectly pleased and gladly join in the ovation.

Quite frankly I am looking forward to being rewarded. I find that I still enjoy receiving gifts. Can you imagine! I still find that I like that part of Christmas too. And I can't wait to see you open yours as well. But of course it goes without saying that the great and best reward in eternity will be God himself. Honestly, what Christian would want paradise with all its pleasures if God is not chief among them? Could they even be considered a Christian?

Dr. Packer again, "The essence of the reward will be more of what the Christian desires most, namely a deepening of his or her love relationship with the Savior. The reward is parallel to the reward of courtship, which is the enriching of the love relationship itself through marriage."

We won't be satisfied, never be content and happy without more depth, more union, more giving and receiving between us and our Groom. As wonderful as our rewards will be, "The bride eyes not her garment, but her dear bridegroom's face. We will not gaze at glory, but on our king of grace; not at the crown he gifteth, but on his pierced hand; *the Lamb, the Lamb, the Lamb!* is all the glory of Emmanuel's land." And so we go from good to better to best in our everlasting life: Refined, Rest, Resurrected and Rewarded.

We'll let the last paragraph of "The Last Battle" of C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia conclude for us: "And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning chapter one of the Great Story which no one on earth has read; which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before."

Ought we not, if this is the case, conclude by saying: Maranatha! Come! Lord Jesus! Amen.