

Final Destination

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[0 : 00] So we're now in the final sermon of our series going through this Old Testament book, the book of Daniel, which is a story that asks, how do you live as a whole person in a broken world?

How can you use your life to make a difference for goods in a dysfunctional society? And ultimately, most importantly, how do you use your life for the greatest good, which is serving God in a world that has rejected that God?

Daniel's story is the story of a man who lives by faith in doing that. And so the book has 12 chapters, and we've looked at the first nine, and then Derek was talking about chapter 10 last week as well.

The first nine chapters show us the story of Daniel as he lives his righteous life in Babylon, in the capital city of a huge, exciting, frightening pagan empire.

And the ingredients of his life in these nine chapters are, well, he's moral, his religious performance is flawless, he has a deep personal faith in God, he will put his life on the line rather than compromise his faith in God, he has strong interpersonal relationships, he has a close group of friends, he's a committed part of a faith community, he is an unbelievably high achiever in his education, and then in his career after that, he's handsome, he's gracious, he has depth of character, and he never puts a foot wrong in terms of integrity, even though he spends his career on that tightrope working in this political environment among people who have less integrity than he does, he has unscrupulous political colleagues and superiors, but he doesn't fall off that tightrope.

[1 : 45] It's the story of a pretty much perfect man living by faith in an ungodly world. So that's chapters one to nine, but then in chapters 10, 11 and 12, the story of Daniel changes dramatically.

The focus shifts from the narrative of Daniel's life to a vision that Daniel receives. In this vision, God interrupts Daniel's life.

And in order to round off this book by teaching him profound lessons on how to go on living as a person of faith in a faithless world. It's not unlike how the book of Job ends.

So Job is another Old Testament book with a different theme. The theme there is how do you live as a righteous person in a life full of suffering? So in Job, the bulk of the book at the beginning is the story again, it's the narrative.

So Job starts off as this person who seems to have everything. He has all these great kids and his life is flourishing and thriving. And he's a really righteous person.

[2 : 46] And then everything goes wrong. His children all die in an accident. He loses his health.

The story takes a really bad turn. And the book of Job, for the most part, is the story, the narrative of how he deals with this as a righteous, suffering person.

And then at the end again, God interrupts. And there's this vision that Job is given where God teaches him this is how to live as a righteous, suffering person.

The book of Daniel is structured kind of like that. So we've seen this life story of this man living by faith in an unrighteous culture. And then in the last three chapters, the chapters we've read, Daniel encounters God who interrupts the story, who transforms Daniel's perspective on what it means to live as a righteous person in an unrighteous world.

And it's only in these last three chapters that we really start to understand what that means in this book. So these chapters are the key to understanding the whole book. So we're finishing this series of sermons then, asking the core question in the book of Daniel.

How do you flourish as a person of faith in an ungodly culture? And this morning I want us to see the way that the vision Daniel receives in chapters 10 to 12 answers us for that.

[4 : 02] And we're doing this in three parts. So first is the gospel in the fallen world. And that's in chapter 10. And secondly, God's hand in the fallen world, chapter 11.

And thirdly, God's people in a new world. That's chapter 12. So number one, the gospel in a fallen world. So we have this remarkable life story then, in chapters 1 to 9.

A young man who starts off with everything going for him. He's this bright young Hebrew guy. He has leadership written all over him for the future. Big bright hopes for what he's going to do with his life.

Then life takes some unexpected twists. His people are overtaken by the Babylonians. He's taken into exile, into the center of this big empire, into a culture that in a lot of ways is more exciting than the one he came from.

The Babylonians were leading the way in terms of medicine and architecture, philosophy, mathematics, politics, economics. But it's also an unrighteous culture because it's a culture that has rejected the God who's at the center of Daniel's life.

[5 : 07] The Lord that Daniel worships is not the God that the Babylonians worship. So in their culture, they worship power, ambition, that drive forward to dominate other people.

And yet somehow even there, Daniel manages to flourish. He rises to the top. He has a stellar political career. And he never compromises his integrity.

And at one point, the national leadership changes. He ends up being moved to work in a more obscure city. But even then, when his career takes this downturn, he still looks like a supremely righteous person.

He handles everything so well as a person of deep faith in an unrighteous culture. Is this the point of the book of Daniel then?

Here's this model believer, person of total integrity in a fallen culture. Is the point just that we should dare to be Daniel's in Edinburgh or wherever you're from?

[6 : 05] Is he simply a role model? Is that why we have chapters one to nine? But then we get to chapter 10, where Daniel, this seemingly perfect, successful, obedient, intelligent, handsome, moral, religious man, meets another man, a man who terrifies him, the text tells us, by his very presence.

Daniel has a vision of what it would be like if God were to take human form. He has a vision of the pre-incarnate, God incarnate.

And Daniel crumbles before this man in his vision. He falls apart. He wants to die. Daniel is afraid of the righteous man that he now sees.

And he needs to be told not to be afraid. He thinks he's going to be judged and rejected because of the righteousness of this man. And he has to be told, you are loved.

He is looking at God incarnate and he comes completely undone. All of a sudden, Daniel is not the impressive person in this scene. Daniel can't even speak.

[7 : 11] This articulate political leader, his biggest need in this immediate moment is to be forgiven by this man.

A lot of you have come to Edinburgh because, those of you who live in Edinburgh, who aren't visiting, you've come to Edinburgh because you were one of the talented ones, wherever you came from.

A lot of you are international students and your talent has taken you across the world. It's brought you to Edinburgh. Some of you were the smart one in your class at school and now you've ended up in medical school here in Edinburgh.

Your talent got you into your law degree or your postgraduate programme. And then you come to Edinburgh and you find that you're in the same class as a hundred other people who were also the smart one, where they came from, the talented one in their schools.

And some of them are so talented that it frightens you. It affects your perspective on yourself, doesn't it? Or maybe you were the boy who was the best footballer his primary school had ever seen.

[8 : 16] And you were the boy who went off in primary school for trials to Celtic and you played alongside a lad of the same age called Aidan McGeady. And you came home with a completely different perspective on how good you thought you were.

Maybe you were the girl who was the best singer in her school or in the small town that you come from. Then you come to the big city and you try and get a singing gig and you come across people whose voices blow you away.

And your vision of how good you were changed forever when you came across someone who was truly great at whatever it is that you do.

And isn't it like that when you encounter God, when you re-evaluate yourself in light of Him? John Calvin once said this, it's certain that a man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he is first looked upon God's face and then descends from contemplating God to scrutinize himself. For we always seem to ourselves to be righteous and upright and wise and holy. This pride is innate in all of us unless we look to the Lord who is the soul standard by which this judgment can be measured.

[9 : 35] To know yourself as you really are, you need to know God. Seeing God changes everything you know about yourself. And it's like that here as well when we read Daniel's story from chapters 1 to 9, he looks so impressive.

He looks awesome. The most righteous man we've ever seen, somehow flourishing in the world that he lived in and succeeding there. And then, and then we get to chapter 10.

And we see Daniel meeting someone else. Someone whose righteousness makes Daniel want to die. The weight of this person's glory puts unbearable pressure on Daniel and on his life.

Daniel meets someone who needs to counter that by telling him, I love you, don't be afraid. I forgive you. In chapter 10, this man touches Daniel's lips.

It's exactly the same picture as in Isaiah 6 when Isaiah meets God. Isaiah trembles in God's presence. What does he say? Whoa is me. I am doomed. It's all over.

[10 : 42] I am a man of unclean lips. I come from a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty. I am doomed. It's all over. So God sends an angel to pick up a call from the altar.

The angel touches Isaiah's unclean lips with it and tells him, see, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is gone. Your sins are forgiven. And the picture in Daniel 10 is exactly the same, isn't it? Daniel meets God. Don't you think he has the same thoughts as Isaiah? I am doomed. It's all over. I'm a man of unclean lips. And this is how God responds to Daniel, to this supremely righteous man. So the book of Daniel is a story of a righteous man who lives by faith in an unrighteous world. But what's clear in chapter 10 when Daniel meets this terrifying man is that Daniel is not the ultimate righteous person in this book.

There's another righteous man who makes Daniel fall apart just with his presence. The truly impressive person in the book of Daniel isn't actually Daniel.

[11 : 51] It's the man he meets in chapter 10. So this book shows us, absolutely, what does it look like when someone lives a righteous life in an unrighteous world, but it doesn't show us that as an end in itself.

Daniel's righteous life points us to another far more righteous life, someone who would come after Daniel to live a truly, actually, perfectly righteous life in this world.

And that person who would come after Daniel interrupts the book in chapter 10. He comes to Daniel. He interrupts his life as we're reading through Daniel's life story and as we admire Daniel. Here's the crucial point. If you only had chapters one to nine in the book of Daniel, it would be reasonable for you to think, okay, what's this book about? What's really important in my life? How can I flourish as a human being in this broken world? How do I make a success of my life here? How do I keep God happy with me? If you only had chapters one to nine, it would not be unreasonable of you to think, well, as long as I'm daring to be a Daniel, as long as I'm a good person, as long as I get this degree, as long as I have my career, as long as I'm respected by my colleagues, as long as I have some strong friendships, as long as I have some beautiful children or a spouse who reflects how great I am to the rest of the world, as long as I'm handsome, as long as I have deep moral courage, as long as I'm good ethical standards for the food I eat like Daniel, as long as I'm religious, as long as I'm a success, and you put all of your hope and expectation in whatever you think it is that somehow makes everything okay, that justifies your place in this world, that justifies your existence, and you make the things that constitute, daring to be a Daniel, the ultimate things in your life, and you devote yourself to them utterly, and they become the idols that you serve.

[13 : 54] But what would you do then, if you were to meet God incarnate? Daniel was as outstanding a person as you could possibly imagine, and when he met God, he thought he would die.

He couldn't bring himself to speak. He had nothing to say to plead for his existence. All he needed was forgiveness and love, both things that God gave him.

I think the sad ironies of how Daniel has been understood and used in lots of evangelical preaching is that we've used the book to preach a moralistic message. It's just dare to be a Daniel, as though the point of this book was just to tell you.

The really important thing is that you try to be as good a person as Daniel did, so copy him. The point of the book of Daniel is the exact opposite. Daniel looks like a pretty much perfect person, and yet, even someone like Daniel collapses under the weight of God's glory.

Even someone like Daniel needs the gospel. So how do you live as a righteous person in a fallen world? The thing is, everyone who comes from this fallen world and who meets Jesus ends up in the same position.

[15:08] As I thought he would die because of how God's holiness showed him his uncleanness and the uncleanness of the world he came from. So he thought he was doomed, and the only thing that could free him to go back and live in that world was for God to forgive him.

Daniel's experience was the same. Or think of John in the book of Revelation when he meets Jesus and he falls down as though dead, and he needs Jesus to tell him, don't be afraid, I am the resurrection and your hope.

Do you really think though that you could be different? Could you meet the God that Isaiah and Daniel and John met and have anything to depend on but the gospel?

Can your career or your education or your family or how you package your life to the rest of the world or your relationships or your religious performance be so impressive that you could tell God, Lord, here is why I'm good enough to stand in your presence?

I can see that you're obviously very important, but I don't know if you've noticed that. I'm kind of a big deal in my office and I live in a decent house. Do you follow me on social media?

[16:14] Have you seen my Facebook profile? Look at how well packaged I am there. How could you not like me? Can you really do that with God?

How can we live by faith in a fallen world? How can you be righteous in an unrighteous world? Maybe you're not a Christian and you think, well, that's just a very Christian question and that doesn't really relate to me.

So let me rephrase it. How can I make a positive difference in a world that is such a mix of good and bad? How can I try and be a whole person in a fractured world?

Christianity says you need to start by recognizing that you're inextricably linked to that world. You weren't produced in a vacuum. That's not where you live. You're not in this world.

You're a child of the dysfunctional world that you somehow want to improve with your life. And Christianity's answer to that is that you can only do so. You can only live well in this world by becoming somebody else's child, by being adopted as a child of God, forgiven, given a new identity and new motivations, new loves by the gospel.

[17:25] So in chapter 10, God shifts Daniel's perspective completely. In chapter 11, we see God's hand in the fallen world. So Daniel is given strength to speak and he asks and he says, speak to me, my Lord.

And his Lord says to him, do you know why I'm here? Why am I doing this? Why have I interrupted your life? And then in chapter 11, God tells Daniel why this has happened. I'm not going to go through this chapter in detail.

A lot of commentators think it's an unpreachable chapter and I think I agree with them. But I want to just cover this chapter very briefly by saying this. When God incarnate asks Daniel, do you know why I've burst into your life like this?

He goes on to tell Daniel about a lot of things that will happen in the future. Okay, so he gives Daniel a lecture on geopolitics, on how kings and kingdoms will emerge and empires will rise and fall and the story of how there'll be armies and fortresses and wars and money and power.

And most importantly, the Lord tells Daniel that he, this terrifying man, is the one who transcends all of it. Daniel's Lord, this truly righteous man, is permitting these kings and these kingdoms to rise and fall.

[18:36] He restrains their evil. He sets a limit on their time and power. He looks down on these world leaders like we look down on ants. But remember whom God is talking to here?

Daniel is a really intelligent person, a talented person, a national leader. He's gone through the ancient world's best university education and he survived in his job for all these years by understanding what's going on in world politics and in culture.

So if you have to share a complex explanation of how world powers are going to develop with anyone in this empire at this time, Daniel would be a good choice, right?

But here's the thing, when this terrifying man shares his perspective on future events with Daniel, it's not that this information's being shared between equals, as though we have two pundits who are speculating together on why they think the world goes around as it does.

The Lord starts off by entering Daniel's memory, saying in effect, you remember when Darius the Mead came to power? That was me. I allowed him to rise.

[19 : 39] I stood up and I supported him. It happened because I permitted it. This man isn't speculating. He's not analyzing. He's telling Daniel that he is the one who makes this happen, who allows it.

And Daniel, this senior political figure, this intelligent man, this godly man, doesn't know how to respond. You see it in chapter 12. I did not understand God in a way that utterly goes beyond Daniel's understanding, is somehow above and working in the rise and fall of every empire, including the world that Daniel had to live in as a faithful believer.

That empire would come and go, then another one, then another one. Daniel doesn't know what's going on. You can imagine all these questions. If this is all happening and God is somehow letting this happen, what's my place in it?

Will this go on forever? Who are these people? Who are these kings and empires from these wars? A lot of you will have seen House of Cards. It's a really popular American TV series that follows an American politician, Frank Underwood, and his wife, as he unscrupulously operates to become the president of America.

It's a really bleak story, I think, of this couple's descent into the depths of evil and deadened consciences in order to build an empire for themselves and maintain it.

[21 : 03] Imagine if you were in that world, in the Underwood administration, in House of Cards, and you've spent your life there trying to be a person of integrity, trying to be a faithful Christian there, around people whose lives are certainly not oriented on serving the God you serve.

God gives you a vision, and that is that the future for you and for your people is that it's going to be House of Cards after House of Cards, after House of Cards, after House of Cards.

After President Underwood, there'll be someone else just as bad as him, and then someone else, and then someone else, and someone else. One righteous emperor after that. If you were Daniel, wouldn't you have all kinds of questions?

Will it just go on like that forever? What are we doing here? Won't God ever put an end to this?

Won't God ever come and defend us, those who love Him? Can God be in control when this fallen regime just goes on and on and on?

Does God know what He's doing? And that's why God moves Daniel from seeing God's hand in the fallen world, then into chapter 12 to seeing God's people in a new world.

[22 : 12] At that time, 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, the book will be delivered.

The Lord is about to tell Daniel that at some point in the future, He will draw history as we know it to a close. God will draw a line on it, and the cycle of brokenness and hatred and selfish ambition and empire building will come to an end, and God will come and save His people.

So God is about to tell Daniel this, but before He does that, He gives him a crucial piece of information. There is a great prince called Michael who protects you, who protects your people in this fallen world.

While you're going through all of this, while your people live through Daniel 11, there is a great prince called Michael who protects you. Some commentators think Michael is the archangel appointed by Jesus to protect the church.

Some others think that the great prince Michael is actually an Old Testament reference to Jesus. Either way, Daniel hears something clearly. You are being protected.

[23 : 23] You and your descendants will have to go on living as righteous people in a fallen world for a long time. You have to be the real life Christians and the real life House of Cards, but you are protected.

There is someone whose name means who is like God who protects you, and he's just waiting for the right time to arise and to save you. To save all of those whose names are written in the book. Daniel, you're thinking, what book? But we're reading through John's Revelation and we know it's the Lamb's book of life. All of this gives purpose to those of you who want to live for God's glory in a world that does not.

You are under protection, even if what that means is a complete mystery to you right now. Your name is written in Christ's book of life.

God then promises Daniel resurrection in chapter 12, when the history of this fallen world draws to a close, and when the time comes for sin and death to die of their own diseases.

[24 : 22] Finally, God then promises Daniel a new world where Daniel will radiate glory, where Daniel will be transformed and resurrected.

Men in the vision, Daniel sees two other men, and he hears one of them ask the other, how long will it be before these amazing things happen? How long before this fallen world is replaced by a new one?

And Daniel's, the answer Daniel hears is, it will be a time, times, and half a time. What does that mean? How does that help Daniel? I think if you were Daniel, you would have understood it like this.

You get the first part, you're told, well, it'll be a time. It will be a really, really long period, a really significant period of time. So not a few days or a week or a year or a century, something far longer than that.

And then after you hear time, it gets stretched out to times, okay, an even longer period. And at this point, you're starting to think, we're in it for the long haul.

[25 : 21] This is going to stretch on forever, will it? How can that be when I've just been promised resurrection in a new world, so that it won't go on forever? So you have vast period of time, then even longer period of time, and you're wondering what next is it going to be, times, times, times is.

But then what he's told is, the next thing is just half a time. So God's people will go on through the first time this long period history progresses. They try and live faithfully for God in this broken world. And then that period passes, and then there's another even longer period. And then God's people live through that, and they try and live for him in that period. And then that passes, another period starts, and then the wicked do not understand.

They think it's going to go on like this forever, and then like that, halfway through, it's over. In an instant, in a flash, the great Prince Michael appointed to protect you arises, and it's over.

This world is gone. There is a new one. There's recreation. There's the consummation of creation. The future that you thought was stretching out forever indefinitely as a future of sin and death and evil is gone.

[26 : 31] A time times and half a times. And God's people will be resurrected in glory as new people in a new world. Daniel's listening to this, and he's thinking, I do not know what is going on.

I don't understand this. What does this mean? It overwhelms him completely, so he asks what it means. What will the outcome of this be? What are you talking about? I'll sound like a star. Well, I have a new body.

What is this? I'll be in a new world. He's asking for an explanation of what exactly it will mean at the very end. Not so much focused on his life right now, but then the new life.

What will the outcome of this be? And the answer that he gets twice is go back to your life, Daniel. Go your way. Go back to the world that you come from.

That's the answer. He's told go back to your city, go back to your people, go back to your fallen world and culture, go back to this fallen place for those who live by faith are being changed by that faith in it.

[27 : 34] They're being changed for the better. And where the wicked just carry on being wicked. And at the end of verse 10, he's told, be wise, understand why God has put you there.

As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, which means that he will die. And then at the end of the days, you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.

It's only here in the very last section of the book of Daniel, I think that we start to see how living as righteous people in an unrighteous world works.

How can you live as a righteous person in an unrighteous world? You need to be transformed by the gospel because you are the product of that fallen world.

You need to know that God is somehow at work within that fallen world. Chapter 10 and chapter 11, and that he's somehow protecting you there to help you, enable you to live for his glory.

[28 : 31] And you need to know that one day he will transform all of this and all of us, his people, into something new and that you have a place there for eternity.

And God's purpose in teaching you that in the vision of chapters 10, 11 and 12, in helping you become wise so that you understand that, so that he can tell you at the end of this sermon, go your way.

Go back into your working life tomorrow. Go back to your office. Go back to your classroom. Go back to your friendships and your relationships. Go back to your life. Go your way, Daniels, and live out your lives here for God's glory.

As for you, go your way. I'm sending you back into that fallen world. Isn't God's purpose in drawing us into himself always that he then sends us out back into this world?

Amen. Let's pray together. Lord God, our Father, we thank you for the book of Daniel. We thank you that you show us there who you are, that you confront us, that you offer it in the gospel to touch our lips, to give us strength, to tell us that you love us and that you forgive us in Christ.

[29 : 42] Thank you that you show us that you're at work in our world in ways that we cannot begin to comprehend, but also that you show us a glimpse of the future, that you will draw all things together and that sin and death and suffering and sadness will be no more, and that you will raise us as your people in glory and as new people in a new world.

Lord, we thank you that your goal in sharing this with us and revealing it to us in your word is so that you can then tell us to go our way, to go back into the rest of our lives so that we can be salt and light, so that we can be righteous in proclaiming your grace to the world around us.

Amen.