

So it seems that we will be kept in the dark a little while longer. But there is a bright spot in the midst of this prophecy! According to Daniel 12:10, those who are wise will understand and as a consequence will purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined. The focus is on the faithful being purified through the fires of suffering, but the wonderful gospel truth is that, as their allegiances are refined, the wise are made white – pure before God.

Two observations can be made from this description: first, in our weakness is our rescue. When we are shattered, our Rescuer comes. Our rescue is not in our own strength, but by suffering the wise learn the necessity of casting their lot with their Lord.

Second, suffering is not absent from the life of God’s covenant people. We live in a real world, but as we endure faithfully, we more and more treasure the wonder and the goodness of the resurrection life our Savior promises. Our claim on that ultimate treasure enables us to live with current deprivations and disappointments. Those without understanding are dismayed by suffering; those that are dishonest deny our suffering; those with wisdom understand that suffering teaches us how wonderful the God who will deliver us eternally from all of this difficulty really is. Until we are with God, the Lord does not promise an end to trouble. Instead, God says, “Those who are wise will understand and many will purify themselves.

What’s more, the wise *will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever* (12:3). Then “stars” of this world the movie stars, the rock stars, the sports all-stars; the people who are pictured in the supermarket tabloids. But God has a different picture of the “stars.” Those who live with the knowledge that God is in control are stars. Those who face the future unafraid because God is working all things for good are stars. People who tell other people about Jesus and the resurrection life are stars, and they will shine forever and ever! Are you a star? You may never have your face on *People Magazine* or even in the *Daily Journal*, but if you are actively leading others to righteousness, God says you are a star and you are special to God. You are a star if you teach Sunday School or share your faith with your co-workers. You are a star if you visit the sick, comfort the bereaved, and feed the hungry. You are a star if you share the blessings God has given you with those who have less, so that they might know of God’s love for them. Many of

our teenagers were stars this week because they helped out at Sonny Mjelde’s funeral, giving faithful service to the members of this faith family and community.

Most of us learned the nursery rhyme: “Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are. Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky...” Of course we know stars are not diamonds and not so little at all. They are huge balls of gas burning at incredible temperatures, some so far away that it takes years for their light to reach us. Some Christians are like that, too - incredibly hot bags of gas - but the Apostle Paul encourages us to be a different kind of star: (be) *children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life* (Philippians 2: 15-16). It is the job of every Christian to point people to Jesus, and to share Jesus with others in the same way that the stars shine.

Let me give you three ways in which you can be a star by sharing Christ. **Stars shine only when it’s dark.** In truth, stars shine during the day also, but we can’t see their light because of the brightness of our sun. We need their light at night. When do we need to let our light shine for Jesus? Wherever there is spiritual darkness. It’s easy to let our lights shine here at church when we are gathered with scores of Christian brothers and sisters, but we need to let our light shine at school, at work, in our homes, in our neighborhoods, and wherever we encounter darkness. We should shine brightest when the world is at its darkest.

Stars shine modestly but faithfully. You don’t have to be obnoxious or rude when you shine for Jesus. You don’t have to be the loudmouth know-it-all who is always hitting somebody over the head with a 10-pound Bible. Like the stars, just shine – modestly but faithfully – day after day, night after night. Give good service quietly, diligently, and always reflecting the light of Jesus to those around you.

Stars shine to give direction. For thousands of years, mariners and other explorers depended on the stars for navigation. Before the advent of satellite navigation, sailors looked to either the North Star or the Southern Cross for guidance. They took a bearing on those stars to know when they were headed in the right direction. That’s the way we ought to be. People who don’t know Jesus aren’t looking at Jesus; they are looking at US! Our lives must be like

the North Star or the Southern Cross: constantly and consistently guiding people to Jesus. God expects us to be stars in this misguided and wicked world.

Daniel 12:3 also says that God’s stars will “shine forever and ever!” All the stars in the sky, including our own sun, will one day burn out. They will all be snuffed out like candles. But when you are one of God’s stars, shining forever and ever, you will outshine the sun and the moon and all the other stars! Are you letting your light shine for Jesus, leading others to Christ? Are you one of God’s all-stars shining God’s light into this dark world?

As we come to the conclusion of the prophecy Daniel asks again: *What will the outcome of all this be?* (12:8). God tells Daniel to just “go his way,” to keep on doing what’s he’s always been doing: praying, serving, worshipping and trusting God. The aged prophet is dismissed with a word of assurance: *You will rest, and at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance* (13). Daniel would rest in death, but would rise again and receive a reward from the God whom he had so faithfully served.

This is a fitting finale to the prophecy. It affirms God’s control of history and gives a glimpse of the resurrection and the eternal security of those whose confidence is in God. The book of Daniel is a wonderful reminder that the present age is not all that God has in store for humankind. There is another age coming when the Lord Jesus Christ will reign in righteousness and holiness on earth (Isaiah 11:9; Zechariah 9:12). We look forward in hope to the coming Messianic age and pray for its coming. History is “God’s Story” and we can see how it has unfolded, which gives us confidence as we anticipate God’s faithfulness in the promises that still remain unfulfilled.

The call is to remain faithful, to continue in the faith as we began, in the same way that the apostle Paul urged the believers in Corinth, *Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain!* (1 Cor. 15:58). If I had to sum up the book of Daniel in one phrase, encompassing all the history that has been fulfilled and the promises yet to be fulfilled before the final victory of our God, I would quote Robert Browning: “God’s in his heaven – and all is right with the world.”

God’s Final Forecast

Sunday, April 19, 2015

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Daniel 12:1-13

This morning we conclude our amazing journey through the book of Daniel. The book started with a young teenager taken captive into Babylon, and it ends with an old man, retired from government service, who receives a staggering vision of the end of time.

Daniel received an awesome vision of the glorified Jesus. This prophecy in Chapter 10 serves to communicate future events, but more importantly to reveal Jesus Christ. In Chapter 11, we followed the historical outline given by the angel Gabriel to Daniel which predicted the rise of the Greek Empire and the ongoing battles between Egypt and Syria. Then, beginning at Daniel 11:36, we traced the career of the last of the world’s leaders, the Antichrist who, in the last verse of that chapter, is terminated at what the Book of Revelation calls the Battle of Armageddon.

But that’s not the end of the story. God’s plan continues into eternity. The book of Daniel ends with a wonderful doxology of praise: *I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, ‘My Lord, what will the outcome of all this be?’ He replied, ‘Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end...you will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.* (Daniel 12: 8-9, 13).

God answers Daniel’s question by saying “Go your way.” God will not give Daniel (or us) any more details at this time. The matter is closed (for now), but understanding will be opened. It doesn’t matter if Daniel understands, or if the Israelites understand, or even if we understand these prophecies, because God is in control of all things. And even if the prophecies take another two thousand years to come about, we should not worry, because the prophecies give assurance that God will ultimately deliver God’s people and fulfill the covenant promises.