

Sunday 21st March 2021

Daniel 11:36-12:13 (Darkness before deliverance)

Talk by Laura Polaine, Prayers by Margaret Davies

Good morning and welcome to St Johns on-line reflection. Today, we will be focusing on Daniel 11:36-12:13. First, Margaret will read the prayers.

Let us pray:

Father most holy, merciful and loving. Jesus, Redeemer, ever to be worshipped. Life giving Spirit, comforter most gracious. God everlasting. We come to you in prayer.

First, O God, we need to confess. God our Father, we come to you in sorrow for our sins. For turning away from you, for behaving just as we wish, for failing you by what we do and think and say, for letting ourselves be tempted in the world around us. Father, forgive and save and help us. Amen.

God who loved the world so much that he has sent his Son, Jesus, to be our Saviour has forgiven us our sins and made us holy to serve him in this world.

Yes Lord, we come to you to pray for all that is affecting us at present.

We thank and praise you for the candidates who have applied to be our vicar. May your Holy Spirit have been with them as they visited the churches and community last Thursday and Friday. May they know that your will be done, Lord. We pray especially for the interviews on Tuesday next. Bless the panel with your Holy Spirit. Guide them to know your plan Lord to make the right decision for our parishes.

Father God, thank you for our fellowships supporting each other and especially those who lead and have been planning for the churches to merge. Bless our wardens, Ian and Steve, the PCC and Sue. In all their hard work, give them energy and insight as they serve you and us. We pray for our work in the community and their leaders, the food bank, the Christians Against Poverty centre, Amaze Penge, the Alpha course and the school. May they all be beacons for your love and care and saving grace.

Heavenly Father, we thank and praise you for answering prayers by healing the sick, comforting the bereaved and easing stress for the mentally and physically challenged. We pray especially for the medical staff treating Will in hospital in and out of consciousness, for possible brain damage and a serious chest infection. Please give his wife Kath and son Samuel the help and care they need at this very difficult time.

We pray for continued healing for Val, Audrey, Anthony, Andy, Zak, Karim's dad. Sue, Julia and anyone else we know.....

Please, Lord, ease the stress for Emma and family. Bless those who are elderly and frail, especially Keith and Barbara on her 89th birthday today. Lord, comfort the bereaved especially Sarah Everard's family and friends and all those who have lost loved ones to the coronavirus.

Almighty God, we thank you for this world you have created and all the blessings we receive. We are more aware of bird song and Spring starting. Thank you.

But the human race has caused so much trouble to our world. As we thank you for the roll out of vaccinations, we pray for the complete control of the virus with cooperation from organisers and all of us.

Lord, we bring our troubled world to you. So many countries like Syria and Yemen are devastated and desperate for help and changes of attitudes of people, governments and leaders. We pray for all the Christian and aid agencies who work under such difficulty to relieve the suffering of the homeless, traumatised, refugees, hungry and wounded. May they obtain resources and be given access to provide shelter, food, physical, medical and mental support. Above all, we pray for peace for the Middle East, many African and Asian nations.

We pray too for your church everywhere, the bishops and clergy and members in the service of Christ, to be united, loving and revealing your glory in the world. Bless all mission partners and especially Jason and Tracey in Thailand with girls, Libby and Ruby. Even in lockdown, bless their distribution of gifts and tracts, supporting children's education and mentoring other Christian workers. Keep them all safe and well in your work, Lord.

To close our prayers, we pray the collect for today:-

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ,
delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross,
we, in our troubles, may triumph in the power of his victory:
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen

Reading

Our reading today is taken from Daniel, Chapter 11 from verse 36 through Chapter 12:13. New International Version (NIV)

Daniel 11:36-12:13. New International Version

The King Who Exalts Himself

³⁶ “The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. ³⁷ He will show no regard for the gods of his ancestors or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. ³⁸ Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his ancestors he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. ³⁹ He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price.

⁴⁰ “At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. ⁴¹ He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. ⁴² He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape. ⁴³ He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Cushites in submission. ⁴⁴ But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. ⁴⁵ He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.

The End Times

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 in the book—will be delivered.² Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. ⁴ But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.”

⁵ Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. ⁶ One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, “How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?”

⁷The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."

⁸I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?"

⁹He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end. ¹⁰Many 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.

¹¹"From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.¹² Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

¹³"As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."

Talk

Chapter 11 & 12 of Daniel concerns the various kingdoms that oppress Israel in the 4th and 3rd centuries BC. In today's reading we explore Daniel's prophecy of the king who will do as he pleases, and the salvation of God's people. Daniel's vision begins with king Antiochus IV. This king views himself as a god, and his nickname is 'Epiphanes' [god manifest]. He abandoned the 'gods of his fathers' (verse 36) including the god loved by women which may refer to the god Adonis, and instead he worshipped the 'god of fortresses' possibly Zeus, one of military power and might. He will spend lavishly 'gold, silver, with precious stones and costly gifts' to support his strength. More than all his predecessors, he will wage war. Though he was powerful he was able 'to do as he wills' only up to a point, since the power of the Romans was far greater than his.

As the vision continues it seems to shift focus and address a situation that transcends the persecution under Antiochus IV, and thus the remainder of the chapter is often thought to be referring to a future king, who will be larger and more ultimate than king Antiochus IV, 'who will truly do as he pleases' and in verse 39 will deal with the 'strongest fortresses' and will make his followers 'rulers over many'. The suggestion here is that it is referring to the Antichrist. The indications for this is that Daniel's vision refers to the end times which was not achieved in Antiochus' time, Antiochus did not extend his power over many countries. 'Egypt will not escape'. (verse 42), and lastly nor did Antiochus die when he pitched his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy

mountain (verse 45), the mountain being Mount Zion or the City of Jerusalem. Some of these events may have been fulfilled in the past, but some have yet to be fulfilled.

In the end times there will be a major battle, and there will be suffering. In Chapter 12 verse 1 – it says ‘There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence.’ This way of describing the future is also used by Jeremiah (30:7) ‘How awful that day will be. No other like it. It will be a time of trouble’. and also by Jesus in Matthew 24:21. ‘For there will be great distress unequalled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again.’ But in the end there will be the destruction of the pride and arrogance of the wicked. Whilst great suffering it is tempered by a great promise of hope for believers. In verse 2 ‘Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise.’ Michael has been mentioned in Daniel already in Chapter 10 as God’s warning angel, and here he comes to fight in order to protect God’s people. One of the great affirmations of life beyond the grave is in verse 2: ‘But at that time your people - everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. The reward of the righteous is everlasting life, and the reward of the wicked is punishment.

When we read of the end times, especially in Revelations, we may wonder when it will occur. In Daniel’s vision there are two angelic figures, one on each of the riverbanks and a celestial being hovering over the water. One of the figures asks a question to the ‘man in linen’ over the water. “How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled? In the reply the celestial being lifts both hands toward heaven, and swears by the one who lives forever. This gesture is similar to Deuteronomy. It is a statement of emphasis and evokes a solemn atmosphere of what is to follow: ‘It will be for a time, times and half a time.’ The understanding from this is not a precise time period, but that just as wickedness gains momentum, it will be slowed and stopped. But Daniel, and perhaps like us wants to know more, and he asks ‘my Lord what will the outcome of this be?’ The reply is clear, that now is not the time, and Daniel is encouraged to ‘Go your way’. Later in verses 11 and 12, it mentions number of days 1,290, from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that desolates is set up, and then another figure 3,335 days, but again Daniel is encouraged to ‘Go your way, and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days. The details of the end times are in the words of the scroll which are sealed up to be preserved until the end. What we take away is that this time of persecution has an end. God is in control of it, and he will be victorious over evil, but that the timeframe is a mystery to us – only God knows. We are not able to figure it out and we are not supposed to. We are to leave it to God. Like Daniel we are to ‘go our way’. In this time the ‘wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.

So, what is our role in this life before the end of time. What does it mean to ‘go your way, and rest’? We are not to go about trying to find knowledge in our own power. In verse 4 it says, ‘many will go here and there to increase knowledge’, but as in Hebrews

(4:3,9-11) we are called to 'rest in God'. Daniel would one day see the fulfilment of his words, but he was not to spend the rest of his life wondering what his visions might mean. Instead, he was to rest in the comfort of God's sovereignty and look forward to the time when he would rise to receive and share eternal life with God. God does not reveal everything to us in this life. We must be content with the partial picture until he wants us to see more. He will tell us what we need to know, but we are not to sit around waiting for Jesus' return to redeem the world instead we are to be in the 'rest of God' which is in work. Being in the rest of God is partnering with God to do what he is calling us to do by his grace, and leaving the part we are not able to do in his hands, trusting him to do it. One day we will shine like the stars for ever and ever. In the meantime, a purification process needs to take place. In verse 10 many will be purified made spotless and refined. As well as leading ourselves, we are to lead others 'on the right path to life' (verse 3 The Message). God wants our lives to make a difference now. We are called to be a blessing to those around us; to help each other in our discipleship, for example, through homegroups. As we challenge and help each other we all grow in our discipleship.

The book of Daniel is a call to all God's people to remain steadfast in their love and obedience to him in spite of present-day turmoil. Trials and persecutions make very little sense to us when we experience them, but they can purify us if we are willing to learn from them. After we come through a difficult time if we seek to learn from it, it can help us in the future. In Romans (5:3-5) it says ... we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.' The hope we have is based on faith. In Hebrews 11:1 'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see'. It is based on past realities of the death and resurrection of Christ. Our faith in the past event of the cross gives us a certain hope for our future which in turn gives us confidence in the midst of a troubled present. In spite of difficulty we know that something better is coming in the future and so we can enjoy the present.

The central theme of Daniel is: in spite of the present evil situation, God is in control, he is sovereign. God's kingdom is his sphere of influence and one day God's sphere of influence will be complete when Jesus returns. There are over 300 references in the New Testament to the second coming of Jesus. Revelation gives us the picture of the end, when God's victory is secure. The victory was won on the cross but we await the second coming for its ultimate resolution. At Alpha this last week in the film was an analogy which showed that whilst there is the future kingdom, there is a present aspect to it now. We can experience a foretaste of what will come in the future. After a long winter we can get a few warm days (as we did a few weeks ago) in early spring, when it stops raining, the sun comes out and it feels like summer. People are in t-shirts, but summer has not arrived and the following week it is cold again. We have experienced a foretaste of summer, and it tells us that summer is coming. The film focused on Does

God Heal today? It explained that when Jesus healed people it was like a foretaste of the future. Not everyone is healed today, but when Jesus returns everyone will be healed, and there will be no more pain and suffering. We may suffer now, but God has given us a glimpse of the coming glory. God will set things right, our reward is coming.

What a wonderful promise for Daniel knowing he would receive his reward. Daniel was born of royal heritage yet taken into captivity when only a teenager. He determined to remain faithful to God in the land of his captivity. Even at great personal cost, Daniel spent his entire lifetime advising his captors with unusual wisdom. God chose him as his servant to record some of the events of the captivity and some significant events concerning the future. As an old man, he had been faithful to God throughout his years. Faithfulness to God has a rich reward, not necessarily in this life, but most certainly in the life to come. By the words of God's promise it gives Daniel and all of his heirs, us, the confidence to persist in the light of continuing persecution and trouble.

'Go your way til the end. You will rest and then at the end of the days will rise to receive your allotted inheritance'.

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord for the promise of everlasting life. Thank you for your faithfulness that you partner with us through life, in our troubles you are with us. Thank you that you have blessed us and help us to be a blessing to others as we encourage one another on the right path to life.

Amen

Closing Prayer:

God, give us eyes of faith,
That we may choose your way
In the face of so many choices this week
Help us to believe in your promise
And to respond to your calling
In Jesus' name

Amen