

Light up the Darkness until Dawn

Daniel 8

Are you familiar with the phrase, “It’s always darkest before dawn?” Literally this phrase speaks to how dark the night sky is before the light of dawn breaks through. But figuratively speaking, the phrase is used to encourage someone who may be going through a difficult time in their lives. Is it biblical? Although the phrase itself is not found in the Bible, the principle is biblically sound.

Concerning the principle, it’s always darkest before dawn, I can attest to what one devotional writer observed, “Circumstances have on occasion brought me close to despair, then made a turn toward the positive. And often a situation seems at its worst just before we start to see things improve.” Heather Adams

As long as we live in this dark and fallen world, we will experience sorrow and suffering. But we don’t have to sorrow as those who have no hope. In the gospel of Luke, John the Baptist’s father, Zacharias prophesied of Jesus, *“because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace”* (Luke 1:78-79).

The glorious light of Christ that has come, and that will come again and that until then shines in the heart of every believer, will guide us in the darkness until dawn. Evil will not have the final word. This is what the book of Daniel teaches us, especially chapter eight.

Main idea: God’s ultimate triumph over all things evil is our basis for shining His light until the day dawns.

This morning we are going to see how vision from God, which comes through the word of God and revealed by the Spirit, gives us hope and strength to light up the darkness.

1. Receiving a vision to see as we ought to see

First of all, like Daniel, to light up the darkness we must receive vision from God to see as we ought to see. In chapter 7 we learned that in the first year of Belshazzar, the Babylonian King, Daniel received the vision of the four beasts, which represented the rise and fall of four kingdoms that oppressed God's people. Two of those Kingdoms, the Medo-Persian and the Greek empires are highlighted again in Daniel's vision in chapter 8.

As we get ready to consider yet another vision that Daniel received, keep in mind that they were not given so that the people of God would change the events in the future. Rather they were given in order for the vision to change the people of God in the present. John Calvin put it this way: "The faithful were informed beforehand of these grievous and oppressive calamities, to induce them to look up to God when oppressed by such extreme darkness."

With this in mind, we read beginning in verse one: *"In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after that which appeared to me at the first. ² And I saw in the vision; and when I saw, I was in Susa the citadel, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I was at the Ulai canal. ³ I raised my eyes and saw, and behold, a ram standing on the bank of the canal. It had two horns, and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last"* (Daniel 8:1-3).

We see here that Daniel received the vision described in chapter eight in the third year of the reign of Belshazzar. So, when Daniel received the vision, the Babylonian empire was still in power. In addition, in the third year of Belshazzar's reign, which was around 550BC, Cyrus, the Persian King defeated the Medes and formed the Medo-Persian empire. Furthermore, in the vision, Daniel was in Susa, a royal city that would later become the center of political power in Persia.

No doubt the expansion of the Medo-Persian empire, which would later conquer the Babylonians, would have made the exiled Israelites nervous. What would happen to the Israelites in Babylon if the Babylonian Kingdom was conquered by the Medo-Persians?

Uncertainty makes us all nervous at times. Like Daniel, in uncertain times, we need a vision that will settle our hearts and remind us that God is still in control.

What was the vision that Daniel saw? In verse 3 Daniel writes that he raised his eyes and saw a Ram with two high horns, one which was higher than the other. According to the explanation Daniel was later given by the angel Gabriel, (Daniel 8:20-22) this Ram with the two horns represents the Medo- Persian empire which was made up of two people groups. The fact that one horn was higher than the other in Daniel's vision probably refers to how Persia, who would defeat the Medes, was the more dominant of the two.

Furthermore, Daniel explains in verse 4 that he *saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward. No beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great.*" (Daniel 8:4). We know from other historical sources that the Ram, representing the Medo-Persian Empire, expanded to the west, the north and the south. The empire appeared unstoppable, that is until Alexander the Great came on the scene.

In uncertain times, once more, Daniel was reminded of the sovereignty of God. In response to Neb's vision in chapter two, Daniel declared: *"He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;"* (Daniel 2:21).

After the vision of the Ram, we read beginning in verse 5: *"As I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground. And the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. ⁶ He came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the canal, and he ran at him in his powerful wrath. ⁷ I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him and struck the ram and broke his two horns. And the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled on him. And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power. ⁸ Then the*

goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven” (Daniel 8:5-8).

According to verses 21, the angel Gabriel would explain to Daniel that the vision of the goat with the conspicuous horn between his eyes, (v.5) represented the Greek empire under Alexander the Great. Remember that in the vision that Daniel received in chapter 7, the Greek empire was described as a leopard with four wings. In the vision of chapter eight, the goat charges from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground.

These descriptions of the Greek empire speak of the speed by which the Greeks, under the leadership of Alexander the Great, conquered the world. Alexander’s military conquests were accomplished by the time he was 30 years old. Alexander and his armies seemed unstoppable.

But according to verse 8, the great horn of the goat that became great, was broken. This prophesy given some two hundred years before it came to pass, predicts the demise of Alexander the Great. At the height of Alexander’s greatness, he died at the age of 32 of typhoid fever.

After the great horn was broken, which speaks of the demise of Alexander, the end of verse eight prophesies: *“instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.”* After Alexander’s triumph and demise, his kingdom was ruthlessly divided between the four generals that had previously ruled under him.

How many of you know, there will be times in our lives, and maybe you’re going through it right now, when you will feel trapped and that the forces against you seem unstoppable. You’re praying, but things seem to go from bad to worse. That’s what it was like for Daniel and his people in their day.

There will be times when things will get so dark that you will be tempted to lose all hope. But in times like these, you must not doubt in

the dark what God has shown you in the light. You must get a vision of God and hold unto to it so that the darkness will not overtake you. You must look up and see the light of God or you will be swallowed up by the darkness of this world.

Now after the prophesied demise of Alexander and the four generals that replaced him, we read: *“Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. ¹⁰ It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. ¹¹ It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. ¹² And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper”* (Daniel 8:9-12).

Most commentators agree that the little horn, which came out of the four horns recorded in verse 8, is Antiochus Epiphanes IV. Remember the four horns in verse 8 represent the four mini empires ruled by the four generals who ruthlessly struggled for power after the death of Alexander the Great. Antiochus Epiphanes, who reign from 175 to 163 BC, and came out of these divided empires, viciously persecuted the Jewish people. Again, the Angel Gabriel would later give Daniel more prophetic details about Antiochus and his demonically inspired opposition to God and God’s people.

But before further details were revealed to Daniel, in verse 13 we read: *“Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, “For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?” ¹⁴ And he said to me, “For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state”* (Daniel 8:13-14). Remember in verse 12, the Bible also says, *“and it will throw truth to the ground.”*

Do you know, sometimes we can be so distracted or deceived by this world that we turn away from the light of truth. We try to find our own

way through the darkness only to stumble and fall. We are living in an age where the phrase “my truth” has replaced “the truth” in people’s lives. As a result, people in the highest places of our country can’t even define what a woman is.

In his book, *The Church in Babylon*, Erwin Lutzer writes: “Gender is no longer conferred by the Creator but is determined by an individual. The modern man says, ‘If I think or feel I am a woman, then I am a woman.’ And a woman says, ‘If I think or feel I am a man, I am a man.’ With an air of defiance, many in our generation say, ‘God did not determine who I am; I determine who I am.’”

When one feels uncertain about the future or confused about one’s identity, we must look to God’s truth not “my truth” or create our own reality. In a time of uncertainty, Daniel looked to God for understanding. And even when the revelation from God made him uncomfortable, he didn’t turn from it, but instead sought God for more clarity. He did so because he knew, if we are going to overcome the darkness of this world, we must act upon what we know is true, rather than on our feelings or impulses.

Notice that in verse 13, Daniel heard a conversation in the spiritual realm between two angelic beings. One of the holy ones said to the other one speaking: *“For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?”* (Daniel 8:13). No doubt the questions that Daniel heard the angelic being asking, he was also asking in his own heart.

Daniel didn’t turn a deaf ear to what was being revealed to him by God. Rather Daniel tuned in. O brothers and sisters, these incredible prophecies of Daniel, which attest to the inerrancy of scripture, were recorded and preserved by God, along with the rest of scriptures, so that we can live our lives based on the truth and promises of God’s word not our fickle feelings or imaginations.

How many of you know, when you respond to the light that God gives you, he will give you more light. Some say, I don’t read the bible

because it's too hard to understand. To this, Adrian Rogers said: "The way to understand the parts of the bible you don't understand is to obey the parts you do understand. Understand?"

This leads us to our second point.

2. Reflecting on the vision to think as we ought to think

In addition to receiving a vision from God to see as he ought to see, Daniel reflected on the vision to think and feel as he ought to think and feel. Concerning the vision of the transgression that makes desolate and the giving over of the sanctuary (v.13), Daniel was later given more clarity from the Angel Gabriel. But before we consider what the scriptures prophesied about the persecuting and blasphemous ways of Antiochus Epiphanes and what it means for us, it's important to note that Daniel received greater understanding because he sought to understand.

After the vision of the little horn representing Antiochus, we read: *"When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it. And behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. ¹⁶ And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision."¹⁷ So he came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end" (Daniel 8:15-17).*

After being given the vision of the Ram, which represented Medo-Persia, and before the vision of the goat, which represented the Greek empire, we read in verse 5: *"As I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west..." (Daniel 8:5).* The word *considering* here means that Daniel was thinking carefully and prayerfully about what was just revealed to him by God.

Daniel made a difference for God in the darkness of Babylon because his reality extended beyond the physical realm and into the spiritual realm. He knew that *"...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers*

over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

And because Daniel’s reality extended beyond the physical realm into the spiritual—because he could see beyond his circumstance, he did not succumb to the darkness of Babylon. Rather he shined in the darkness knowing that in spite of the evil that was not going away anytime soon, the armies of heaven were working to see to it that God’s purposes would ultimately be fulfilled.

Daniel didn’t pray for understanding and God didn’t send Gabriel to his aid to satisfy Daniel’s intellectual curiosity. Daniel sought God for understanding because first and foremost he wanted to be on mission for God.

Do you know, there are many Christians today who love to study bible prophecy related to the end times. In fact, the most well attended bible conferences are prophecy conferences about the end times. But do you know that the least attended meeting in Christian churches across the country are corporate prayer meetings?

If we are understanding bible prophecy about the end times the way we ought to—if it’s leading us to think and feel the way we ought to think and feel, the prayer meeting would be the most well attended meeting. As we will see in chapter 9, the vision that Daniel saw of the end times, kept him on his knees (Daniel 9:1-3).

O how we need a Holy Spirit renewed vision from God rooted in the word of God that causes us to tremble—that drives us to our knees because of the reality of the darkness of this world, the judgment to come and the power of the gospel to save.

This leads us to our final point.

3. Responding to the vision to act as we ought to act

Daniel not only received vision to see as he ought to see, and reflected on the vision to think as he ought to think, he also responded

to the vision to act as he ought to act. After the angel Gabriel came to Daniel to enlighten him, we read beginning in verse 18:

“And when he had spoken to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground. But he touched me and made me stand up” (Daniel 8:18). Notice that when the angel Gabriel, who was sent to enable Daniel to understand the vision, spoke, Daniel fell to the ground. The visions that were given to Daniel were about weighty matters, so weighty that when he heard them he fell into a coma like state.

Growing in our understanding of the bible and in particular end times prophecy, should humble us not make us proud. It should break our hearts for the lost not make us gloat in their demise. The Angel Gabriel was not only sent to make Daniel understand the vision. But after Daniel fell to the ground, Gabriel had to touch him to stand him back up. In other words, Daniel not only needed supernatural assistance to understand the vision, he needed further help to deal with the weight of it and so do we.

When you read the word of God, are you conscious of your need for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding and the capacity to grasp the weight of its revelations? The Lord said through Isaiah: *“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word”* (Isaiah 66:2). May God help us to receive, reflect and respond to His word with the upmost reverence and seriousness.

After standing Daniel back up, the angel Gabriel says, *“Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end”* (Daniel 8:19). As we will see more in a moment, Daniel is referring to the cruel reign of Antiochus, which by God’s decree would come to an end.

Commentating on this passage, one bible teacher writes: “The time has been determined and set by the sovereign Lord of history. God’s people will suffer for their sins, but their suffering will not be indefinite. God is in absolute control of all that is and all that will happen. This includes the trials and tribulations of his people. Human powers are

merely instruments in the hands of an all-powerful and providential God.”

Now after prophesying about the demise of Antiochus, whose history he picks up again in verse 23-25, Gabriel clarifies the vision of the Ram and the goat, which prophesy the rise and fall the Medo-Persian and Greek empires (v. 20-22). The amazing accuracy of this prophesy, which also references the four generals that replaced Alexander, is astounding.

Most commentators agree that the prophecies concerning the Medo-Persian and Greek empires have already been fulfilled in history. But concerning the ruler that arose from the divided Greek empire, there is some debate.

Some bible scholars and historians are convinced that Gabriel is describing Antiochus. Beginning in verse 23 we read: *“And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit, [Gabriel here is referring to the climax of God’s judgement upon his people] a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise. ²⁴ His power shall be great—but not by his own power; and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints. ²⁵ By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken—but by no human hand”* (Daniel 8:23-25).

Now the descriptions given in verse 23-25 compared to the historical record of Antiochus, leaves very little doubt in the minds of many that it is indeed Antiochus that Gabriel was describing. However, others believe that the ruler that is being described is the final anti-Christ that we spoke of last week. I believe the answer to this debate is that Gabriel is clearly prophesying about Antiochus, but at the same time his prophesy reveals a pattern that is characteristic of all anti-Christ’s figures throughout history and especially the final anti-Christ.

One commentator, who is convinced, as I am, that Gabriel is speaking of Antiochus Epiphanes writes: “So did the bible get it right in Daniel 8? The answer is a resounding yes! A brief historical summary adds a little meat to the bones of Daniel’s prophecy. Antiochus was violently bitter against the Jews. He hated them and was determined to exterminate them and their religion [see verses 13,24]. He devastated Jerusalem in 168 BC, murdered tens of thousands, defiled the temple, offered a pig on its altar, erected a shrine to Jupiter, prohibited temple worship, forbade circumcision on pain of death, sold (according to 2 Macc 5:11-14) forty thousand Jews into slavery, destroyed all copies of Scripture that could be found, and slaughtered everyone found to be in possession of God’s Torah. This all eventually led to what historians call the Maccabean revolt in 163 BC. Judas Maccabees (meaning “the hammer”) would lead the Jews to victory and the restoration of their religion. Today Jews celebrate Hanukkah (the Festival of Lights) in remembrance of that event” (Danny Akin).

Also, according to 2 Maccabees, the blasphemous Antiochus died not by human hands, but by an intestinal disease in fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy (v.25).

Now, after clarifying the vision to Daniel, Gabriel writes:
“The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true, but seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now”
(Daniel 8:26).

Why must Daniel seal up the vision? This doesn’t mean that he was to keep it a secret, but that he must preserve it for future generations.

The promise of the vision is that God is sovereign over evil. This not only means that evil will come to an end, but that God is so big that he can take the evil of this world, weave it into our lives to accomplish His purpose without ordaining the sin. And can I tell you, God’s sovereignty over evil is most clearly seen on the cross. Evil rulers crucified Jesus, but because God is Sovereign over all, the evil cruelty of the cross brought salvation to man.

Now knowing that God is sovereign over evil will not exempt us from the pain and suffering that comes from living in a fallen world, but it can enable us to rise above it and shine in the darkness.

Notice Daniel's final words about this vision at the end of chapter 8: *"And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I rose and went about the king's business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it"* (Daniel 8:27). Daniel's response is a little different than the average Christian after attending a prophesy conference, which I'm not against by the way.

The vision caused Daniel to be bed ridden. Remember that in verse 18, when Gabriel began to speak about the vision, Daniel fell into a coma like state. And after Gabriel gave him more details, again he was overcome, but this time he lay sick in bed for some days. What made Daniel feel so overwhelmed?

According to verse 27, part of the reason was that although he was given understanding by Gabriel, there was still some things that he didn't understand. What was that? Was it that he still didn't understand how much longer he and the people of God had to wait before evil would come to an end? The truth is that none of us can know how much longer we must wait before Christ returns and the fulness of His unstoppable kingdom is established on this earth.

But although Daniel did not understand and although he was overcome by the magnitude of the evil yet to come, he would eventually regain his strength, get up and go back to attending to the king's business. Where did that strength come from?

I want to submit to you that the divine grace which lifted Daniel up, was obviously not that all his why questions were answered. The vision didn't answer all his "why" questions, it answered the "who" was ultimately in charge question. Knowing, by the touch of God, that God was in control and that His redemptive purpose would be accomplished, strengthened Daniel to rise up and get busy doing the king's business for the glory of the King of kings.

In the movie, Legend, Doctor Neville, played by Will Smith, tells a story about the singer Bob Marley. While talking to a woman about the singer, Neville says, "Bob Marley believed that you could cure racism and hate...literally cure it by injecting music and love into people's lives. When Bob Marley was scheduled to perform at a peace rally, a gunman came to his house and shot him down. He survived. Two days later, he walked out onto that stage at the peace rally and sang. Afterwards when asked why he still performed, he said, "The people who are trying to make this world worse...are not taking a day off. How can I? Light up the darkness."

Although Bob Marley wasn't a believer, he was onto something. The answer wasn't in his music, but it is found in the love of Jesus.

Conclusion:

In these dark days, let us keep our eyes on the cross of Jesus where love triumphed over evil. And let us daily receive fresh vision from God in His word and by His Spirit to see as we ought to see, reflect on the vision to think as we ought to think and respond to the vision to act as we ought to act while we wait in hope. Although darkness may rule the night, the sun will rise again. Light up the darkness until dawn.