

To God Alone Be the Glory

“What’s going to happen?” People want to know what the future holds. Some consult psychics, or they have their tarot cards read, or they study the predictions of Nostradameus. What part of the future do many people want to know about? Minutia. Work related issues such as, “Will I keep my job” or “Will I get a job?” Or they want to know: “Will I have someone to love?” or “Should I dump the one I’m with and find someone new?” They want to know what to gamble on because they are tired of living on the daily bread God has promised; they want the easy life instead. There’s also a malady going around much worse than the delta variant. We could call this malady ‘moral myopia.’ That’s fancy talk for, “Don’t bother yakking to me about eternity; I’m too busy thinking about the next few days.”

Sad to say, some of this society’s shortsightedness is rubbing off on us. How many of us want to get rich, even though such wanting breaks two of the Commandments? How many of us singles lack contentment in our singleness? How many of us ‘marrieds’ wish we could be married to someone other than the one whom God has joined us together with? How many of us consult horoscopes and other such tomfoolery because we are unwilling to let our loving Lord keep a veil over his plans for our future? It would be good to leave the future in the hands of the Lord where

it belongs. But even after we make plans that please God, many of us still fret and feel anxious about what’s going to happen.

“Why can’t we know more about what’s going to happen?!” Apparently God has told us enough about himself and the future. Were he to tell us more about the future than he already has in the Bible, the knowledge would apparently harm us in some way. He loves us too much for that. Our present knowledge is sufficient for us to conclude that we have but one legitimate option with regard to the future: trust the Lord. At the same time God expects us to manage well the blessings he has placed into our hands. Trust him even if you’ve laid out a detailed, comprehensive plan. Trust God like you trust bridges. Yes, bridges. We all drove across at least one bridge in the last week. You weren’t afraid to drive your car across the bridge even though your car weighs more than 1500 lbs. You didn’t even give it a second thought. You just drove right out onto that bridge expecting it to hold you up. That’s trust. When you came into the worship area this morning, you didn’t even stop to think whether the pew could hold you up without collapsing. You just sat right down on it, believing it would hold you up. That’s trust.

Trust the Lord. The Lord is more trustworthy than bridges and church pews. He asserts that earthly wealth pales in comparison to our treasure in heaven.

He wants us to think that all our relationships with people are surpassed by our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Every time we open our Bible at home or come to God's house to hear his Word, he is inviting us to set aside our important-but-smaller concerns of this life, and turn our attention to the life to come. Doing so helps us with the joys and the setbacks of this life. Our homes here are wonderful, temporary dwellings, but heaven is our more wonderful, permanent home. Our health here has been good enough to sustain life till today, but our glorified bodies in heaven will function even better.

The Lord is trying to help us accomplish godly thinking in today's Old Testament lesson. He's saying, "Come on, I'll show you what's in your future—but just the important stuff." Let's look at Daniel 12.

¹*At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise.* "At that time" means the time just before Judgment Day. At that time Michael will arise. But who's Michael? He's an angel, a very powerful angel. Jude (9) calls him the archangel, the chief angel. In Daniel's vision, God calls him "*the great prince who protects your people.*" This Michael was active behind the scenes of history, working against Satan's agents in the evil governments which were trying to hurt God's people and prevent God's plans from happening (Daniel 10). The Lord will have none of that. So Michael is dispatched as God's special agent to

stop Satan's schemes and assure that God's good will is done. Michael protected God's Old Testament people so that God's promises to send Messiah would come true. And now we learn that in the last days Michael will arise to protect us.

"Why? What special need of protection will we have as Judgment Day approaches?" *There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.* The worst in all of history? Whoa! There've been some mighty distressful times. Think back a year to social distancing. Think back to the great recession of 2009. How about Pol Pot in Cambodia? Who can forget World War II and the holocaust? Distressing? It will be worse for God's people just before the end.

Have you ever hoped that Jesus would return during your lifetime, in part because you prefer to skip death as the usual step before entering heaven? Are you sure you want to be alive to see Jesus' return? Daniel's words make me think of death as preferable to what the believers in Jesus will have to endure in the days just before the end.

If these thoughts scare you, then listen to the Lord speak through Daniel: *At that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.* "Your people," Daniel's people, are everyone who trusts in the true

God, the God revealed in the Bible. The Lord has written their names in “*the book*.” Seven other Bible passages call this book “the book of life.” Can’t you just picture the Lord sitting on his throne in heaven saying, “I love these humans, and I want to give them eternal life. Therefore I will send my Son to live among them. He will suffer the consequences for their sins so that I can cancel the debts they owe me. I will send them my Spirit through my Word and Baptism to lead them to trust in my Son. Oh, I know some will want nothing to do with me or my Son. But I choose that one and that one and that one and that one and that one to be counted as my family.” Can you see the Lord writing names in his book? Look over his shoulder. See? Your name is one of them! On the Last Day the Lord will take out his book, his registry of names, to see if your name is written there. And of course, because the Holy Spirit brought you to faith in Jesus, and because he will keep you in faith through his Word and the Lord’s Supper, your name will appear.

Do you see why it’s important to know this? A time is coming when we who cling to Jesus will be set upon unrelentingly. It won’t be like today when people are drawn away from Jesus through persuasive temptations for love, sex, money, influence, or excitement. We will be required to say that we have been wrong about all kinds of things the Bible teaches. If we refuse to give in, we will experience losses, the kind that make

you think twice about holding onto Jesus. We will probably see some Christians give in, reducing our numbers and causing their names to be erased from God’s book of life. Shall we fear? No. *At that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.* DELIVERED PEOPLE ARE TRIUMPHANT PEOPLE.

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. You can’t get much clearer than that, can you? Just think how many people have died since the world was created at least 6,000 years ago. And the death rate has never changed: it’s still one per conception. If Jesus doesn’t come back soon, some of us will be added to the billions who have already gone the way of all the earth. Why? In Romans 5:12 the Bible says, “*death came to all men because all sinned.*” On every death certificate the underlying cause of death could be listed as “sin.”

But every human will rise from the dead, even unbelievers. This surprises some Christians. I don’t know where they picked up the notion, but they think only believers in Jesus will rise. Huh-uh. All will rise, with their bodies. It matters little how long it’s been since their body turned to dust. As far as we know Adam and Eve’s son Abel was the first human to die. He’ll be there, rising from the dust, body intact.

And then there will be only two options: with God or away from God. You'll notice no mention of hellfire in this text: that's because the shame and contempt are worse than the fire. * If you want to understand contempt, try this experiment. Cook a turkey. When all the meat is cleaned off, set the carcass aside in your home. In a few days the bacteria will be going to town on those giblets. Whew-ee! Do you hate the smell of rotting carcass? That's contempt. God will treat unbelievers like rotting turkey carcass on the last day. * Shift gears. Do you remember a time you were caught doing something sinful? You were so caught, you couldn't lie your way out of it even if you wanted to. Oh, the shame! Shame sometimes makes people not want to be here in God's house. That's too bad, because shame is the best reason to come here. Right now there's time to bring our shame to God, to ask him for help never to give in to anything that causes shame, and hear God say, "I forgive you for Jesus' sake. I will never be ashamed of you." But on the last day, shame will become the permanent feeling of those who loved the things of this life more than they loved God. They will hear God say something like: "You wanted to be without me? Very well then. Be without me forever."

It doesn't have to be that way. For some it won't. They will rise to everlasting life. Jesus died for their sins and lived so they could have a perfect record in life.

The Holy Spirit offered them a relationship with the Father through Jesus, and they said, "Thank you very much." You know what will happen to them? *Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*

To be wise is to believe in Jesus as your Savior. Then you are "wise for salvation" (2 Timothy 3:15). But this wisdom isn't just faith. This wisdom is the kind that leads us to shape our lives according to God's will in hopes that others will see we live different from the world. We stop after one or two drinks. We express surprise with words that don't include God's name. We try to manage our money well and share with those in need of Jesus or in need of bread.

This wisdom also leads us to talk about what Jesus means to us. The Lord has decided that he will reach the world through his Word. Yet very few people will pick up a Bible for the first time without being led to it by another human. That's why the Lord wants us to talk about Jesus. He promises that those who lead others to believe in Jesus will be made to shine like the stars. He holds out this promise because he wants to deliver you from shame and contempt permanently. He wants you to shine like the stars. He wants you to be saints triumphant. He has delivered you from sin and hell.
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