



COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH

Strangers

A STUDY OF DANIEL

Daily Scripture Readings for
October 5 - November 22

PRELUDE: SABBATH

Monday, October 5 - Exodus 20:8-11

I will be on vacation this coming Wednesday and Sunday, so I found it appropriate to have Scripture Readings this week which focus on Sabbath. Honoring the Sabbath and keeping it holy is one of the Ten Commandments. Jewish and Christian leaders for almost 3000 years have been trying to determine the best way to fulfill this requirement from the Bible. The reason behind the Sabbath in our passage today is God rested on the seventh day of creation. Because of God's action, we do the same. God has set an example for us to follow.

Sabbath means much more than having a "rest day." It's a special day that God has ordained for us to have an opportunity to focus solely on our spiritual life instead of having other tasks to do. It can be hard, almost impossible it seems, to do this once a week. I believe it appropriate to make modifications to the schedule and calendar if necessary. While the Sabbath is technically Friday Sundown to Saturday Sundown, most Christians use Sunday as this Sabbath day. In my line of work, I am not resting on Sunday. How do I have a Sabbath day? I take little bits of time whenever they come my way. Sitting outside for 15 minutes after mowing the lawn. Enjoying an early morning run. Drinking coffee and reading the Bible before anyone in the house wakes up. Those little moments throughout the week sustain me until I can have a longer time of Sabbath rest. I consider the time I will have with my family away from home this week part of this type of Sabbath. I will have the opportunity to re-energize my mind, body, and spirit this week.

I pray that you have opportunities to take Sabbath rest as well. Make sure to rest from your daily work, so you can focus on your relationship with God. God showed us the way to live our lives during the week of creation. Let us follow his example and take time to rest.

Tuesday, October 6 - Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Why are we reading this commandment again today? It is interesting that while the commandment of Sabbath stays the same, the reason in Deuteronomy is different from the Exodus passage we read yesterday. In Exodus, we rest because God rested; in Deuteronomy, we rest and let others rest because we know what it is like to not be able to rest.

The reasoning behind the commandment here is a great way to live life. It is reminiscent of what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12). The Golden Rule is part of the reason we keep the Sabbath. Us not working allows other people to not work. As you read yesterday, I find it appropriate to take small Sabbaths throughout the week. However, if you are committed to an idea that “no one should work on Sundays,” then you must not go out to eat or go shopping on Sundays. That’s the idea in Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Moses is telling the people to remember what it was like as slaves in Egypt. Telling them to remember that God had to save you for labor seven days a week. Reminding them now that you have a say in how you, your workers, and your animals work, give everyone rest.

We’ve all gone through stretches in life with endless daily work. Remember what that is like and give yourself and others grace by allowing rest for all.

Wednesday, October 7 - 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Even though I am on vacation, we will continue through our study of the Letters to the Thessalonians tonight at 5:30 pm in the sanctuary. I recorded it earlier this week, and you will be able to watch the recording together after you take time to pray for each other, our community, and our world.

We conclude 1 Thessalonians tonight by reading several commands that Paul gives the Thessalonians. Some are positive affirmations and others are negative corrections, but all are commands on how the church is supposed to behave. I have an assignment for you. Try to find every command in these verses. Write them out and study them. Circle two or three that you think you do well and then circle two or three that you struggle with. Pray today for God to help you in these works.

Thursday, October 8 - Matthew 14:20-23

If you don't think you have time to rest, or that there is too much to do, these verses are for you. After the Feeding of the 5000+, Jesus went to the mountain by himself to pray. Jesus didn't have much time on this earth; he knew that, and still he took time to be alone and pray. That is how important rest and prayer are.

When you read the book of Matthew, mountains play an important role. When Jesus goes to a mountain, it shows an important characteristic of who he is. He's on a mountain during one of the temptations (Matt. 4:8), when he gives the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), for the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8), and when he ascends into heaven (Matt. 28:16-20). Now here, he prays on the mountain. He takes time to be alone and pray to his Father in heaven. This is part of who he is.

Charles Spurgeon, the 19th century British pastor, paraphrases Martin Luther in one of his sermons saying this: "most people would say, 'I have so much business to do to-day, that I have only three minutes for prayer; I cannot afford the time.' But Luther thought that the more he had to do, the more he must pray, or else he could not get through it. ... [Luther said] 'I have so much business to do to-day, that I shall not be able to get through it with less than three hours' prayer.'" What an amazing way to think about life. Let us attempt to think of life in a similar way. Take time to rest and pray.

Friday, October 9 - Hebrews 4:1-11

It is in Jesus where we find our ultimate rest. Put another way: the Lord is our Sabbath. Hebrews is full of reasonings concerning Jesus being superior. Here in Hebrews 4, Jesus is explained to be superior to the Sabbath of the Old Testament and superior to the Law of Moses. It is this understanding why I was able to say earlier in the week that one full day is not forced upon us; if you need, you can take smaller sabbaths to sustain your spirit.

The hope of salvation is not in the Law of the Old Testament. Keeping the Sabbath is not about appeasing God. Keeping the Sabbath is about sitting at the feet of God and resting in his presence. Much like what Jesus told Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42, Mary chose correctly by sitting at the feet of Jesus. It was what she needed to do at that moment. It is in our relationship with God through Jesus where we find ultimate rest. Take time to grow that relationship today.

Saturday, October 10 - Hosea 6:6

This verse can help sum up our understanding about Sabbath. Jesus quotes this verse in Matthew 12:7 when his disciples are questioned about plucking grain on the Sabbath. What God desires from our lives isn't only action, but our heart behind the action. God doesn't want mindless obedience; God wants mindful submission. God doesn't want us just following the rules, but God wants us to love him. The Sabbath is not about laying around; it is about taking the time to get closer to God. I hope you take the time to do that today.

Sunday, October 11 - Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us as we seek his will and worship him today.

A STUDY OF DANIEL

Over the next six weeks (with a one week break), we will be going through the Book of Daniel. Daniel is best understood as an Apocalyptic book meaning it should be read similar to the Book of Revelation. As we read through Daniel, we will not be going straight through the book. It is my interpretation that different chapters connect with each other, so we will be studying those chapters together.

Many see Daniel broken into two sections: chapters 1-6 are court stories and chapters 7-12 are visions or prophecies. I think there is more unity to the book than that. I would relate Daniel 1-6 as similar to Revelation 1-3. Revelation 1-3 plays a role and is connected to the vision seen in Revelation 4-22. Daniel 1-6 plays the same role with Daniel 7-12. We will get more into studying the connections as we go through the devotions, worship on Sunday mornings, and then have the opportunity to talk in depth about the passages on Sunday nights. With that said, let's begin exploring the Book of Daniel.

WEEK 1: DANIEL 1

Monday, October 12 - Daniel 1:1-2

This week we will focus on the story found in Daniel 1. It serves as an introduction to the entire book and introduces us to Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The first two verses today indicate the time period of Daniel. When you use the reigns of the kings mentioned in verse 1, the story of Daniel begins sometime between 606 BC and 597 BC. The land of Shinar mentioned in verse 2 is another name for Babylon.

In verse 2, it is clear who is in control of the events that are unfolding. As in any apocalypse writing, the purpose is to show that while it seems that worldly events are spinning out of control, God knows what is happening and he is still in control. The words "Lord" and "God" show us immediately in this book that God is not confined to

the boundaries of Israel or the Temple. These terms are more universal than the personal name for God “*Yahweh*.” Even though God is allowing this to happen to Judah, God is still with them and will be with them as they are taken to Babylon.

How do you think of God? Do you think of God as one who lives at church? When I was a child, I thought he lived behind the baptistery and would come out to get his money we left on Sunday afternoon. Do you have a more sophisticated version of that belief? You come and visit God at his house, but you are on your own when in the world. I hope you don't believe that. God is with you always. God is not just our God, but he is God over all the world. No matter if we are in church, at home, at the store, or halfway around the world, God is there, and God will help his people (YOU!).

Tuesday, October 13 - Daniel 1:3-5

The Babylonians had conquered Israel and Judah. As a result, the best and brightest young men from the tribe of Judah were being taken from their home to be reeducated by the Babylonians. The goal of the Babylonians was to indoctrinate this next generation of leaders for Israel to the ways of Babylon, so that they would lead the rest of Israel to support Babylon and its empire. The plan is doomed to fail from the start. These best and brightest from the tribe of Judah would have already been studying about and building a relationship with the one true God. They were already being prepared for service in the Temple and in the Palace in Jerusalem. If Babylon was trying to convert Israelites to their way of life, these men would have been the toughest to sway.

How tough are you to sway to the ways of the world? How tempted are you to convert to a faith in culture instead of a faith in God? If you were completely taken away from everything you know and not given the opportunity to worship with other Christians, how long would it take for you to stop practicing your faith? A recent Barna Group poll surveyed 1,000 Practicing Christians in May and 47% of them said they did

not participate in worship with their church in the four weeks after Easter this year. They were active in attending church before the Pandemic but did not watch online when everything they knew about church changed.

We will be introduced to the four Israelite men who had this happen to them on Thursday. They had a firm foundation from their upbringing to stay true to the faith. Continue to build your faith with God, so that you don't lose your trust in God when times get difficult.

Wednesday, October 14 - 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

We begin 2 Thessalonians tonight. Much like 1 Thessalonians, there is a lot to say about what Christians will face at the end of days. Once you get past the introduction to the letter (2 Thess. 1:1-4), the main theme of chapter 1 is judgment. Who do you know who is not prepared for Jesus' return? Make a list and pray for those people throughout the day. Tonight, we will begin prayer time by praying for those people also. Also pray for your strength to boldly share the gospel when the opportunity is divinely presented to you.

Thursday, October 15 - Daniel 1:5-21

We will be doing something a little different over the next three days. We will read the same verses in Daniel, but have different devotions from them. About the same time of Daniel, Jeremiah writes to the exiles to seek the welfare of their new home (Jeremiah 29:7). As Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are ushered into the royal courts, they are called upon to refocus their lives on Babylon. This is supposed to be done in three areas: education, name, and food. The four men are willing to be re-educated and have their names changed, but they will not eat the food of the king.

What was the issue with the food? It's hard to know for sure, but there are two possibilities. One possibility is that the food from the king's table was likely sacrificed to

Babylonian idols. Eating this food would have been complicit with idol worship. A second possibility is that Daniel did not want to eat the king's food because it was rich food. Eating the rich food of the king would have been inappropriate for an exile taken from his home. The majority of the exiles are not eating rich food from the king but poor food of the peasants.

I find it fascinating that the two possibilities correspond to the words the prophets have been trying to get Israel to follow for the previous 300 years: don't follow idols and have solidarity with the poor. We learn from this introduction that Daniel is trying to follow what the prophets have been trying to tell Israel. We can be like Daniel when faced with similar decisions. Now, I don't expect you will be exiled from your home, taken into the palace of a king, and forced to eat rich food which has been offered to idols. However, maybe you have the opportunity to benefit from the worship of an idol like money. You have not given into worshipping the idol, but you benefit from others who are worshipping money. What are some ways you can avoid being complicit to the worship of modern-day idols? Pray for God to reveal these areas of your life, so you can be more like these four friends who said "no" to the King of Babylon.

Friday, October 16 - Daniel 1:5-21

The temptation to eat the king's food was real. There was a fad diet popular a few years ago called the Daniel Fast. It avoided eating meat and drinking alcohol and only eating vegetables. If you've ever tried to diet, you know the temptation of fatty foods and red meat. The four friends committed to eating this way for three years.

When we commit to doing something in service of the Lord, it takes dedication. When we falter on our commitment, it hurts the body of Christ. How would have the witness of Daniel been affected if he decided to start eating the food of the king a year into his schooling in the palace because the food looked good? How is your witness to the world affected when you act like non-believers in the world? Pray for God to give

you perseverance to stay committed to following the commands of God, even when everyone around you is not.

Saturday, October 17 - Daniel 1:5-21

The four friends persevered and lasted three years eating common food instead of the king's food. God was part of the event in every step of the process. God showed the guards in charge of the four that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's request would not cause trouble for the guards. God blinded the eyes of the king and others to what the four Israelites were eating; God caused the four men to be stronger and fatter than the men eating the rations of the king. On top of that, God caused the men to be smarter than the other students.

When God puts something on your heart, God will give you the tools to be successful. When God requires your obedience in a matter, God will clear the path for you to reach the goal. Is there something or someone on your heart today? Is your will pulling you in one direction, but God's will is pulling you in another? Are the ways of your world contrary to the ways of the Kingdom of God? Pray that you seek God's direction in your life today. Pray for someone else who God lays on your heart. Pray for their decision-making as well. When we do the will of God, God will see us through. Seek God's will today.

Sunday, October 18 - Psalm 68:4-10

"God in your goodness, you provide for the needy." Lord, we are needy today. We need your provision and sustenance. We need your mercy, O Lord. You are a good God. Supply what we need today.

WEEK 2: DANIEL 3 & 6

These are the stories we are most familiar with in Daniel and tell of similar events. The king makes a decree that all of Babylon must worship an idol. The four Israelites will not do so. They are given the death penalty for their disobedience, yet God saves them from death. There is a great amount of instruction we can learn from these stories, so let us begin with the story of Fiery Furnace.

Monday, October 19 - Daniel 3:1-18

What do you do when the earthly king demands you to do something against God? When it is phrased like that, it is fairly obvious. However, life is usually not that straight-forward and oftentimes, Christians fall into the trap of idolatry. The majority of German Christians during the reign of Hitler were supportive of him. Here is a quote from *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* by Matthew D. Hockenos written in 2004:

Most Protestants, then, found nothing incompatible with practicing their faith and supporting Hitler. If some were disturbed by the violence in word and deed of this new movement, they hoped that such excessive rhetoric and brutality would subside once order had been established. Protestant leaders admired Hitler's courage in attacking atheistic leftists and liberals and believed his goals were similar to theirs.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could have just gone along with what the king wanted. What's the harm in faking to worship the statue? They could have just gone through the motions, pleased the king, and then in private prayed to God. That is not what God commands from us. As the old hymn suggests, Christ demands my soul, my life, my all. And if that means earthly death or ridicule, so be it. Pray that when you

are forced to choose between earthly powers and God, you have the strength to choose God no matter the consequences.

Tuesday, October 20 - Daniel 3:19-30

“Absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Originally attributed to Lord Acton of the 19th century, this quote is true for most people who have power in a nation, corporation, community, or organization. If one person has all the power, he rules corruptly.

King Nebuchadnezzar was this way. Verse 15 from yesterday shows this when he says: “...who is the god that will deliver you out of *my* hands?” King Nebuchadnezzar sees himself as high as or higher than any god. This is why Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are thrown in the fiery furnace. When the three friends question the king’s position of authority asserting they will never bow to him, he is enraged and makes the fire bigger.

However, when the people of God stand up for what is right, God has the opportunity to show his power. Because of the resolve of these three men, God’s name, power, and love is made known to the king. This is the power that all Christians have today. When we stand up for the commands of God, we have the opportunity for God to show himself to the world. Can you think of opportunities you have to speak out for what is good and right and perfect? Pray for God to make you aware of opportunities you have to show your circle of friends and neighbors the power of God. Don’t do the bidding of corrupt earthly powers who think they are stronger and more powerful than God. Stand up and trust in God’s protection.

Wednesday, October 21 - 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

Who is this “man of lawlessness?” Verse 5 seems to indicate that Paul has already spoken to the Thessalonians about this subject. This means they are able to

understand this passage more than we ever will. Tonight, we will do our best to learn from a sermon that is in two parts when we are missing part one. Join us as we discuss this passage and we pray.

Thursday, October 22 - Daniel 6:1-9

Much like the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego earlier this week, this story of Daniel is a story of remaining faithful to God in the face of persecution. Before we discuss Daniel, let us notice that there has been a regime change between Daniel 3 and Daniel 6. The new king is King Darius who was a Persian king. Persia took over the Babylonian empire around 535 BC when King Cyrus allowed some Israelites to return to Israel. It seems that Daniel was not one of them as he was continuing to serve as a government official now for the kingdom of Persia. Darius took over the kingdom in 522 BC, and so this story takes place after that. Much like God does with King Nebuchadnezzar, God shows his power to King Darius through the faithfulness of his servant Daniel.

These first nine verses of this story show us the animosity between people of God and non-believers. Because of Daniel's faithfulness to God, God had allowed him to raise in favor with the king. Because Daniel did his work as if he worked for God, "Daniel distinguished himself above all the other presidents and governors (satraps)." That led to jealousy from his co-workers in the Kingdom of Persia and led to the others conspiring to get rid of Daniel.

Daniel's attitude while in a foreign kingdom is a great example for how we are to live in a world that's not our home. Can it lead to tension from people who are citizens of the world instead of people of God? Absolutely! But that is exactly what should be when you are following different leaders and have different allegiances. In a less substantial way, think of college allegiances. Is there tension between followers of Texas A&M and followers of the University of Texas? Or more personal to me, Baylor

University and Texas Christian University? Undoubtedly! I hope it's a friendly rivalry, but this is what happens when allegiances are different.

If there is not tension between Christians and non-Christians sometimes, is it possible we aren't fulfilling our obligations to God? The other officials tricked King Darius into signing a law. You know the story, so you know what Daniel does next. However, in these verses we learn that Daniel was following every other law and had no corruption inside of him. The story of Daniel and the Lions' Den is not just about *disobeying* an idolatrous law; it is also about Daniel *obeying* the other laws. I hope all of Daniel's story can be an example for us in the world today. Obey when it is appropriate; disobey when it is necessary.

Friday, October 23 - Daniel 6:10-18

The decisions made by Daniel and King Darius are strikingly different and a great example of the decisions God-followers and non-believers make. Daniel is solely motivated by his devotion to God. He knows the law; he still prays to God. He does exactly what he knows is right and what he wants to do. The law is not going to get in his way. The king, however, does not do what he wants to do. King Darius clearly wants to save Daniel. He looks for a way to get around the law. He cannot determine a way to appease the other government officials and save Daniel, so he follows the law. King Darius wanted to please men; Daniel wanted to please God.

Who are you trying to please in your life? It is clear that Daniel knew the law; he chose to please God. Can you think of times recently where you were more like the king trying to please others instead of pleasing God? I am praying for you as you seek to live out the will of God in your life. Pleasing God can lead to being thrown to the lions. Pleasing God will not please men. Who will you please today?

Saturday, October 24 - Daniel 6:19-28

Much like the story earlier this week, Daniel's obedience to God leads to a king seeing the power of God. When we are obedient to God, people see the power of God. We pray for the power of God to be seen on this earth. We yearn for God to show himself. It is in our period of time where God has chosen to show himself through the work of the church. The power of God can be seen in the work of his people. Let us choose today to be part of God's power on earth. Let us be people seeking to bring the actions of the Kingdom of God to this earth. Let us be like Daniel, who obeyed God and showed the power of God to the world.

Sunday, October 25 - Psalm 69:16-18

Do you feel distressed this morning? Take it to God. Do you feel trapped? Ask God to set you free. Turn to God who is all-loving and grace giving. Worship God today.

INTERLUDE: POLITICAL ELECTIONS

Monday, October 26 - Matthew 22:15-22

Every four years our country elects a president; this can be a time when we lose perspective. We forget the priorities we should have as Christians. This week, we will be reading Scripture which will lead to my last sermon before Election Day. It's a sermon I preach every Sunday before Election Day. I never want us to forget which leader of our lives is most important.

Today's Scripture will be the main text of the sermon on Sunday, so I will save most of the description of this passage for Sunday. The question posed to Jesus was a trap. If he said the people should not pay the tax, as the Pharisees would have agreed, the Herodians (Jewish followers of Herod who supported the Roman Empire) would have turned Jesus into the Roman authorities as disobeying Roman Law. If Jesus said

the people should pay the tax, as the Herodians thought, the average Jew listening to Jesus would be ready to cause a riot. Jesus was in a no-win situation and yet in his infinite wisdom he found a way to appease both groups: humor. I'll look forward to explaining this in more detail this Sunday.

When you find yourself in a tense political discussion, instead of causing strife, try to use humor this week to diffuse the situation. Instead of arguing to the point where friendships and family relationships become strained to the point of no return, do as Jesus did and find a way to calm everyone down. These next 9 days can be high stress as people have strong opinions. Let us be peacemakers.

Tuesday, October 27 - Matthew 6:31-34

I succumb to this temptation as well. I am a worrier. When it comes to our country, I am tempted to worry and think the fate of the future relies on who lives in the White House. How small my mind is and how little I think of God in those moments when I think his ultimate plan is governed by one leader in one country at one time on this earth.

From 1997-2002, Apple used the slogan "Think Different." Many saw this in response to IBM's slogan "Think" which they had used since 1915. What if Christians chose to "think different" while everyone else was thinking one way? Instead of focusing on who the president is at this point in history, let us focus on who God is always. Let us seek after God and his kingdom instead of seeking after the president and an earthly kingdom. It is interesting how Jesus described verse 32. He says it is the Gentiles who strive after food, clothing, and drink. Christians are supposed to be different from others. We do not strive after things of this world. I'm reminded of a quote I shared with you several weeks ago about a letter from 125 AD. Aristides wrote to the Roman Emperor Hadrian telling him that there were now four races of people in the world: Greeks, Barbarians, Jews, and Christians.

Let this be a message to Christians today. Let us not be able to be assigned a different classification other than Christian. Let us be so unlike everyone else, all people can say is that we are Christians. Let us think different.

Wednesday, October 28 - 2 Thessalonians 3:1-18

We will finish up our study of 2 Thessalonians tonight by looking at chapter 3. The main fireworks of this passage we discussed several weeks ago on a Sunday morning, so we will review that for a short time and discuss the other verses in this conclusion. Paul asks for prayer from the church and is confident in the Lord's provisions. Take that promise with you today. Know that your church family is praying for you and the Lord will take care of you. Pray for others in our church today as we are doing for you. Then let's come together tonight and pray for our church, our community, and our world.

Thursday, October 29 - Joshua 24:14-15

"Put away the gods that your ancestors served..." This address by Joshua is a familiar one. As Israel moves into the Promised Land, they renew their covenant to the Lord right before Joshua's death. They commit to fearing the Lord and putting all false gods away. Joshua commands each family to choose whether to serve God or idols, but his family will serve and fear God.

The gods that Israel served previously were Abraham's family's gods ("beyond the River") and the gods of Egypt. Remember that while Abraham and his descendants were called and blessed, the generations previous to him were not followers of the Lord. In Egypt, there were many gods who governed different parts of the world. Egyptian mythology is as polytheistic (many gods) as Roman and Greek mythology which will come later. Egypt also included the pharaohs as sons of god and gods in their own right. This is where we turn to our focus as it comes to an election in 5 days.

The pharaohs were worshipped like gods. I see too many Christians elevating the status of an American President to that level. I see Christians who have completely devoted themselves in such a way as they have deified the office of the president. I see high-profile pastors who will bend over backwards to explain away the wrong officials commit in order to show devotion. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! Let us be weary when leaders require complete devotion and faithfulness to them. Let us be weary when a person says they are the only one who can save us. Let us put away the gods of our ancestors and forefathers and revere the Lord alone. God is our King. He deserves all of our reverence and devotion.

Friday, October 30 - Romans 13:1-7

These two verses seem to conclude a passage that starts at Romans 12:1. I find it very important to read Romans 12 and 13 together because too often Romans 13 gets separated from its context. It is too often used by authority to demand submission and that is not the context of Romans 13. The context starts with presenting our bodies to God in a form of spiritual worship, with us not being conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds. The context is the demands of the Christian life and then Romans 13 starts. Romans 13:3-4 are terribly hard to interpret because we can look through history and current events around the world and clearly see that good conduct can still lead to persecution by the government. Others of Paul's letters speak to this tragedy of Christians who do nothing wrong are being persecuted. World events show that innocent people are regularly killed by earthly authorities.

However, the world needs authority; a country cannot function without a government. In general, which is what Paul is describing, if you obey the law, then authority leaves you alone. Of course, if the law is contrary to Christ's Law, then you must obey Christ.

All of this is summed up in Romans 13:6-7: give honor to those who deserve honor, pay taxes to those who require taxes, give respect to those who deserve respect. These are not the words of the authority to the citizen, but these are the words of the citizen to each other.

Lastly, notice the verses that surround Romans 13:1-7. Romans 12:21 says overcome evil with good; Romans 13:8 says to love one another. Let that be the context that we consider being subject to authorities.

Saturday, October 31 - Matthew 5:3-12

I find it appropriate to end the week discussing the Blessings that Jesus gives at the beginning of The Sermon on the Mount. I often say The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is the constitution of the Kingdom of God. If the entire sermon is the constitution, then the Blessings or Beatitudes are the preamble. If you do not remember from junior high U.S. History, the preamble to the U.S. Constitution is:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

The values shown in the Preamble are in the middle of the statement from “in order to...” to “...and our Posterity.” These are the principles which are supposed to be found in our country and seen in the Constitution and Laws of the United States. What are the values and principles in the Blessings of Matthew 5? It’s to be humble, be vulnerable enough to mourn, be meek, be hungering and thirsting for righteousness, be merciful, be pure in heart, be peacemakers, be

ready to be persecuted for doing the right thing, be prepared for people to hate you and make false reports about you.

As we embark on the final weekend before Election Day, make a promise that you will follow the values and principles seen in the Blessings. These are the values and principles which are supported by the Laws of the Kingdom of God. These are the values our Lord requires of us.

Pray for God to help you show these values to others. Find someone to hold you accountable when you are finding it difficult to live the way Christ wants you to live.

Sunday, November 1 - Psalm 70

We pray for God to deliver us from difficulty. We ask for him to help and deliver us. He is a faithful God. Come and worship that God today!

BACK TO DANIEL

WEEK 3: DANIEL 4 & 5

Monday, November 2 - Daniel 4:1-33

While looking through Daniel 4 and 5 this week, the theme will be judgment on earthly powers. Daniel 4 sees judgment against Nebuchadnezzar; Daniel 5 sees judgment against a different king, Belshazzar. We see a warning in these passages to remember that God is more powerful and important than all earthly events.

The story of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream is pretty straightforward (we will look at Nebuchadnezzar's first dream next week). The King of Babylon had a dream which concerned him and none of the diviners of the kingdom could interpret the dream. Daniel came and was able to interpret the dream correctly. The dream told of the king as a tall tree reaching to heaven, but now he will be

cut down and run out of the kingdom. The fulfillment of this dream and the prophecy Daniel gives comes to fruition a year later in Daniel 4:28-33.

Nebuchadnezzar serves as an example to not be led astray by power and pride. Do not think you are more powerful than God because you have achieved great things on this earth. In the order of Daniel, this passage is immediately after the king throws Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace. Earthly authorities are still under the power of God. God is faithful and just, and the king's pride and injustice has led to punishment. All people are in the hands of God. Obeying God will lead to glory from God.

Tuesday, November 3 - Daniel 4:34-37

God is just; not a terror. Nebuchadnezzar served his time, he lifted his eyes to heaven, and God restored his mind. God does not punish because he is angry, but in order for others to learn lessons. Nebuchadnezzar learned his lesson and was put back in his right mind. It is unclear in these verses if Nebuchadnezzar showed true faith in God. It seems he is only in awe and fear of what God can do. Moving from reverence to devotion is a hard hurdle to cross. You can choose to be reverent; you must relinquish control to be devoted.

Nevertheless, what has happened here is the king has realized how frail he actually is. He has learned even though he is king, there is a greater King of heaven. When he learned his lesson, God restored to him his humanity.

God has the power to bring down the proud. This passage shows the importance of even powerful people on this earth needing to humble themselves before God. If you will not humble yourself, God will do it for you. Is pride a source of struggle for you? I pray that God can help you realize this sin of pride in your life. I pray that you repent from this feeling of superiority. Humble yourself before the Lord before God does it for you.

Wednesday, November 4 - 2 Corinthians 4:13-15

With our study of the Letters to the Thessalonians complete, we will spend the next few weeks discussing the importance of giving thanks. What we see in 2 Corinthians 4:15 is grace may increase thanksgiving. What does it mean to extend grace to one another? Who should receive grace? What does it mean to extend grace to more and more people? How does this bring glory to God? Think about these questions today, and we will plan to discuss these questions and more during our time together tonight.

Thursday, November 5 - Daniel 5:1-9

Different king, basically the same story. King Belshazzar sees a vision and none of the king's diviners can interpret it. We will spend the next few days talking about the writing on the wall and the judgment which is coming for Belshazzar. Today, we discuss the beginning of this event which is the choice to use the vessels from the Temple as party cups for his feast.

Choices have consequences; prideful boasting leads to forced humility. A story that comes to mind in this regard is the 2011 NBA Finals between the Dallas Mavericks and Miami Heat. Before the season began, the best player in the NBA joined Miami, and the team essentially had a pre-season celebration exclaiming the team would win multiple NBA championships. When they made the NBA Finals in 2011, the Miami Heat easily won game 1 and were ahead in game 2 when I saw boasting get the better of them. The Mavericks came back and won game 2. After game 4, the two leaders of the Miami Heat made fun of Dirk Nowitzki for being sick. The Heat seemed to not think that the Mavs were their equal. Dallas went on to win game 5 and 6 and win the NBA championship. I think the boasting and belittling of the opponent led to their downfall that year.

The better team who worked harder definitely won in 2011. The Heat were arrogant and their choices to not take the Mavericks seriously led to them losing.

Instead of being forced to be humble, make the choice to be humble instead. Respect other people. Belshazzar didn't respect the Lord and used the Lord's vessels as party cups. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; Proverbs 3:34).

Friday, November 6 - Daniel 5:10-16

Who is the Queen? We already know that Belshazzar's wives and concubines were at the party. Who is this queen who enters the scene? What we know about this time period in Babylon is that Belshazzar became the *de facto* king when his father King Nabonidus went on a journey. The Queen is likely King Nabonidus's wife and Belshazzar's mother.

What isn't made apparent when moving from Dan. 4 to Dan. 5 is many years have passed in Babylon. This feast is in the last days of the Babylonian Empire before Persia overruns the kingdom. Daniel has become elderly. This leads to Belshazzar not knowing him, nor probably having any desire to have him as an advisor. However, the Queen knows about Daniel and what he did for Nebuchadnezzar (when it says your father in verse 11 it just means one of the former kings).

It is from the Queen's advice that Daniel is called into the King's Chambers to explain the writing on the wall. It is important to have people in your life who can give you advice when you do not know what to do. Who is that person for you? Say a special prayer for thanksgiving today for that person. Maybe write a note of thanks to that person for the special relationship you have with them. Let that person know how much they mean to you.

Saturday, November 7 - Daniel 5:17-31

Daniel's interpretation of the writing on the wall does not mince words. Daniel has no desire to gain favor with the king, but to only use his gifts of interpretation for God's glory. He is rewarded for that honesty even as the king suffers the fate Daniel predicts. The Aramaic words in verse 25, *mene, mene, tekel, and parsin*, are weights used to measure on a scale. Essentially, God has evaluated Belshazzar and determined his fate.

The two main characters of this story are examples of two contrary ways of life. Belshazzar is a young man who seems to have no respect for what God has done in the past nor has interest in advice until he is spooked by the writing on the wall. Daniel, on the other hand, is an older man who knows the power of God and seeks to honor him always. How will you live your life? Will you honor God with all of our actions? Or will you disrespect God by using his resources for your pleasure?

Sunday, November 8 - Psalm 71:1-3

When you read further in Psalm 71, you learn that this prayer for protection is because the writer of the Psalm has become elderly (Ps. 71:9). No matter your age, let God be your rock and fortress and deliver you from evil.

WEEK 4: DANIEL 2 & 7

Monday, November 9 - Daniel 2:1-23

Daniel 2 and 7 will be our focuses this week. The connection between the two chapters will become clearer later in the week and in the sermon on Sunday. Today, I want you to look at verses 17-18. We see the importance of praying for each other in times of difficulty. Daniel asks his friends to ask for mercy from God, so that the mystery will be revealed to him.

Daniel's response to the king is much different than the Chaldeans. Nebuchadnezzar wants the court interpreters to tell him his dream and its interpretation, probably because he forgot the dream and was more discomforted by this fact. The Chaldeans immediately said "we can't do that!" Daniel, however, requests extra time to hear from God about what the dream and interpretation were.

This is the importance of listening to God in our prayer lives and incorporating others in our prayer lives. Daniel had his companions (named with their Hebrew names here) praying for him as he prayed for discernment as well. Do not lean on your own understanding, but lean on the understanding given to you by God. Who have you asked prayer from? Do not be embarrassed; do not see being put on a prayer list as a sign of weakness. See it as asking the people of God to pray to God for you. Have you asked another person to give you time to pray about a decision? Now, please don't give the standard church answer "I'll pray about it" when you really mean "No, I will not volunteer for that." What I mean is don't rush into a decision; don't move until God tells you to move. Spend time in prayer for yourself and others, and God will see us through.

Tuesday, November 10 - Daniel 2:24-49

Much like yesterday's devotion, we will save the discussion of Four Kingdoms and the interpretation of the dream for later in the week and especially on Sunday. Today, I want you to notice the phrase "God of heaven." This is the term Daniel uses for God as he discusses the dream with Nebuchadnezzar. This term for God was not much used before the exile but starts to show up in the books of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. The reason for this new description of God is Israelites describing God in a way people in Babylon or Persia would understand. The Babylonians and Persians looked to the stars to divine the will

of higher beings in their religions. Daniel and others, like Ezra and Nehemiah, use the term “God of heaven” to explain to the people the importance of Yahweh.

When we tell others about God, we need to be able to teach them about God in their own language. This goes beyond world languages like Spanish, French, German, etc. This means we find terms to describe God so that the average person can understand who he is. For example, the term “lord” is not common in every-day language. A person who has not grown up in church will not grasp what it means to have a lord. When telling others about Jesus as Lord, we can, instead, describe Jesus as Master or Boss. People understand those terms.

We can tell others the most biblically sound message about God, but if the person doesn't understand it, it is useless. Don't believe me? οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ' ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον. I just shared with you John 3:16, but if you can't read Greek, then the message is lost. When we share the message of Jesus, let us look for ways to explain it, so that the people can comprehend.

Wednesday, November 11 - 1 Peter 1:3-12

This year has been anything but easy, yet we still can be thankful. We serve a wonderful God who by mercy has given us hope through the resurrection of his son Jesus, the Messiah. There have been trials; there have been struggles, but God is still God. Let us look at this passage in 1 Peter tonight and discuss all the reasons to be thankful for God: his mercy, his inheritance, and his protection.

Thursday, November 12 - Daniel 7:1-14

What does Daniel 7 have to do with Daniel 2? Most divisions of the book of Daniel divide it into Court Stories (Dan. 1-6) and Visions (Dan. 7-12). However, I think this division is too simplistic. I believe that the entire book of Daniel should be read in the Apocalypse genre much like we read the entire book of Revelation. More than that, Daniel is peculiar because it is written in two languages. Daniel 1, 8-12 is written in Hebrew, while Daniel 2-7 is written in Aramaic. This is significant because Hebrew is the religious language of the time period while Aramaic is the common language. It is as if the Hebrew sections of Daniel have only the Jews in mind while the Aramaic sections have everybody as an audience. The language connects Daniel 7 with Daniel 2-6.

The vision of the four beasts here is very similar to the four kingdoms in Daniel 2. It is a vision that ends with one “like a son of man” coming and being given dominion over all the earth forever. It is from this passage that Jesus takes the term Son of Man for himself. You can see Mark 14:62 as an example of Jesus using this phrase to describe himself. Let these verses serve as a reminder of what will happen in the End of Days. In the transition to the new heaven and earth, Jesus will return. That is the message of Christian Apocalyptic Literature like Daniel and Revelation: Jesus is returning and when he does, the beasts of the earth will be defeated, and his kingdom will reign forever.

Friday, November 13 - Daniel 7:15-28

This is a hard passage to understand. We will do our best to interpret what it can tell us about life this Sunday morning and Sunday evening. This passage discusses the difficulty that followers of God will face because of an adversarial government: the fourth beast or fourth kingdom. Many believe that this prophecy already came to fruition during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the years

175-165 BC. He was a brutal dictator of the Greek Empire, including Israel at this time. It was what led to the Maccabean Revolt in Jerusalem during that time period; the festival of Hanukkah derives from the Maccabean victory of purifying the Temple in 164 BC. The Greek empire was the fourth beast/kingdom while the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Empires were the first three.

While the Jewish people were facing brutal persecutions, verses like Dan. 7:25 would give hope. At the end of the verse it says “they shall be given into his power for a time, two times, and half a time.” This would have the meaning of 3 ½ years. This is half of seven, the number of perfection, the number of eternity. The times of tribulation and difficulty in our lives will not be forever. The days of frustration will have an end. They only last a time, two times, and half a time. Take time today to pray as you move through difficult days. Pray for others who are having struggles. Pray with the hope and confidence that days of struggle are only for a season and eternity with the Father is on the horizon.

Saturday, November 14 - Daniel 11:40-12:13

If you read Daniel from a Christian perspective (which we should do by the way since we are Christians), you can see Jesus in this last vision of Daniel. While discussing Daniel 7 the past few days, I said the prophecy of Dan. 7 was fulfilled when Antiochus IV Epiphanes was defeated by the Maccabeans. I see this prophecy being fulfilled by Jesus. I won't try to make the numbers of days work because a literal number of days, weeks, and years was not a point of emphasis in Apocalyptic Literature.

When you look specifically at Daniel 12:13, the book closes with the phrase the “end of the days.” This does not necessarily mean the end of the world, like we sometimes think about it. Instead, it could mean a transition to a different era of the world. The essence of the vision is that “the end of the days” will come

soon. When Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the fourth beast/kingdom, is defeated, the Jewish people and the world are now waiting for the one to come who will establish a kingdom forever. Looking at Dan. 12:7, the man in that verse is described in a way that combines a priest, an interpreter for angels, and a warrior angel. There is a person who is born about 160 years after Antiochus IV is defeated. In his life, he is seen as a priest, a prophet (interpreter of angels), and messiah (warrior angel). Jesus is this one this passage speaks about. It is Jesus who is coming to establish his forever kingdom when he is born in a stable. Jesus is the one people are waiting for. Jesus is the priest, prophet, and messiah we need to put our trust in.

Sunday, November 15 - Psalm 72

We read this a few months ago as we went through Psalms on Wednesday nights. It was a prayer for the king as he was crowned. Read these words and see what brings success and what precipitates failure. May we pray for leaders today who live as Psalm 72 says.

WEEK 5: DANIEL 8-11

Monday, November 16 - Daniel 8

Last week, I told you that Daniel 2-7 was written in Aramaic, the common language of the time, while Daniel 1, 8-12 was written in Hebrew, the religious language of the Jews. This will be significant this week as we study the visions from Daniel 8-11. These are visions originally written for a religious audience to understand.

The vision of Daniel 8 is a vision of the Greek Empire overtaking the Persian and Median Empire. The vision fits perfectly with the history of this event as we know it from outside of the Bible. We will speak more about this fact come Sunday.

Notice Daniel 8:10: it reads of one of the horns of the ram growing large. This is likely a reference to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the same ruthless leader as seen in Daniel 7 and 12. Verse 10 indicates that it grew as high as the host of heaven and it even threw down some of the host and stars, meaning that the power of the earthly leader convinced some angels of heaven that he was more powerful than God.

Many times it can look as if human leaders have become more powerful than God. It seems that they can do anything they want without punishment from the Almighty. For the people of God, let us remember this important fact: God is above all. Even if it seems as if evil is running free today, there is a tomorrow when it is defeated. There will be a day when “he shall be broken, and not by human hands.” Let us continue to trust in God even when it seems evil is winning.

Tuesday, November 17 - Titus 2:1-8

Tonight at 6 pm, we will gather in the sanctuary to worship with other Texas Baptists across the state at the conclusion of the BGCT Annual Meeting. The theme of this year’s meeting is Compelled. Let us be compelled to serve and compelled to worship God. Are you compelled? Titus 2:1-8 teaches older and younger men and women how to live in community with each other. It compels each of us as individuals to treat one another with respect and dignity. This passage urges us to be self-controlled and firm in our faith. All of this, Paul explains to his “child in the faith” (Titus 1:4), is consistent with sound doctrine.

I pray that you live out your faith in community with others. Please worship with us tonight from 6-8 pm.

Wednesday, November 18 - Daniel 11:2-19

How does it make you feel to know that God is in charge even when there seems to be chaos and disorder in the world? Today and tomorrow’s readings of Daniel 11 is

a retelling of the history of the Seleucid Empire. This chapter is an account of what was happening on earth during this time period from the perspective of heaven. In essence, that is what Apocalyptic Literature is. It is more than telling the future; it is telling history from the perspective of God.

It is reassuring to the people of God to know that the events of the earth are seen by God. It is comforting to know that God is in control and that the grand events of the world are written in “the book of truth” (see Dan. 10:21). I believe this promise is for us today just as it was for the Jewish people of the Old Testament. The day you are reading this is 8 weeks later than when I wrote it. My guess is that as you read this, the election results are being fought (this may be completely wrong, but on September 22, this is what I think will be happening). Take comfort in knowing that whatever is happening today, God knew about it beforehand and God’s will will ultimately prevail. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, maybe not in the next four years, but the visions of God prevailing will become reality even if it is “many days from now” (Dan. 8:27). This is not just a statement about American politics; this is a statement of every world event. God will prevail. This will not fully take place until Jesus returns, but trust in God’s wisdom and God wins in the end.

Thursday, November 19 - Daniel 11:20-39

The ways of world power are seen at the end of this passage. Support means reward and contradiction means persecution. The land is given for a price (Dan. 11:39). Once again, we see that God leads differently. Jeremiah 15:13 mentions that God gives without price. Jesus says in Matthew 5:45 that the rain falls on the just and the unjust equally.

God is a giver of grace to anyone, even the undeserving, while human leaders give only to those who do their bidding and even then, the gifts come with a price. Who will you serve this day? A human leader who will use you while you are useful, then

move on when you are not, or a God who loves you unconditionally? The choice seems pretty clear to me: stop being used and devote yourself to God today.

Friday, November 20 - Daniel 9

This is a confusing passage to read. The reason for Daniel's prayer and the math involved is something we can discuss on Sunday evening. In short, the 70 weeks of years equaling 490 years should not be pressed to be an exact figure. It is representative of 70 years which represents a lifetime and 7 years which represents sevenfold vengeance.

Daniel 9:1-19 is an example of prayer in a difficult time. This is likely not an everyday prayer for Daniel; this is a prayer of distress about the situation the Jews are facing in exile. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to pray without ceasing; however, there are times when specific prayers need to be told. There are times to go to our prayer closet or private prayer place and spend time alone with God. There are difficult moments in life where times of intercession and petition before God are necessary. That is what Daniel is doing in chapter 9.

Spend time in prayer for the people of God today. Pray for Christians in our community and around the world. Pray that we may have boldness in the face of persecution; pray that those living a Christian life are protected by God today. Let us live as the people of God today no matter what the Evil One does against us.

Saturday, November 21 - Daniel 10:1-11:1

Micah has a morning meeting in Kindergarten every day on Zoom. In order to learn pronunciation of words, the class repeats what the teacher says. They repeat rhyming words, sight words, compound words, etc. When you repeat the words of the teacher, you will say exactly what he/she wants.

Daniel 10:16 has the spiritual, human-like being touch the lips of Daniel. It is reminiscent of other prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel who were touched on the lips or consumed the scroll so that they could speak the words of God. In addition, when Daniel says he is too weak to speak, the being tells him to be strong and courageous, as Joshua told the Israelites hundreds of years earlier, and Daniel is strengthened to do the will of God.

Let us do as Daniel did and let us do as Micah (my son, not the prophet) does with his teacher. Let us listen to the words of our Teacher, let us be emboldened by God's strength, and let us tell others about the glory of God. Tomorrow is Sunday. Who is God telling you to tell about him? Is God leading you to ask someone to come to church with you? Don't delay in doing the will of the Teacher. He is giving you the words to say: say them!

Sunday, November 22 - Psalm 73:22-28

We serve a God who deserves worship. God is one who is always with us no matter what. As we begin this week of Thanksgiving, this is certainly something to be thankful for. Come and give thanks to God in worship today!