

Nine Marks of Eschatological Discipleship

Daniel 12:1-13

Introduction: 1) In 1 John 3:2 the apostle makes a wonderful declaration concerning our future, “Dear friends, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is.” John then follows up in verse 3 with a very clear application, “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure.” John’s point is clear: Future destiny impacts present discipleship. What I will be someday will mold and shape how I live today.

2) The prophet Daniel conveyed that same message in the final chapter of his prophetic masterpiece. The hope of my future resurrected body (v.2) provides motivation for discipleship-making (v.3) and personal holiness (v.10). In fact it seems to me we can identify no less than 9 marks of what I am calling, “eschatological discipleship” in Daniel 12. More specifically, Daniel 12 teaches us how to live as faithful exiles in a world, a context, that is not our home. It helps us answer the question, how can we live as kingdom citizens, dedicated disciples, in a land that is strange and even hostile towards us?

3) The vision that began in 11:2 actually continues through 12:4. Verses 5-13 serve as the epilogue or conclusion. Still, there is clear continuity that links 12:1-4

with 12: 5-13. I recently read that, “The Old Testament book in which the exiled Daniel refuses to obey orders to worship the king rather than his own god (sic) is seen as “very dangerous” by the Chinese government in light of the explosion of Christianity in China” (“China on course to become world’s most Christian nation within 15 years,” Tom Phillips, Liushi, Zhejiang Province, 4-19-14, *Telegraph Media Group Limited 2016*). I can understand that, and chapter 12 is a fitting finale to this guide for exile living as it provides what Sinclair Ferguson calls, “the eschatological ethic that characterizes all Scripture” (*Daniel*, 223). So, what are the 9 Marks of eschatological discipleship the last chapter of Daniel provides?

I. Be comforted by God’s protection 12:1

- “At that time” links 12:1 with 11:36-45 and the reign and end of Antichrist. When that eschatological day arrives, God will raise up the angel Michael (cf. 10:13, 21) who is identified as “the great prince who stands watch over your people.” Michael is called the archangel in Jude 9. He leads a victorious war against Satan and his angels (demons) in Revelation 12:7-12. Michael, as are all angels, is a ministering spirit sent out to serve those who are going to inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14). He, no doubt, is ministering to God’s people today, but at “the time of trouble” (v. 1), “the time of the end” (v. 4, 6, 7, 9, 13) he will intensify his involvement on behalf of the people of God. Historically I believe this refers to the righteous remnant of Israel, “the

holy people” (v. 7). This side of Pentecost and with the insights of Romans 11 and Ephesians 3, we know it points to the church, the eschatological community of the redeemed of all ages. God takes a particular interest in His holy people purchased by the blood of His Son.

- Dale Davis puts it well, “from Daniel 10 we understand Michael to be the warrior-advocate of Israel who takes up the cudgels on their behalf. There are unseen legions (cf. Matt. 26:53; Heb. 1:14) standing behind the wobbly people of God in their darkest trouble” (*Daniel*, BST, 162). So be comforted by God’s protection as you live for Jesus. His angels are on your side and they are busy at work on your behalf.

II. Be ready for trouble and intense persecution 12:1, 7

- Second Timothy 3:12 reminds us that, “all those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” This basic theological axiom runs true throughout redemptive history in both testaments. But as history, as we know it, draws to a close, opposition, persecution and suffering will escalate so that, “there will be a time of distress such as never has occurred since nations came into being until that time.” Verse 7 adds that this will be, “when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes.” And, this is when “an end of all these things would be finished.”

- This time of distress or trouble echoes Jeremiah 30:7 and the time of Jacob’s trouble. It also is found on the lips of the Lord Jesus in Mark 13:19 (cf. Matt. 24:21-22). Trouble is on the way. It comes now, of course, in the regular ebb and flow of normal life in a broken and fallen world. Such troubles, however, are only an inkling, a foretaste, of what will come at the time of the end. Since we have no idea when that day will be, we must prepare ourselves now in the present. Living as a holy people, even if we are shattered, broken in pieces, must be a vital part of our discipleship living. Purifying ourselves, cleansing ourselves, being refined by the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit, will not be an optional consideration. It will be essential warfare equipment for the battles we engage. It will not be a small skirmish. It will be a total war with no prisoners taken. The brilliant philosopher of science and mathematics John Lennox simply notes, “It is hard to get one’s mind around this grim statement. The time of Antiochus was horrendous, as was the period around the later fall of Jerusalem. The Holocaust beggars description. But Daniel indicates that there is even worse to come at the time of the end.” (John Lennox, *Against the Flow: The Inspiration of Daniel in an Age of Relativism*, 341). Be prepared. Be ready. Don’t get caught by surprise unprepared.

III. Count on God to rescue His people 12:1

A time of unprecedented trouble is coming for God's people. However, don't be alarmed. Gabriel promises Daniel, "at that time your people shall be delivered." And, who are Daniel's people? "Everyone whose name shall be written in the book." This is a reference to the book of life (Rev. 20:12, 15), the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 12:8; 21:6-7). It also is an echo of Psalm 69:28 and a precious promise for the people of God. Antichrist may rage against "the holy" people of God. It may seem, for a while, he will win and be victorious. Saints will suffer and saints will die (as they are all around the world today.) Don't panic. Don't be afraid. Deliverance is on the way as Daniel 7 promised with the glorious coming of the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Further, be comforted. Your deliverance is assured because your name is written in the book! Your eternal destiny is secure. Your heavenly citizen-ship cannot be revoked. The book of life contains your name and is a guarantee of final and certain salvation. H. C. Leupold puts it beautifully, "That a record of heaven with reference to those who are to inherit eternal life should be available is equivalent to saying that God's thoughts for the salvation for His children runs back into eternity, and that He loves to busy Himself with their eternal welfare" (*Exposition of Daniel*, 528-29). I absolutely love that! You can count on God to rescue his people.

IV. Hope in the resurrection 12:2

- One component of God’s deliverance is our future bodily resurrection. The empty tomb of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem is our guarantee. Verse two discusses this future hope in terms of a general resurrection drawing a contrast between the righteous (v. 3) and the unrighteous. Resurrection day will also be separation day.
- Drawing from the language of Genesis 3:19 and the curse of sin warranting our death both physically and spiritually, God’s Word promises those whose body lies in the grave will be reanimated by the power of God with no exceptions. All will be bodily raised. However, at that point the similarities end. Some shall awake to everlasting life because their name is “found written in the book.” Others, tragically, will awake and rise “to shame and everlasting contempt” only to be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15) where, as Revelation 14:11 says, “the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night.”
- C. S. Lewis, in very sobering terms, helps us understand what is at stake according to this verse, as well as our proper response. “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all,

only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations....There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal....it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours” (*The Weight of Glory*). God’s people have hope in their future bodily resurrection.

V. Live wisely and point others to Jesus 12:3

Verse 3 could be called “a soul-winner’s promise” (cf. Ps. 125:5-6). It is an appropriate companion to the wonderful promise and striking truth of verse 2. The wise (cf. 11:33) are busy about the business of disciple making to use the language of the New Testament. They encourage others to turn to God. Those who “influence others to go on walking in righteousness and assist them in remaining faithful in the pressure of the times will “shine like the brightness of the sky above...like the stars forever and ever.”” (Dale Davis, 162). Bob Fyall says this verse, “is a powerful motive for evangelism” (*Daniel*, 188). Calvin adds, “No one of God’s children ought to confine their attention privately to themselves, but as far as possible, everyone ought to interest himself in the welfare of his brethren. God has deposited the teaching of his salvation with us, not for the purpose of our privately keeping it to ourselves, but of our pointing out the way of salvation to all

mankind” (Calvin, *Daniel*). I love the simple paraphrase of Eugene Peterson in *The Message*, “those who put others on the right path to life will glow like stars forever.” Want to be an all-star for King Jesus? Then do the work of a soul-winner following in the footsteps of the Savior (Luke 19:10).

VI. Treasure God’s Word and grow in your understanding of it 12:4

Verse 4 is a bit tricky and susceptible to misunderstanding. Daniel, interestingly and surprisingly, is told to “shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end.” The idea is not to hide the words but to protect them keeping them safe. Joyce Baldwin notes that, “Seal the book has the double sense of authenticating and of preserving intact (cf. Is. 8:16; Je. 32:11, 14) (*Daniel*, TOTC, 206). God’s people need this word from God, especially as we move toward the end of the age. They need to be ready and not taken by surprise. The closer we get to the end, the more important God’s word and the understanding of it will be.

The last phrase of verse 4 is enigmatic and problematic. Some read it negatively of unbelievers drawing a parallel to Amos 8:12 (Ferguson, 227). Others read it in a positive vein (Davis, 164). Because of the near context of verse 3, I cautiously take it in a positive sense. “As the Lord’s people give diligent attention to this piece of Scripture, they will, especially nearer the

end, have a clearer grasp of its meaning...It is immersion that brings insight” (Davis, 164). Stephen Miller puts it clear and simple, “As the time of fulfillment draws nearer, the “wise” will seek to comprehend these prophecies more precisely, and God will grant understanding (“knowledge”) to them (*Daniel*, NAC, 321).

VII. Patiently trust that God will end things at the right time 12:5-9

In verses 5-9 the vision shifts as two other angels join Gabriel who has been talking to Daniel. They stood opposite each other on the banks of the Tigris River (cf. 10:4). Neither says a word (v. 5). But then, “the man clothed in linen” (cf. 10:5-6) appears again “above the waters of the stream” (v.6). This is the glorified Son of God robed in His priestly purity. One of the angels asked Him, “How long until the end of these extraordinary things” (*ESV*, “wonders”; *NIV*, “astonishing things”)? How long will these extraordinary things go once they start? When will they stop? There is an urgency to the request. Further, this is a question even the angels do not know the answer. Jesus reaffirms this in Mark 13:22.

In a display of amazing solemnity and seriousness the Son of God raises both hands to heaven (cf. Gen. 14:22; Deut. 32:40), an unusual act, and he invokes an oath “toward heaven and swore by Him who lives eternally” (v. 7). The

answer to the angels question is two-fold: 1) “it will be for a time, times, and half a time” or 3½ years. 2) This terrible and intense time of “distress” (v. 1) will end right on time, according to God’s timetable, “when the power of the holy people is shattered.” It is then an only then that “all these things will be completed.” Ligon Duncan puts it well, “When evil has done its worst, we are told, as soon as [it finishes] shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be complete. When evil has done its worst and the hopes of the people of God seem shattered, then God will act. The grim work of the oppressors will roll on and on and on. But at the appropriate moment God will intervene” (“Blessed is the One Who Waits”, 3-29-98).

Daniel’s response in verse 8 so encourages me! “I heard but did not understand.” I can certainly identify with that. So he follows up with a question of his own, “My lord, what will be the outcome of these things?”

Verse 9 gives him his answer, but probably not the one he wanted.

Respectfully Daniel is told, “Go on your way, Daniel, for the words are secret and sealed until the time of the end.” Go on about your life and business

Daniel. You have received all you are going to get, and it is enough. This prophecy and its understanding will come more clear only, “as God unravels history in the unseen future” (Ferguson, *Daniel*, 229). The word is protected and it will be preserved. Everything will happen as God intends at the right

time. Be faithful. Trust Him. Be patient. As Adrian Rogers so often said, “God is never late and He is never early. He is always right on time!”

VIII. Pursue holiness and rejoice in its fruits

12:10

When it comes to eschatology there are things we know and things we don’t know and can’t know because God has chosen not to reveal them to us.

However, one thing we can know with a certainty is how we are to live in light of the Son of Man’s coming and the time of the end. And, there is good news. God will see that these things, related to our redemption, come to pass. In those days of great distress and trouble God will see to it that His “holy people” (v. 7), his bright and shining ones (v. 3), those whom He will raise to “everlasting life” (*ESV*, v. 2) “will be purified, cleansed, and refined.” In contrast God’s enemies will only be hardened in their sin and rebellion against His sovereign authority. Dale Davis says it well, “The wicked will act wickedly; none of the wicked will understand” (cf. Rom. 1:22). No, only “the wise (11:33; 12:20) will understand.” “The wicked remain in their accustomed darkness, but the Lord’s wise ones will discern the issues of the time, what they are called to do and what it will cost them. Their ‘understanding’ may also include having more exact clarity about the meaning of the revelation given via Daniel’s ‘book’” (Davis, *BST*, 166).

IX. Endure to the end knowing it is worth it

12:11-13

I love the honesty and humility of James Boice when it comes to these verses. Concerning them he simply says that there are things here “which we cannot yet explain” (Daniel, 122). Acknowledging that exact sentiment, I will give it my very best knowing caution is the wisest course to take.

Once again we have a reference to “the abomination of desolation” (v.11; cf 9:27; 11:31; Matt 24:15; also 2 Thess. 2:3-4). Dale Davis again is helpful when he says, “Verse 11 is speaking of the repression of true worship (*the regular offering ...taken away*) and the imposition of false worship (*an appalling abomination* [NJPS] put in place). We have already noted that Antiochus Epiphanes would do this sort of thing (8:11-13 and 11:31), yet there will be another near the end who will out-Antiochus Antiochus, one who will not only put a stop to legitimate worship (9:27b) but along with ‘abominations’ is himself one ‘who makes desolate’ or ‘is causing horror’ (9:27c); now in 12:11, under the aegis of this ‘final scourge’ of history, the *abomination making desolate* appears again. I think Jesus has 9:27 and 12:11 in view when he refers to the ‘abomination of desolation’ in Mark 13:14. Even though ‘abomination’ in that text is a neuter noun, the following participle is masculine – ‘standing where *he* ought not’ (emphasis mine). Jesus agrees with Daniel 9:27 that the ‘abomination’ is supremely a person

and assumes that his appearance is future to Jesus' own earthly ministry.”

(Daniel, 166-167).

This seems to me to be a very reasonable and persuasive interpretation. But, what of the 1,290 days of verse 12, and the beatitude of verse 13, “the one who waits for and reaches, 1,335 days is blessed?” With Boice I must confess my lack of understanding even after reading more than a dozen commentaries and listening to several fine expositors. This much, I believe, we can say. Our Lord promises to bless those who endure and persevere through these difficult and troubling times of opposition and persecution. These specific numbers affirm God's sovereign control over the details of history. Things will move ahead as He has decreed and things will also end as He has decreed. There is wonderful hope and assurance even if there remains mystery concerning the particularities.

The book concludes with a personal word for Daniel we all can benefit from. “Go your way til the end.” You are in your last years but I still have work for you to do. When it is time to retire from My work then I will bring you home. Then “you will rest” because you will be with Me. Then, as I have promised in verse 2, “you will rise to your destiny” (*ESV*, “allotted place”), your reward, your inheritance. And by now I think you understand at least this much my servant Daniel, this will happen at “the end of the days.” So, do

your duty, make disciples, proclaim my Word and endure. Something wonderful is on the horizon at the end.

Conclusion: How does this text point to Christ?

Just as we see in Daniel 10:5-6, again we see the majestic man “dressed in linen” sovereignly standing above the earth declaring His absolute authority over all things (12:7). This is a Christophany, a preincarnate appearance of the second person of the Triune God. Both in appearance and action He conveys God’s glory and greatness. He is Lord of history not these petty tyrants, including Antichrist, who come and go. After all, never, ever forget and “know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men” (4:17). Exalt the arrogance and prideful Antichrist? No way! Exalt the humble Galilean from Nazareth? Absolutely!