

GOING WITH GOD

Sermon Eight

SEEING GOD'S HAND IN THE END TIMES

Daniel 8

One of the blessings of the book of Daniel is that it demonstrates so well the fact that God is the author of human history and as he wrote with his finger on the banquet wall of Belshazzar's banquet hall predicting the future, so he has written over the lives of rulers, nations and very ordinary people down through the years. At times of seeming chaos like, the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, the exile of God's people from Judah to Babylon, the lions den and the fiery furnace, we have seen the hand of God at work in the midst of these crises achieving his plans and purposes for mankind. As God begins to reveal to Daniel the events that will take place at the end of the age, events that for many are horrific and frightening, we can well fall into the trap of being overwhelmed

and even fearful of the difficult times which lie ahead. For many the ends times described in Scripture appear to be so horrific that they are rather to be avoided than discussed and considered. The choice we however have to make is to focus on, and see the hand of God at work in the events of the last days because the last days is all about God being at work bringing his plans and purposes for mankind to completion.

Daniel eight describes some of what will take place. As we consider it we will again see the hand of God at work and can be encouraged by this rather than being overcome by fear.

There are three things that characterise the end times that I want to consider this morning namely God's preparation, Satan's persecution and finally God's prophetic promise.

1. GOD'S HAND OF PREPARATION

As all of creation begins to move toward the last days and the end of the age, it is amazing how God uses pagan rulers and

nations for his purposes in working out His plans for mankind. We are given two pictures that demonstrate this.

1.1 The ram 8:3-4, 20

The first picture we are given in this new vision is the picture of a ram in verse 3 with two horns one which was longer than the other. The ram with the two horns represents the Medes and the Persians with Persia under King Cyrus being the stronger and longer horn. You will recall that it was King Cyrus who conquered the Babylonians and took over control of the nation of Judah. Cyrus was a pagan king who did not recognise God but was used by God for his purposes. Centuries before Cyrus appeared the prophet Isaiah called him by name and even called him “God’s shepherd”.

In Isa 44:28, “I am the Lord who says of Cyrus, He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, Let it be rebuilt and of the temple, let its foundations

be laid”. Many centuries later Cyrus would conquer Babylon, take Judah captive but ultimately allow them to return to the Promised Land and rebuild their temple. The prophet Ezra records this in Ezra 1:1, “In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfil the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia.....” . In Isa 45:1 God calls Cyrus his anointed one, anointed to do God’s purposes. It is amazing that God is able to move the heart of a pagan king to achieve His purposes! How much more can God even today use people who do not recognise Him to achieve his purposes. We don’t need a Christian government for God is able to use any government for His purposes.

1.2 The goat 8:5-8, 21-22

The second picture we are given in this vision is of the angry goat in verse 5 who runs so swiftly that his feet don’t touch the

ground. The goat is a symbol of Greece and the large protruding horn is a picture of Alexander the great who led the armies of Greece to victory and extended his empire to greater than that of Cyrus. The breaking of the horn relates to Alexander's death in June 323 at the age of thirty three but not before he was able to achieve much for the spreading of the gospel. By extending Greek culture and language he helped bring peoples together and eventually the common Greek Koine language became the language of the New Testament. What the Greeks began the Romans as the legs of iron in Nebuchadnezzar's statue, the Romans continued. The Romans were master bridge and road builders which enabled the rapid spread of the Gospel across the whole region. Roman rule and power also brought much stability and security to the area which also aided the spread of the Gospel. It is in the context that Jesus is born in Bethlehem, lives for 33 years ministering for three before dying on the cross. It is this context that the New Testament church is born and

Paul and Peter undertake their missionary journeys rapidly spreading the good news of the Gospel. God's hand of preparation was clearly at work.

2. SATAN'S HAND OF PERSECUTION

As God prepares for the final victory at the end of the age, in the heavenlies the spiritual battle between the forces of good and evil is intensified. Satan opposes the preparations that God is making for the end and he uses two men as instruments of destruction against the Kingdom of God and His people.

2.1 Antiochus Epiphanes 8:9-14

Antiochus is the small horn in verse 9 that grew so great that it touched the heavens. As the ruler of Syria he was known as one of the cruellest tyrants of the time. He claimed to be God. He attacked Jerusalem, plundered the temple and declared that there would be only one religion effectively banning the Jewish

religion. He prohibited them from honouring the Sabbath, practicing circumcision and observing the dietary laws. He stopped the offering of sacrifices on the temple altar. He replaced the altar with an altar of Zeus and sacrificed a pig on it! Can you see how the evil one was trying to turn the order God brought on its head? Antiochus was a forerunner to the man of evil known as the antichrist who would follow him. Antiochus was ultimately killed by Judas Maccabeus who led a band of Jewish fighters against Antiochus and his plans came to nought. Let's now take a look at the antichrist.

2.2 The Antichrist 8:23-27

The angel awakens Daniel from his deep sleep to reveal to him what would happen during the “time of wrath” vs 19 and “the time of the end” vs 17 which will be the time of tribulation. The stern-faced king refers to the antichrist who will come in the

last days and oppose God and his people. There are many parallels between the antichrist and Anthiochus.

1. Both begin modestly but increase in power and influence.
2. Both blaspheme God.
3. Both persecute the Jewish people.
4. Both claim to be Gods and put images in the temple.
5. Both are opposed by a small believing remnant of believers that know God.
6. Both are energized by the devil and are great deceivers.
7. Both appear to succeed marvellously and seem to be invincible.

And so as the end of the age draws near we need to be aware that we will be subjected to persecution from the hand of Satan. We need to be aware of the person of the antichrist and know how to respond to him and not be deceived. Thankfully in this difficult time we can hold onto God's prophetic promise in verse 25.

3. GOD'S PROPHETIC PROMISE vs 25

Following God's preparation for the ends times through Cyrus, Alexander the great and the Roman Empire, and after the evil reigns of Antiochus and the antichrist, God's prophetic promise will be fulfilled. We read in verse 25 speaking of the antichrist, "He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes (Jesus). Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power". In the revelation God gives to John in Rev 20:1-3 this destruction is graphically described.

"And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the keys to the abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from

deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be set free for a short time".

CONCLUSION

The end of the age therefore is about God's preparation through the history of mankind, it is about the persecution at the hand of the evil one, but ultimately it is about the destruction of the evil one and the ultimate victory that Jesus secured for us over sin and death on the cross of Calvary. We can choose to be overwhelmed by fear of the persecution or we can see God's hand of preparation in these events and hold onto the prophetic promise of victory that is our in Jesus Christ.