

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Unshaken_ Daniel Chapter 8

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I'm honored to be sharing with you all this weekend; it's good to have this opportunity. Hey, a couple of things that I wanted to just elevate for you this weekend. Number one is a Baltimore update. We have every intention to launch or plant a gathering of Jesus followers in Baltimore. This is the second phase of what we have endeavored to do. And so this weekend, I want to both announce the name and I also want to invite you to consider being part of our launch team. Our official name will be Hope City Baltimore; we will brand it Hope Baltimore. And there's a little link at the bottom NCC.re/HopeBaltimore. You can give us your email address; we will give you information on what it means to be a part of this launch team. And in October, we will actually begin to gather virtually as a launch team. I'm super excited about that. So I hope you would consider joining us.

The second thing that I want to elevate for us this weekend is one related to history. I believe that remembering and recognizing history is hugely important, especially given the current context that we're in right now. The month of August is a significant month in history for, in this country, for women and for people of color, particularly African Americans. It was 1920 - 100 years ago that the 19th amendment was passed to give women the right to vote. I should also note that that was a 50 year struggle. So the suffrage movement was 50 years in the making before women could vote. Also in August of 1965, the Voting Rights Act was passed giving black people the right to vote. I should note that that was a 95 year struggle. The 15th amendment had given blacks the right to vote, but it took 95 years for them to actually see that happen. I wanted to highlight that this weekend in light of our present struggle, in light of what we're seeing all around us, in light of what's upcoming for us as we prepare to go to the polls this fall.

I know that many are tired of some of the civil unrest and the things that we're seeing and the stories and we're ready to just move on. But I have a little bit of news for you. This is not a new struggle. This is an ongoing struggle, and many have died in this struggle just to have their humanity recognize. So I believe that we must resist the narrowing of our perspective as we evaluate the struggle that we're in. And interestingly enough, I think as we continue our series in Daniel, this weekend, this series we've titled Unshaken, I think this is relevant to us this weekend.

I think Daniel helps us with this idea of perspective and struggle, particularly as we zoom in on Daniel chapter eight. And I think how we perceive struggle is also related to how we think about triumph. Now I was thinking about this, personally as it relates to what I have personally experienced. And I went back to a time when I first started playing football; some of you know that I went on to play in the NFL. But when I first started playing, I was in the first grade and I live down the street or about a block and a half from Richmond Park where I grew up in Miami, Florida, and I could hear the sounds of the park and I

could see the lights from where I lived. And so when it came time for a football season, and I was old enough, I would show up with great anticipation, great excitement, and I was anxious to be there, only to be quickly disappointed because as I showed up, and I began to engage the coaches were tough. And they had us doing weird and dumb things that I didn't think really applied to football, things like running as fast as we could and when we heard the whistle, we would dive with our chest into dirt and then we would get up and we would run again. And then they would have us doing these things called monkey rolls that there's like three guys in a row. And you can Google everyone to see what it looks like. And then we did this thing called six inches. And I hated it. You lay it on your back and you would beat on your stomach, and you will hold your feet off the ground six inches until they tell you to put them down. And it seemed like we spent an exorbitant amount of time doing these dumb and ridiculous things that made no sense and I didn't even know what it had to do with football. So after about two or three days of this, I quit. I just I just couldn't handle it anymore. It wasn't what I hoped for, I had the wrong perspective. I thought that I could just show up and have a good attitude and be ready to play and be excited and it will be all good. But the coaches were prepping me for adversity and developing grit and tenacity and toughness, which is the mindset and the perspective it takes to both persevere and to win.

I was excited about playing, but I wasn't excited about perseverance. I wasn't excited about suffering associated with winning, I was naive about that. But the coaches, all they were trying to do was elevate my narrow minded perspective. And that's actually what I want to talk about this weekend. I want to just park right there for just about moment, as we examine Daniel chapter number eight.

I want to tag this message with the subject 'an elevated perspective' because I believe that is what Daniel is doing for us throughout the book of Daniel and particularly in Daniel, chapter number eight. You see part of the apocalyptic writings, which the second half of Daniel will fall into this category, the purpose of these apocalyptic writings was to elevate our perspective or elevate the perspective of the people beyond what was going on right then and also beyond this world. In chapter eight, pretty weird stuff going on. If you've read it, and you just are just, you know, taking it as surface value there's some weird stuff going on here that doesn't seem to make a whole lot of sense. You got a vision about a ram and a goat and they're facing off with one another. And then the ram had two horns, but it was destroyed by the goat with one horn and then one horn was broken off of the goat and then four grew in its place. And then there was one other extra one that grew as well. And this is all crazy stuff here I mean, you're thinking that you're like, has Daniel been drinking? Like there's a lot of, you know, crazy stuff going on here. And that's just like the first half of chapter number eight.

Then the second half of Daniel eight is the interpretation of what's happening here in the book. So I just want to zoom in for the rest of our time on the latter verses of Daniel eight because we don't have time to go through all of the nuances and to read through it in its entirety. I'll encourage you to do that.

But I just want to pick it up in verse number 23 says, *"In the latter part of their reign."* Their reign is talking about the reign of these kingdoms because these horns that were a part of the goat, they represent a kingdom.

So, ²³ *"In the latter part of their reign when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise. ²⁴ He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people. ²⁵ 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. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power."* Let me skip down to verse 27, it says, ²⁷ *I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding."*

There's so many things that we could zoom in on, historically, literally and theologically, but this weekend, I just want to elevate three things for us. And these things, I think, just like they spoke to the current crisis that Daniels contemporaries were going through, I think they speak to us, as well, both personally whatever we're going through and collectively, what we're going through right now. So the question is, as I mentioned, I wanted to give this message a title - 'An Elevated Perspective.' Well what is the elevated perspective that Daniel is trying to give us? Here are three things for your consideration...

Number one and this is a very simple one, but a very significant one. Evil is real. Evil is real. We talked a lot about this in our alpha course here at NCC. But when we look at the landscape of our world, both currently in our lifetime, and as we study throughout history, there is an ever present darkness, a diabolical force on the earth. And I'm not sure how, as a logical or rational person, you can look at the world, you can see the things that have happened and that are happening and not see evil present in the world. Things like mass shootings. Things like sex trafficking, people taken and forced against their will to perform sex acts and they're not even their own they've been enslaved. Or we can even look at things like the transatlantic slave trade and even modern day slavery. What about attacks against specific groups of people like our Jewish brothers and sisters, and many others throughout history? All of this is a product of evil in our world. But here's the thing, mentioning evil and talking about evil is very uncomfortable for us at times, we don't even often want to acknowledge it. And sometimes I think it's because we have this false sense of what evil is. I remember growing up loving Tom and Jerry. And it was my favorite cartoon, and I'll never forget that there was one time this little Devil that was a poking at Tom the cat, and he had a little pitchfork. So he had a little pointed town and a little pitchfork, and he was red, and these are the sorts of little images maybe that we have grown up with. But I love what theologian Mark Turnage, said. He said, "We must understand that evil is part of the biblical worldview.

As we look throughout Scripture, we can see that evil and the evil one is highlighted. Jesus himself was confronted by the evil one; he was tempted in Matthew four. And then in Matthew 14, he said to his

disciples, *"Watch him pray so that you don't fall into temptation from the evil one."* Then he says in Luke 22, to Peter, he said, *"The evil one desires to have you but I have prayed for you."*

This vision in chapter eight, that Daniel has, is transposing a natural struggle that was going on. And part of the natural struggle that Daniel and his contemporaries were experiencing. It was real oppression that they were facing. They were in an oppressed state. But he's transposing this natural struggle to the supernatural struggle. So Daniel is elevating the current struggle to where the fight really is. His vision of the ram, and the goat and the horns being destroyed and then another one, another horn growing, they represented the struggle between kingdoms and darkness.

We read in the first half of Daniel eight that the daily sacrifice was taken away from God's people, and there was a desecration of the Jerusalem temple. All of this was really, really bad. But what Daniel is showing us and showing his contemporaries with his vision is that it was beyond and it was bigger than the present day struggle. It wasn't to minimize the struggle that they were in. But it was to give them an elevated perspective of the evil that they were up against. And what does that mean for us? It means for us that the struggle is way bigger than liberal versus conservative, its way bigger than that. The struggle is bigger than this political or economical or racial struggle. Now, I'm not minimizing those struggles. I'm not suggesting that we should not be engaged in these things because they have an impact on us. They affect us. God is calling us to engage but we must understand that there's an elevated perspective.

I love the way Paul writes about it to the Christians in Ephesus. He says in chapter six verses 12 and 13. ¹² *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* ¹³ *Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand your ground, and after you have done everything to stand."*

Paul is simply saying, hey, there's a war going on, there's a struggle going on, but it's in a different realm, and we need to be aware of that. And he says, *"the day of evil will come."* So evil is real and we have to understand where the real fight is. So the first thing that I wanted to highlight for us as Daniel was trying to help us have an elevated perspective is that evil is real.

The second one is, even God's people will suffer. This is a tough one for us. And Daniel 8:24 says, *"The kingdoms will even call suffering for the holy people"*. Now, many people of faith or many people who have who have engaged in faith, lose it or stumble at the simple question, why do bad things happen to good people? Suffering causes a reevaluation for us. It's a perspective shifter for us. And this is the same crisis of faith that Daniel's contemporaries were having because unlike the prophecies of Jeremiah, of Isaiah, of Amos and others, those prophecies were simply, if I could just summarize it, - Hey, be righteous do the right thing, and you will not see the wrath of God. But the problem with that with

Daniel's contemporaries is that they were facing evil or they were facing things that they didn't necessarily bring upon themselves.

There's a difference between the evil enemy and the stuff that I did to bring upon myself versus the evil around me or the evil that's being done to me. I think many of us are under the impression that our goodness blocks suffering. Our goodness shields us from suffering and it causes us to have a crisis of faith. And I love the way Pastor Jordan Rice says this of Renaissance Church in New York City. He says, sometimes we don't have faith in God; we have faith in what we want God to do. And that's a big distinction. He goes on to say that suffering burns off the impurities of our faith.

You know, I was thinking about this as a parent. I have two older girls, I have four kids and we basically got two sets. You know, we basically started over is what I tell people, you know, we will have a kindergartener when we have a student going to college pray for us. Um, but my two older girls, you know, I discipline them very differently because they, you know, they're older they should know, but but I'm very hard on them and I and I'm really trying to literally help elevate their perspective. Now, they think some of the things that I have them doing is persecution. It's not real persecution. But I'm just trying to help them understand certain things. I'm trying to help elevate their perspective, the little things that I'm pointing out and the little things that I'm harping on that they're not just me being a nag is me helping them to understand that the little things become big things, and you need to pay attention to the little things so they don't become problems down the road. I'm elevating their perspective. They feel like they're really suffering.

But here's the thing about suffering. Sometimes when we're in the moment of suffering, or we're in the moment of persecution, and things are happening to us we don't we don't have the capacity to fully understand it. And so sometimes we have to be further removed from it to fully understand what is happening or to gain clarity from it.

That's why Paul says, to the believers in Rome, he said, *"The sufferings of this present time cannot be compared to the glory that will be revealed."* There are some things that we just don't understand in the moment, but the glory of God will be revealed in our lives if we allow the suffering to do what it's meant to do.

So the first thing that I believe Daniel is trying to do is, is elevate our perspective about evil, evil is real. Secondly, even God's people will suffer. And finally, eventually, God will prevail. So, there are several kingdoms represented in this vision that Daniel is presenting, there's the ram which represented the Persian Empire, so that's Iran, and Iraq and Syria, and parts of Egypt. And then you had Greece with the one big horn which represented Alexander the Great. And then Alexander the Great dies at the height of his of his power and then four of his generals basically split up the kingdom, which is why you had the four different horns. Then you had this little fifth horn that grew up as well. And it said, this fifth horn prospered in everything it did, throwing truth to the ground.

So here you have all of these kingdoms that were dominant at one time they had power. And we see throughout the Old Testament that there were several kingdoms historically who went against a God's people and we saw the things that happened. But out of all of these kingdoms with all of these powers, and at one time, everyone thought, oh my god, Rome is the greatest power, oh, this country is the greatest power and they all fail. But as a key note here and Daniel 8:25. It says, *"The forces won't be destroyed by human power."*

Listen, we can take comfort in the fact that no matter what happens, God is in control. He has our back and he will bring an end to this wickedness. This was the message that Daniel was trying to send to his people. And this is the thing that I like. We're not just left behind, empty handed, but we also have access to supernatural weaponry ourselves. Listen to what Paul says to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 10:4. He says, ³ *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.* ⁴ *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds."*

You know what that means? That means that if we're going to be able to stand firm, if that means if we're going to be able to really fight against evil, if that means that we're going to really be able to persevere, guess what economic power is not going to do that for us. It won't, we can have all the money we can have all, we have all the access, it won't do it for us we will not defeat evil in that way. You know what also that means? That means that public policy and legislation won't defeat evil. These things will help us address problems. We need to be engaged in that way. It's important, but we must understand that that's not going to help us defeat evil, because we don't wage war as the war as the world does. So we've got to tap into the access and the power that we have in God through Jesus.

Let me just land the plane for us real quickly this weekend like this. Up unto this point, we've been walking through the entire book of Daniel. We're now in Daniel chapter number eight, right? Daniel has already been through so much at this point. I mean, he and his people have been exiled to a foreign land. They've been forced to serve foreign kings who care nothing about their God can nothing about their traditions. Their friends have been - there's an attempted assassination against them, you know, persecution. Daniel himself has experienced the same deal in the lion's den, people conspiring against them. And then just weird stuff like, just imagine being at a party somewhere and a hand starts writing on the wall, you know, our hand is writing on the wall and Daniel was asked to interpret it and then he's interpreting dreams and then he's having now these crazy visions. I'm just putting myself in Daniel's position right now. I mean, this had to have been weighing on him significantly. And I think we know that it did. But as we read the last verse of chapter number eight, verse 27. It really encouraged me and I hope it encourages you too. Listen to what Daniel said. He says, ²⁷ *I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding."*

Listen, Daniel is like 'this is way too much for me.' And he was exhausted. And you know what? I think we're gonna find ourselves in situations and circumstances and maybe that's right now. Were we are worn out and we are exhausted. But at some point, some way, somehow we got to get up and carry on with the business. Daniel gets up and he carries on with the Kings business. And I'm trying to figure out how in the world can you just get up and carry on with the Kings business with all of this crazy stuff going on? And then you're Daniel, you're supposed to be the one who can interpret these visions and you're saying it was beyond my understanding. I think the only way that Daniel can have this kind of resolve is he has an elevated perspective. He understands that the things that are happening in the natural that there's actually a bigger struggle going on. There are other things that are happening outside of his own power. And so he can step back because he has the right perspective and he can proceed in the right manner.

The reason I was able to continue on playing football and eventually have the opportunity to go as far as you can go is because between the first time I stepped on the field, and the next year, I had a whole year to think about it and my perspective shifted. And I understood what it was going to take for me to not only survive, but to thrive. And so for those of us, who are followers of God and believers in Jesus, we have to have an elevated perspective, with all of the things that we have going on and everything that's happening in our world and being in the middle of a pandemic. And yes, it's exhausting and, man, it's frustrating, and we don't know when it's going to end. But God can sustain us but we've got to have an elevated perspective. And that's my prayer for us this weekend that we understand that the struggle is beyond where we are right now that there's a greater struggle going on. So I'm asking God to give us strength as we navigate our personal and our collective struggles together.

Let's pray. God, I come before you this weekend thanking you so much for the life of Daniel, and all that he experienced and was able to capture not only for his people to give them an elevated perspective, but to give us those who are left behind an elevated perspective as well. To help us to understand where the real struggle is to help us understand what the real fight is, and that we may even suffer. But you are all powerful. And you will, you will, you will bring us victory. And we thank you that we can lean, depend and trust you And help us to have the right perspective as we move forward. In Jesus name, amen