

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH  
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Unshaken\_ Daniel Chapter 12 – The Last Dance  
Dr. Mark Batterson

In the spring of 1992, the capital city of Bosnia was besieged by the Yugoslav People's Army. On May 27 innocent civilians were standing at a breadline when a bombshell exploded. That explosion would kill 22 people and leave a crater in the center of Sarajevo. Moments after the blast a man by the name of Vedran Smailović, instinctively ran to the scene, but he didn't know what to do. He wasn't a medic, wasn't a firefighter, wasn't a soldier. He was the chief cellist in the Sarajevo opera. What did he do? He did the best he could with what he had, where he was. The very next day, May 28, 1992 he grabbed his cello. He put on a tuxedo. He climbed into the crater, he sat down in a scorched chair and he started to play Adagio in G by Albinoni. For 22 straight days, one for each day, each one of those victims, Vedran Smailović would play his cello in craters, in cemeteries, in the rubble of bombed out buildings. Why? Why puts your life at risk and what difference does it make? In the words of Vedran Smailović, "My weapon is my cello."

Twelve weeks ago we began a series called "Unshaken", unshaken is confronting the brutal facts with unwavering faith. It is refusing to compromise your convictions even if you end up in a fiery furnace or land in a lion's den. It's the moral courage to speak truth to power and I want to add one more to the mix. It's climbing into the craters left by sin and suffering and turning your cello into a weapon of faith and hope and love.

In 606 BC, the city of Jerusalem was besieged by King Nebuchadnezzar and The Babylonian Empire. A teenager named Daniel was taken from his home taken from his family marched 900 miles to Babylon, where he would live the rest of his life as an exile. The odds were against Daniel, that God was for him. The Babylonians tried to name him tried to tame him. Administration's would come and go, nations would rise and fall but we get to the end of the book of Daniel, and he is the last man standing. Daniel gets the last laugh. Daniel gets the last dance. How? How does a prisoner of war not only survive a lion's den, but climb a political ladder all the way to the top? Here's my take, even when his life was turned upside down, even when he found himself in a crater Daniel never lost faith in the end of the story.

Decade after decade, he put on his tuxedo he climbed into the crater of that exile and he had the holy audacity to play his cello. What are you talking about? Well in Daniel one, it was a countercultural conviction that refused to compromise. In Daniel two his weapon is a prophetic imagination. In Daniel three its integrity. In Daniel four it is the gifts of the Spirit. In Daniel five it is the moral courage to speak truth to power. In Daniel six it's the faith to shut the mouth of lions. In Daniel seven it's humility. In Daniel eight it is testimony. In Daniel nine it is kneeling three times a day and praying. In Daniel 10,

his weapon is fast for 21 days. In Daniel 11, his weapon his vision. In Daniel 12 it is long obedience in the same direction.

We live in a very different day and age. Not much has changed all of us born on a battlefield between good and evil. We live in a fallen world we live in a broken world. I am not telling you anything you do not know. We've got a COVID crisis that will not go away. We've got wildfires ravaging the West Coast. We've got hurricanes hitting the Gulf Coast. We've got pain and suffering in Kenosha, Wisconsin after the shooting of Jacob Blake. We've got peaceful protests and violent riots; it seems in every corner of the country. We've got the president of a Christian university who makes news for a sex scandal. And we are politically polarized after two political conventions with an election two months away, and that's this week.

Hear me we are here for such a time as this. We are here for such a place as this. It's easy to stand around a bombed out crater says {inaudible} and talk about the crater, how it got there who's to blame for it in all its particulars. It is much harder to step past the edge of it down into the middle of it and say or make or do something generative.

In Ezekiel 22 the prophet is challenging the Jewish people who are exiled in Babylon. He says stand in the gap. If not you who? Stand in gap. How? By climbing into the craters left by sin. It's by climbing into these craters of injustice, by climbing into the craters left by a cancel culture, each one of us a part to play each one of us an agent of the eschaton, each one of us has a weapon and it is not carnal. It has the divine power to demolish strongholds. I'm talking about you. Yes, you all of us a part to play.

So ready or not here we go. The last dance, Daniel 12 verse one, *"At that time Michael, the Archangel who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress, the likes of which will not have occurred from the beginning of nations until that time. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered."*

This reference to the Archangel Michael is a cue and a clue to help us put together this jigsaw puzzle called the End Times. Yes, we're going to go there this weekend. Now, Daniel points to a moment in the far distant future when this archangel will arise and it will happen during a time of distress that we would call the tribulation. More on that in a minute.

In Revelation 12, a battle breaks out in the heavenly realms between angels and fallen angels. Now the fallen angels they're led by Michael and the fallen angels, they're led by the dragon which is another name, Revelation 12, nine for the age old serpent, who is called the devil or Satan. And by the way, it's in this very same chapter where he is called the accuser of the brethren.

Now, I'm gonna say a lot of things this weekend that are going to sound strange and mysterious. I'm going to tell you why. When you're talking about things that haven't happened yet, when you're talking

about supernatural phenomenon, you don't always have words for it. You don't always have categories for it. You don't always know how to name it. All I know is this, the existence of evil is getting less and less deniable and more and more obvious. I think the enemy is showing his cards.

Now, here's some good news. In the end, this dragon is cast down, verse 11, they triumph over him. You know how? By the blood of the Lamb and by the word of his testimony. Listen, testimony is prophecy. If God did it before he can do it again. This is one of the most significant weapons in your arsenal. It's your testimony and it's not yours, it's actually God's and so there's a stewardship dimension to it. When we share our testimony, what we're doing is we're loaning our faith to someone else. You know what, I need to borrow your faith and you need to borrow mine and I'm not just talking about the testimony of miracles, okay. I'm talking about some testimonies of sin and suffering and some of the craters that we've walked into, but we have walked out of by the grace of God. And so this week an opportunity is going to present itself would you share that testimony with someone?

Verse two, *"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting disgrace."*

When you read this, you have to remember that it is written in the sixth century BC. And so this prophecy predates the incarnation. Daniel is looking past the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ. Now you can read all about it and Revelation 19. There is a mighty shout in heaven and then John sees heaven opened up and there is One who is called Faithful and True, and he's riding a white horse and his eyes are like flames of fire and on his head are many crowns, very similar imagery to the book of Daniel.

Now, 1 Thessalonians describes that moment this way, (4:16) *"The Lord Himself will descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and left will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air."*

Now that phrase caught up is where we get this word, rapture. It's this moment, when Christ returns for his church, returns for his bride. Now, most theologians they fall into three camps, a pre, mid and post tribulation rapture. I have a little different take on that eschatological timeline, and I'll explain why. But before I do, let me say this, as soon as I'm omniscient, I will let you know. But I would not hold your breath. What I want to do is just share a personal conviction, I feel like I owe it to you as your pastor to just call it like I see it. So here goes.

I'm going to show you a chart, and we'll put it on the screen, and we'll put it back up on the screen. You've got the church age, which begins on the day of Pentecost. Now this church age, we don't know how long it lasts. But it's the church age that ushers in the eschaton or end times. And Jesus gives us some science that will precede his second coming in the Olivet discourse, Matthew chapter 24. There will be wars and rumors of wars - check. There will be an increase in the frequency and intensity of

natural disasters - check. There will be dissensions and divisions - check. But this is where I want to pop the periscope and give us a little reality check. Now I am not trying to minimize the challenges that we face right now as a nation, but it's so critical that we understand our history, both American history and church history.

100 years ago 1920, the world is grieving 20 million casualties from the war to end all wars. 1919 Spanish Flu claims an estimated 50 million people 70 million people. And then in 1921, you've got the Tulsa massacre, which many historians would say is the worst incident of racial violence in the history of this nation. All of that to say this, I mean, it felt like the world was coming to an end 100 years ago.

Alright, let me double back to this chart. At the end of the church, age we will enter into a unique period of history a time of tremendous trial and distress, called the tribulation. And at some point Jesus will rapture his church. Now the question, of course, is when. Now, I have no idea chronologically, no one knows the day or the hour, but I have a pretty good guess where it happens biblically. I think the rapture happens in Revelation seven, somewhere between the sixth and seventh seal.

Now you've got three kinds of judgments that happen during the Tribulation. You've got the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls in that sequence and what I'm suggesting is that the rapture happens between the sixth and seventh seal, this first series of judgments.

Verse nine of chapter seven says this, *"After this I looked and a vast host appeared which no one could count, from every nation, and tribes and peoples and languages. And they stood before the Lamb; they were dressed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands."*<sup>10</sup> *And they sing this song: "Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*

And one of the elders asked this question in verse 13, *"Who are these people clothed in long white robes and from where did they come from?"* In other words, how'd they get here? The answer is verse 14, *"These are they who have come out of the Great Tribulation."* All of a sudden this multitude appears in heaven, even the angels don't know how they got there. But the key to me is to back up the bus to chapter six verse 17, *"For the great day of his wrath has come."*

The first six seals, in my opinion are intensified natural disasters. And verse 17 says that, and then it's the great day of wrath. It's almost like a script flips right here from judgment to rap evil is going to meet its match. I think God will rapture his church before he pours out His wrath on injustice and unrighteousness.

Now listen, everyone is given an opportunity to repent. God is not willing that any should perish. But there's an interesting phrase after some of these seals and trumpets and bowls, here's what it says in Revelation, *"Even then, they did not repent."* Now Daniel 12:10 says it this way, *"Many shall purify themselves made spotless and refined but the wicked shall do wickedly."*

Long story short, I don't think the rapture happens pre, mid or post. I think it happens pre wrath. And I'll show you that chart one more time. And I want to say one more thing hundreds of years ago Rupertus Meldenus said, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity." And so listen, if you hold a different timeline, not gonna love you any less, but one way or the other, sooner or later, Jesus is going to rapture his church and it is going to be a moment.

Okay, I paraglided over the Sacred Valley in Peru. I've climbed a few fourteeners, been at the top of the Empire State building, road Soren at Epcot, okay, all of those are amazing, right? Come on. It is gonna be an epic moment the dead and Christ shall rise and then we who are still alive will meet the Lord in the air.

I'm praying two prayers a lot lately. Come Holy Spirit and come, Lord Jesus. Is there anything that you long for more than the second coming of Christ? Second Timothy 4:8 says that there is a crown a crown of righteousness for those who long for his appearing. Do you long for his appearing, to meet your Lord and Savior in the air? What a moment that's going to be.

Now listen, I have no idea how the news media's gonna handle this one. It's funny that this week I just happened to listen to a podcast about the Lost Colony of Roanoke. Okay, it's like this mystery like, what happened to them and so I have no idea how Fox and CNN will spin this one - the Lost Colony of Christians but I cannot wait. Now I know that some of you are listening to me and wow this sounds awfully fantastical. Okay, listen a thousand years ago, a round Earth sounded kind of crazy. 500 years ago, I think these invisible things called atoms like what. What are you talking about? 100 years ago landing a man on the moon are you kidding? Give it a few years. Now I'm not making any predictions not placing any bets but what I do find fascinating is that we live in a moment of history where many prophecies are being fulfilled or are now made possible to be fulfilled.

I'm going to go quick but let me go back to the chart one more time. Right in the middle, there's going to be an interesting event that will kind of bisect this tribulation. Now week nine talked a little bit about Antiochus Epiphanes 168 BC invades Jerusalem, desecrates the temple, sets up the statue of Zeus, sacrifices a pig on the altar, makes the Jewish people eat the unclean parts, outlaws circumcision, outlaws Torah. And then it happens again in AD 70. But scripture seems to indicate that it will happen again in the middle of the tribulation. Now, I don't have time to detail this, but just newflash. None of this was possible before May 14, 1948. What are you talking about? Well, I think we take the nation of Israel for granted. But what were the chances of the people of Israel forming a nation on the heels of a holocaust. But it's the forming of the nation of Israel that makes many of these prophecies possible to be literally fulfilled. So many prophecies would have made no sense 100 years ago, okay.

Just kind of a little appetizer this weekend - in Revelation 11 there are two witnesses who would be killed in the streets of Jerusalem. Verse nine says, *"For three and a half days, men from all races and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies."* Now we don't think twice about that.

But that's not possible before satellites in orbit. That's not possible before television. What I'm saying is technology makes possible a literal fulfillment of the entire world. And by the way, those two witnesses will be resurrected.

Revelation 9:16 there's an army that numbers 200 million people. Now, what's amazing about that is this, in AD 95 most historians don't think that the population of the world was even 200 million people. Okay, we're talking about an army that was just inestimable that it was impossible to imagine. Let me just benchmark this 70 million soldiers fought in World War II, we are inching closer and closer to a potential fulfillment of that reality.

Now, for me, the greatest single indicator of the end times maybe something that Daniel said in verse four. I want you to look at this, "But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there (here it is) to increase knowledge."

Now, most translations say knowledge will increase. There is more information in a single weekend edition of The New York Times than the average person living in the 18th century would encounter in a lifetime. We have these devices called smartphones, more computing power than the engineers and the astronauts who landed a man on the moon. Don't get me started on AI. I think the digital universe of data doubles in size every two years and has now reached 44 zettabytes? I have no idea what that means. But I think it's called information overload. There is this exponential increase in knowledge that to me might signal the beginning of the end times.

Alright, what do we do with all of this? Verse 12, "*Blessed are those who wait expectantly and earnestly who endure without wavering.*"

It's at this point Daniel is in his 90, in his 90s. That's a lot of trips around the sun. Again, administrations have come and gone, nations have risen and fallen and Daniel is still confronting the brutal facts how, with unwavering faith. Don't lose faith in the end of the story. Blessed are those who wait expectantly and earnestly.

In other words, get ready. Well, how do I get ready? Listen, I think it starts with a right relationship with God. Jesus extended an invitation. A couple thousand years ago, he said, "*Follow me*". Have you accepted that invitation? Have you surrendered your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ? If you want to do that today, you want to take a step of faith you're at our online campus, there's a little button right there, would you raise your hand right now, would you have the courage to just say, I'm in? I'm going to take a step of faith. I want to follow this person named Jesus, and we want to help you in your spiritual journey.

This week, Josiah and I took a little hike, Little Devils Stairs. I didn't know why it was called that - do now, at least my quads do and then we got lost, okay. So a six mile hike turned into a 10 mile hike. And

about half way we hear a loud sound kind of up over here. And I look up and there's a black bear like 20 yards away, and it shimmies down this tree like a fireman's pole. And we don't know if it's gonna charge us so I just kind of start doing one of these little moonwalk things like this. I actually pick up some stones. I really don't know if that's what the bear protocol is, but listen the adrenaline is pumping. And Josiah wanted to go the other direction. That's backup the hill, I can't do it, Josiah. Our lives are on the line. But listen, my quads can handle it. So we waited about two minutes.

I have never been more hyper vigilant in my life. I think that's what's happening right here. Waiting expectantly and earnestly it's hyper vigilance, its sanctified expectations. It's watching and praying. It's being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Then it says this, "Go your way until the end. (And I love this promise) You shall rest, you shall stand fast, you shall rise again to receive the inheritance set aside for you."

The day is going to come I'm going to scan the horizon as I'm kind of going vertical. My vertical leap takes off in that rapture. Where's Daniel? Where is he? That's gonna be a moment to see some of these saints who have gone before us raptured with us.

Let me try to land this plane. Now I wear a ring, I think you know this, with infrared sensors. And these infrared sensors they measure different vital signs and so heart rate, respiration rate, body temperature, deep sleep, and every day, this ring on my finger, it gives me a readiness score. What's your readiness score for the second coming of Christ?

Three things real quick if you want to be ready - number one stay grounded in God's word. My most prized possession is a 1934 Thompson chain reference Bible that belonged to my grandfather, Elmer Johnson. Man, he didn't just read it, it read him. I have never seen a Bible more marked up than my grandfather's Bible. And here's the thing I love his favorite book of the Bible, Daniel, that had a little something to do with this series that we're doing right now. Sometimes I love reading that Bible and seeing what he wrote in the margins. He would sit around a table with his cousins with his family members and they'd talk prophecy for hours on end. He loved the Lord, and he was longing for his return. There are parts of his Bible that are literally taped together because they're worn so thin. Charles Spurgeon said this, "A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't." This is a moment for us to stay grounded, grounded in God's Word.

Two - pray the news. Don't just watch it. Pray it. Now listen, I think one of the challenges we face again, anxiety, depression, about a third of us, 71% angry, 66% fearful. We have all of these stirring emotions right now. I think part of it is I don't know that we were designed to have a live news feed two feet from us through social media every moment of every day. It's like overload. How do you handle all of that? Lora and I had to do something this summer - we had to do day off, phone off because we just needed to unplug a little bit. Now having said that, I want to say this, I believe we watch the news but we also pray

it. Karl Barth said, "Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible." One of two things is going to happen. Either your reality is going to conform to your theology or your theology is going to conform to your reality. Which is it? We got to make sure that our reality is conforming to our theology.

I want to just say this, and get ready because there's more where this is coming from. We're going to talk some political theology as we begin our next series. I just think it's so critical our primary citizenship if the book and Daniel teaches us anything it's that our primary citizenship is in heaven, is in this thing called the kingdom of God. And here's the problem, I think a lot of us find more of our identity in our political ideology than our theology. And that's when your ideology becomes idolatry and now we're in trouble because hashtags aren't going to get us where we need to go. Politics isn't gonna get us... Now, we honor it, we're in it, in it to win it. And it's so critical that we are exercising our civic rights and responsibilities right now. Can I get a little amen, wherever you are? But our primary identity, our primary loyalty, is to the Lord Jesus Christ. Come on, the day is coming. It's coming when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and Christ. And until that day comes, we pray the news, we pray the news.

Number three - Play the long game - Daniel, long obedience in the same direction. I think we're in a season where God is shifting us from a weekly mindset to a daily rhythm. What are you talking about? Well, we can't gather on the weekend right now. You know what; I can't wait until we can. But here's the challenge. If we aren't careful, we go to church, we check a box and we check out Monday to Friday. It's not going to get us where we need to go. And so, what I want to challenge us to do is daily church, okay to make sure that we are practicing daily spiritual disciplines The only ceiling on our intimacy with God, and our impact on the world is daily spiritual disciplines. Daniel models this three times a day, kneels next to his bed, he's a student of God, he's grounded in God's word.

And so I'm so excited about this, we'll talk more about it next week. But September 7, happens to be Labor Day, as we begin a series on the book of Ephesians. 'Heaven on Earth' we're going to kick off daily church Monday to Friday. Listen, it's only gonna be about five minutes. It's not this like major, major message, okay? But it's about us growing every single day, every single day, in our relationship, if we seek first his kingdom, all these other things are going to be added to us - spirit filled spirit lead every single day. And if we do that, if we do the right thing day in and day out, God is going to show up and show off. And so I'm going to challenge you even this week, [NCC.re/daily](https://ncc.re/daily), would you sign up? Because if you don't, we always give ourselves kind of that opt out and so I'm so excited. We're going to overestimate what we can do a year or two but we're going to underestimate what God can do in 10 or 20 or 70 years, like Daniel.

I've got to close. I'm gonna invite our worship team, you're ready to come. And I'll close with this. On the evening of January 30, 1956 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr speaking at First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. In the middle of the message, he's informed that his house has been bombed. It



was intended to intimidate, had the opposite effect. Dr. King went home that night he was sitting at his kitchen table, and he said he heard the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, "Martin, do not be afraid". He lived unshaken, didn't he? I'll let Dr. King have the last word. He said, "You may be 38 years old, as I happen to be. And one day, some great opportunity stands before you and calls you to stand up for some great principle, some great issue, some great cause. And you refuse to do it because you are afraid.... You refuse to do it because you want to live longer.... You're afraid that you will lose your job, or lose your popularity, or you're afraid that somebody will stab you, or shoot at you or bomb your house; so you refuse to take the stand. Well, you may go on and live until you are 90, but you're just as dead at 38 as you would be at 90. And the cessation of breathing in your life is but the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit."

Quit living as if the purpose of life is to arrive safely at death live unshaken do not lose faith in the end of the story. God's got this God's got you may his kingdom come may his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. If you believe it, would you say Amen and Amen?