

20th December 2020 10 am Making Room for the Messiah

Service led by and talk by Andrew Attwood, Reading by Lindsey Attwood,

Prayers by Roger & Heather Homes. Andrew also interviews Dot Powell about waiting

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Greetings and Notices

[Andrew Attwood:]

Good morning. It's good to see you on this presently sunny day. Here we are on the fourth Sunday of Advent, on this most unusual Christmas. So good morning to you. I'll be leading parts, and there'll be various bits and pieces happening. I'll be doing the talk later on as well.

A big thank you to all of you who've been involved through this year in helping out: it's very very much appreciated. A couple of notices before we begin:

- There's going to be a carol service online today at 6pm. So do log on to this channel, as usual 6pm. There'll be a whole host of familiar things that happen ordinarily in our carol services. So, do please come along, watch that, it'd be great to have you on to that.
- In terms of the actual plans for Christmas in the building. I mean, even though things seem to be changing very rapidly at the moment, ~~as far as we're aware, we're still able to do the Wednesday 23rd midweek service, so that is going ahead 10:30 as usual, and the 8am service on Christmas Day is happening as planned. I did want to emphasise that that particular one on Christmas Day is primarily for people who ordinarily go to 8am. We are going to be limited in terms of social distancing, in terms of how many people can get in the building, so please, you know, be restrained in terms of the inclination to come to that if it's not your normal service.~~¹
- We will have an online Christmas Day service at 10am, and I look forward to seeing you there for that.
- One final notice I wanted to make, it's something I'd like you to do with emails, texts and messages, even onto the YouTube channel today. You may have picked up in the newsletter, that Michelle Harris is having a bit of time off after Christmas, she's busy running the tech for this service as we speak, and she doesn't know I'm giving this notice now, but I just thought it would be nice if some folks from the church sent Michelle a thank-you. All the way through this lockdown year, 2020, Michelle has been at the helm of quite a lot of the tech challenges we have been facing. And she has worked tirelessly throughout the whole year. So could you send her a thank-you message by text, on YouTube, by email or even send a card to her, stick it through the office door, if you're not sure how to get the message to her. I just wanted to say publicly, "Thank you Michelle, for all that you have been doing."

Activity

Okay, right, I wanted to do an activity this morning just to get you into the

¹ Cancelled due to recently increased restrictions nationally, and a high local COVID figure, and the vulnerable nature of our service attenders

spirit of what I want to say this morning because we're going to be studying, like this mini-series we've been doing, leading up to Christmas, focusing on the Bible itself. I want you to find in your Bibles Daniel 9:22-27, that's what we're going to be looking at in some depth, so that we can combine the Christmas theme with in-depth Bible study, so we can combine both of these things at the same time. I'm hoping that you really get a lot out of that today.

Before we do that, I wanted to put a challenge to you. I've got this little battery in my hand, it's a charger battery. I wanted to encourage you, whatever age you are, whether you're young or old, to guess when I'm going to drop this charger into my hand... like that. I just want to have you guess and if you guess when I let go and it drops, you clap. I want you to clap when you think it's going to happen. So I'm going to start now. And you've got to guess when I'm going to...

[3 seconds pause] You didn't guess.

I'm going to, I'm going to drop it soon, so clap when you think I'm going to drop this battery.

[7 seconds pause]

Did you get it? Give you another go. When am I going to... oop! Too fast. When am I going to do this?

[7 seconds pause]

Did you get that one? What about this one? Are you going to clap and get it when I drop this?

[1 second pause] When is it going to drop?

[5 seconds pause] When is it going to drop?

[6 seconds pause] When is it going to drop?

[8 seconds pause]

Oh my goodness! That took far too long, didn't it? It's pretty much impossible, when you have to wait so long for something to happen. A key theme of today is waiting, and God's perfect timing. Waiting, and God's perfect timing. So I'm just going to begin with a prayer, and then we're going to have a little interview I did with Dot Powell this last week, and I'd just like you to watch the interview and then we'll go straight into some worship. But let me pray first.

Lord Jesus, on this particular Advent Sunday, we pray with anticipation. We remember the story of Your first coming. And we remember how long the people of God had been yearning for God to come. So Lord, at this time, this strange time of unpredictability, of uncertainty, focus our hearts on You. Amen.

Interview: Waiting

So let's have our interview with Dot.

Hi Dot, good to see you. Thank you for being here to kind-of answer a few questions, just a few questions that seem to relate to the theme of today's service. And the first question is, now, many people at the minute are waiting and longing for change. What about you?

[Dot Powell:] Yeah, I'd agree, I have been waiting for almost as long as I can remember now, and I think lots of people feel like that. And I think one of the real challenges at the moment is, we don't really know what we're waiting for. We think maybe it's the vaccine that will solve things or we think that maybe you know the number of cases will go down and then we'll be able to return to

something more like normality, but this has been what we in education we talk about liminal spaces, like we've been on the threshold now for so long, we feel like we're stuck. And it's very tiring and very frustrating for us, I think.

[Andrew:] Yeah, I agree. People talk about liminal spaces like train stations where it's not a real place, you're waiting for something to come and somebody to take you somewhere. But you're right, we have been stuck. In the light of that, though, what might be the spiritual benefits of waiting on God, do you think?

[Dot:] Well I think it's been about patience and learning patience and learning to find Him in that liminal space, and I was thinking about how, for the people of Israel waiting for the Messiah, they were in a similar sort of situation, in that they didn't know what they were waiting for. They thought it might, you know, that what their picture of what was going to come wasn't actually what came in the end. And I think that's where God finds us, He finds us in our waiting. It's how, you know, it's where Jesus stepped in, He stepped in to be... And there's that thing in the Bible about the 'now' and the 'not yet'. What we are now is not what we will be in the future², and that's where He finds us. And I feel very much we're in that place between the 'now' and the 'not yet', and we don't know what that 'not yet' is but that's where I've been finding that if I am patient and I try to listen to Him, His voice is there, He is still with us. But He's asking a lot of us, He's asking us to be patient and to trust Him.

[Andrew:] Yeah, okay. So, in the light of what you're experiencing, what would you say to others, to encourage them during this time of waiting?

[Dot:] Be kind to yourself, we've been talking a lot about being kind to each other, you know, it's been in social media and all over the place, you know, that we need to be kind to others, but I think there's the thing about being kind to ourselves and recognising that we're tired, and we're lacking some of the joy, the weather's not as good as it was before, and being kind to each other is obviously still, you know, important, reaching out to others, I think just, you know, a few individuals that can help you and that you can help. I think that's really important too, and I read a verse this morning that I thought really was an encouragement, and it's in Psalm 10³, and it says, "He knows the hope of the helpless." And so He knows what we're hoping for even though we feel really helpless at the moment.

[Andrew:] Okay. Well, thank you very much, Dot, that's really helpful. Thank you.

[Dot:] A pleasure.

Hymn: O Come, O Come Emmanuel

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| 1. O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel. | 2. O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the Law,
In cloud, and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel. |
|--|--|

2 E.g. see Romans 8

3 Psalm 10:17, New Living Translation

3. O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of Hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

4. O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

5. O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Song: O Come All Ye Unfaithful (Christ is born)

1. O come, all you unfaithful
Come, weak and unstable
Come, know you are not alone

4. O come, guilty and hiding ones
There is no need to run
See what your God has done

2. O come, barren and waiting ones
Weary of praying, come
See what your God has done

Chorus

Chorus:

Christ is born, Christ is born
Christ is born for you

Bridge:

He's the Lamb who was given
Slain for our pardon
His promise is peace
For those who believe

3. O come, bitter and broken
Come with fears unspoken
Come, taste of His perfect love

Repeat bridge

5. So come, though you have nothing
Come, He is the offering
Come, see what your God has done

Chorus x 2

Reading: Daniel 9:20-27 [NIVUK 2011]

20 While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill – 21 while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice.

22 He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. 23 As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision:

24 'Seventy "sevens" are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put

an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.⁴

25 'Know and understand this: from the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven "sevens", and sixty-two "sevens". It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. 26 After the sixty-two "sevens", the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: war will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. 27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one "seven". In the middle of the "seven" he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.'

This is the Word of the Lord.

Talk

[Andrew:] Thank you, Lindsey.

Now some of you may be intrigued as to why I would want to speak on this passage at Christmastime. We are in unusual times. And really I wanted to give us an opportunity to focus in on God's perfect timing. I also wanted to kind-of reinstate Daniel as a Christmastime prophet. Inevitably later on in our Carol Service there will be perhaps more familiar readings that we often return to at this time of year. But I wanted to let you know that Daniel was an extremely significant prophet, particularly at the time of Jesus Christ. Many people were reading Daniel closely at the time of Jesus. So that's why I want to focus on it today.

So I just want to have our first slide up today. There's a particular line in Paul's letter to the Romans, Romans 5:6, and it says this:

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

I'll read that again, "You see, just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." Paul's emphasis is on timing. And he makes a point of saying Jesus did it at just the right moment.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." Rom. 5:6

Now I don't know about you, but all of us, I think, are fed up waiting for something to come to a conclusion with our present pandemic situation. People are longing for the end of it, and they're longing for the end of unpredictable times. Perhaps you've felt the same anxiety, but I actually felt sympathy for Boris Johnson yesterday: he looked a little bit worn out and, and I don't know, broken a little, that he had to say, announcing yet again more changes at the last minute because of the things changing in terms of the spread of this new strain of coronavirus. I felt sorry for him. And so many of us feel wrong-footed again and again and again.

I've said this before, but the human race needs certainty to function properly. There is so much disturbance and unwellness when we don't know what is happening, and we don't know what's coming. That's why I wanted to concentrate on this passage from Daniel.



4 NIV 1984: "the most holy" with note 'Or Most Holy Place; or most holy One'; NIV 2011: "the Most Holy Place" with note 'Or the most holy One.

Daniel was a sincere man in exile, waiting for God to come and rescue. And that's the context of this reading. Daniel was praying. You read the whole chapter of chapter 9 in Daniel and you realise, he was interceding for his people to see the end of a 70-year exile, and he was praying and repenting, and he was humbling himself and seeking rescue. And then, this dramatic change happens at verse 20, when Gabriel appears: Gabriel, the same Gabriel who we know from the Christmas stories, and Gabriel describes much, much more than Israel's immediate rescue. He talks about Israel's timeline, a timeline that is about 490 years.

Let me have my next slide. The next slide gives you a little bit of background in terms of what happens with regards to the other elements in Daniel's story. You see in chapter 2 and chapter 7 of Daniel, you have Daniel needing to interpret vision. There's a particular dream given to King Nebuchadnezzar, and he has this dream of this great statue that's made of different materials,

Background;
530BC - Daniel's
previous visions

4 arising Empires -
Followed by the
Kingdom of God



and Daniel wisely is graciously given the interpretation of what it means. Now almost every single commentator I've come across would now interpret carefully and precisely the different phases of Daniel's vision, that vision of the statue, describing four different empires that were to come in the future after Daniel's time. He describes the Babylonian Empire which he was in, and then the Medo-Persian Empire, followed by the Grecian Empire, followed by the Roman Empire. And then right at the base of this sculpture there's a kind of a mixture of iron at the bottom of the legs of iron, but they're mixed with clay by the time we get to the feet, as though they're fragile and fracturing, and on this ending part of the vision for chapter 2, it says a big rock is thrown at the feet and it smashes the whole thing to the ground. And Daniel then, back in chapter 2, interprets that as the inevitable coming of the Kingdom of God.

There's a kind of parallel in chapter 7, where he kind of repeats that, using pictures of beasts, of animals that represent the four empires. And once again, there's an emphasis that the kingdom of God is going to sweep in, and destroy all of these. It's going to be a rock that destroys these things, a rock not made by human hands. I don't know about you, but when you come across these kinds of passages in the Bible, it kind-of makes your head hurt. These things are written in what you would call apocryphal language. It's apocryphal material, meaning it's full of symbolism, it's rich with signs, but it's not always super-clear as to what it means. There's a couple of passages in Daniel that really make me smile, and these come immediately after Daniel has received visions. He says this in Daniel 7:28, it says,

28 This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself.

That vision he had in Daniel 7 really disturbed him. Likewise, Daniel 8, 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.

So, Daniel's human like we are, scratching our heads as to what is being revealed, and what on earth is going on. It's hard! But let me move further on into the story of Daniel and set the scene for this particular passage that we had read to us earlier. Daniel is praying. You see, Daniel is devoted to the Bible. He knew that according to the prophet Jeremiah, Israel was going to be in exile for about 70 years. That's what Jeremiah had prophesied, and Daniel is starting to pray. He's about 68 years into the exile now. He's read the text, and now he's praying, because he wants to see the story change, and he doesn't know what's going to happen next. And it's a model prayer, it is full of heartfelt confession. He's admitting what the people have done wrong. He's recognising that what God has done, putting them into exile, was absolutely right. But now he seeks God's grace and he sees God's help, and then we have this dramatic change in verse 20. Gabriel, the angel Gabriel, literally appears in direct response to the prayer.

I think it's worth noting, just at this point, in a very simple sense, God responds to sincere praying. He may not always send an angel. But God clearly responded to Daniel, as he interceded for the people of Israel. So Gabriel appears, and he doesn't just tell Daniel what's going to happen next in terms of 'out of exile'. He gives the whole timeline of Israel.

Now let me just zoom out for a moment and remind you of why this passage links into the Christmas theme. What do we already know about Gabriel. We know that in Luke 1⁵, Gabriel appeared first to Zechariah. Do you remember? Zechariah was in the Temple, offering sacrifice, and Gabriel gives him precise details about the birth of his son to come. He's going to be John the Baptist. Later on⁶ Gabriel appears to Mary and gives her precise details about being filled with the Holy Spirit in conceiving Jesus, and timed details about Elizabeth's pregnancy. So Gabriel by storyline, by information, is someone who is the bringer of explanation and the timeline. So given the context of what we can know from the New Testament, reading back to look at Daniel, we should expect Gabriel to bring understandable messages relating to God's timeline. And that's what exactly we find here in Daniel 9.

Now let's have a look at slide 3, because this is where it seems to get a bit more complicated. He talks about 70 sevens and 62 sevens and one seven. What on earth is this all about? Well, Gabriel is using numbers to describe a period of history that is about to happen. And he's using sevens as a multiplication of sets of time. The sevens refer to years, it's very obvious, all the commentators say so. The sevens are saying, just like you've had 70 years in captivity, Daniel, you're going to have seven times 70 years of something else now. So we're talking about years here.

- So there's 7 times 7, which is possibly a rebuilding. He talks about that,
- then there's a 62 times 7, which talks about a troubled history.
- And then there's the last 7, which is the last 7 years of Israel as we know it.

What on earth is that all about? If you add them all up, that's about 490 years from Gabriel saying something is going to happen. 490 years of what? If you look in the text, it says, "From the time of the decree from when the city will be rebuilt." From the time of the decree? And then there's a definite ending

$$7 \times 7 \text{ (49 years)} + 62 \times 7 \text{ (434 years)} = 483 \\ + 1 \times 7 = 490$$

1. "From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem...(v25)
2. "After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. (v26)
3. "The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. (v26)

5 Luke 1:11-20

6 Luke 1:26-38

7 Daniel 9:25, NIV: "From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem "

within this prophecy in verse 26, where it says, "And the prince will come and destroy the sanctuary and the city."⁸ So there's a decree to do with the building, the rebuilding and then right at the end of verse 26, there's a destruction again.

What on earth is Gabriel talking about? He's not just talking about symbolic language that can be interpreted in multiple ways. He is talking about something that was really going to happen. Let me zoom out again and say, there are some problems with how we interpret timings in Scripture. We need to admit where things are hard and not clear. With regards to the decree to rebuild, people have tried to interpret when the starting time was in different ways. And there are three possible decrees in the Bible that this return could refer to.

- There's Cyrus' decree that we find in Ezra 1. And that was in approximately 538 BC when he was saying you can go and rebuild the Temple.
- And there was Darius' decree. That was in 519 BC, and that's in Ezra 6, but that was only confirming effectively what Cyrus's early decree was saying.
- Then there's a third decree, Artaxerxes' decree of 457 BC, which is a bit later. Again Ezra, Ezra 7, which concerned not just the building of the Temple but also some rebuilding work, which went on maybe 444 or 445 BC in Nehemiah. You remember the story of Nehemiah, which includes the rebuilding of Jerusalem itself, the walls of the gate and not just the Temple.

Three decrees: which one are we referring to? We have to admit, we don't definitely know. There's an additional issue to do with this: because we're talking about ancient history, we can't be absolutely sure which are the dates exactly, we can't completely show when these things happen. So there's that. That makes the starting time of Gabriel's prophecy a little tricky to gauge.

However, there is a way of being very clear about what this prophecy refers to, because it gives a definite ending to what is going to happen. It says there are going to be six huge things to accomplish before the final destruction of the city and the sanctuary. Six big things. And then the destruction of the city and the sanctuary. And Gabriel carefully lays out the saving plan of God, after which Israel's story finally finishes. So look at look at slide 4, and you will find a reference there from verse 24 onwards, and he mentions these six different things.

- 1.to finish transgression,
- 2.to put an end to sin,
- 3.to atone for wickedness,
- 4.to bring in everlasting righteousness,
- 5.to seal up vision and prophecy,
- 6.and to anoint the Most Holy.



Daniel 9:v24 zoom

He says, **the Anointed One is going to come**. Some Bible translations just automatically put in the word Messiah there, but actually the original Hebrew simply says the Anointed One. Their expectations in Jewish times was of a king coming, or a high priest or a warrior high priest, but it was kind of conflated in the time of Jesus to be sort of Messianic, but an Anointed One is going to come to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy, to anoint the Most Holy Place or to anoint the most holy One: it's a little bit vague in the Hebrew.

I just wanted to spend a little bit of time on this. Gabriel is saying these six things have to happen before the holy city and the holy temple are destroyed. Just think about this from a Christian point of view. There are various passages in the New Testament that describe exactly these six things happening through whom? Through the Messiah, through Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said in Matthew

⁸ Daniel 9:26, NIV: "The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary." RSV, NRSV, ESV, NASB etc. translate "prince" where NIV translates "ruler".

23 verses 34 to 36, He says this,

34 Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.

And carefully listen to this:

35 And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. **36** Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation.

Jesus seems to be saying that there was a gathering-up of all the wickedness of Israel in His time to finish transgression, that's point number one, that Gabriel made reference to.

Point number 2, putting an end to sin. Have you ever thought about this? Jesus arrives in Jerusalem on a donkey⁹. And what's the first thing He does? He heads straight into the Temple, and He kicks tables over, He scatters coins in all directions, He sets all of these animals free, and He disrupts the sacrificial system. Jesus enacts a new offering. He embodies it in His Last Supper. He describes it secretly to His disciples. And not only does He disrupt the sacrificial system symbolically, He then dies, as a sacrifice on the Cross, putting an end to sin. [That's] Point 2.

Point 3: atoning for wickedness. When you read in 2 Corinthians 5 verses 18 to 19, it describes what Jesus achieved. It says this:

18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: **19** that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

That's what atonement is: making reconciliation.

Point 4: bringing in everlasting righteousness. Romans 3:21 says exactly that:

21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Jesus brings in God's righteousness in a way that had never happened before.

Point 5: Luke 21, this is Jesus saying this Himself:

32 'Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. **33** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

We know again and again and again through the whole of the Gospels, Jesus said He came to fulfil the Scriptures, the fulfilment of prophecy, point 5.

And [**Point 6**:] here we have this strange mention from Gabriel to anoint the Most Holy Place. What does that mean? We read in Hebrews 9 the most unusual description of what Jesus did when He was on the Cross. It says,

11 But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. **12** He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, so obtaining eternal redemption.

In our minds we sometimes wonder how it worked. But when Jesus was on the Cross,

⁹ Matthew 21:1-13, Mark 11:1-10,15-18, Luke 19:29-38,45-47;

John's gospel differs in sequence: John 12:12-15,2:13-16; See also Marcus Jackson's 10am talk on 5th April 2020.

He was entering into the true Holy Place, offering His Own Self, His blood as the true sacrifice, anointing the most Holy Place with His own blood. You see, we get the privilege as Christians, of having the New Testament and reading back into Daniel 9 and what Gabriel prophesied, all these things being fulfilled in Jesus Christ, again and again and again. 1,2,3,4,5,6 things that needed to be fulfilled before the destruction of the temple and the city.

Now how can I be so sure that this is the right interpretation? How can we be so sure? Well, the other week, Phil was telling us that we need to be very careful when it comes to interpret Scripture, and we have different ways of doing it. One of the ways in which we can interpret Scripture is see what Jesus said about Scripture. We need to make sure that we don't get confused about it, and we understand what He thought. Jesus quoted Daniel several times Himself, in the Gospel accounts. Just think about it: Jesus was a young Jew, growing up with the Scriptures. He would have read Daniel over and over again. We know that there are certain references from various Old Testament books that Jesus referred to repeatedly, like Isaiah, Isaiah 53, like the Psalms. But Daniel featured heavily in Jesus' referencing.

One of the prophecies of Gabriel says, After 69 sevens or after 62+7 sevens, the Anointed One will come and do things. So afterwards means, in the last of the sevens, the final week, the final seven if you like, is where it all kicks off. Jesus knew when He read Daniel, that the Anointed One, according to the passage, would be cut off, and would have nothing. It's extraordinary! It says, after the 62 sevens, plus the other sevens, the Anointed One will be put to death, and will have nothing. What could that possibly have meant to a young Jesus? What could that possibly have meant to Jesus, after He was filled with the Holy Spirit and sent out to do mission and ministry? He knew, if He was the Anointed One, at some point, He would be cut off. The language in Hebrew, to be cut off, is to be killed. So Daniel as a prophet informed the Messiah Himself as to what His ministry was going to be, and it would involve dying for the sake of others, not for Himself. So that's Daniel influencing Jesus.

Not only that, Daniel probably influenced Jesus in His understanding of ending the sacrificial system. Daniel 8:11-13, Daniel 9:27, Daniel 11:31, Daniel 12:11 all make reference, one way or another, to the sacrificial system being ended or interrupted. Why do you think Jesus would go into Jerusalem and kick tables over? Because He's got Daniel running through His mind. He's thinking, "I'm the Anointed One, I need to do a sign now that the sacrificial system is coming to an end." And then He knew the consequences. That was probably the key reason why His enemies started to plot His death.

Not only that, there's even more reason to think that Jesus was strongly influenced by Daniel. If Daniel was important to Jesus, Daniel should be important to us. There are 25 references alone in Matthew's gospel to Jesus describing Himself as the Son of Man. "The Son of Man came to serve and not be served." ¹⁰ He says it over and over again¹¹. 'The Son of Man', 'the Son of Man', and there's a particular part of Daniel that Jesus would have had in His mind, and He even quotes this when Jesus was on trial. This is what Daniel 7:13-14 says,

13 'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. **14** He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

10 Matthew 20:28

11 Matthew 8:20, 12:8, 12:32, 12:40, 13:41, 16:27, 19:28, 20:18, 24:30, 24:44, 25:31, Mark 2:28, 8:38, 10:45, 14:62, Luke 9:58, 12:8, 18:8, 19:10 John 3:14, 30:31 – all from NIV Study Bible concordance

When Jesus would have read this passage from Daniel 7, He would have known that He is the rock that is going to be thrown at all the empires of the Earth, and that He would be given an everlasting Kingdom. He was going to be the Son of Man approaching the Ancient of Days, coming to God, not coming from God in the story, but coming to God as an offering, the Son of Man being presented before God as a sacrifice. So when Jesus makes reference to the Son of Man, He's talking about the Son of Man as a sacrifice, who would then receive the Kingdom of God forever. You see, Daniel is so important that Jesus quotes him, over and over again.

Now some of you may wonder, how does this all fit with prophecy in the Old Testament, and did Jesus then contrive some of that? I would say that there are some things in the Old Testament that Jesus obviously *couldn't* fulfil intentionally, and there are some things that He *did* fulfil intentionally.

- Most obviously you can't intentionally fulfil the date of your birth or the place of your birth, Jesus couldn't control that.
- Jesus couldn't control soldiers casting lots for His clothes,
- but He could ride in on a donkey, as the Messiah,
- He could disrupt sacrifices,
- and He could declare Himself the Son of Man, in every Gospel account by the way.

But particularly to do with timing, one thing Jesus couldn't do, He couldn't decide on the time of His arrival as a human being. Guess what, the approximate time, as best as we can measure, from the rebuilding of Jerusalem, after the end of the first exile, to the coming of Jesus is about 490 years. 490 years, just like Gabriel predicted. Gabriel predicted exactly that the Messiah would come, the Anointed One would come, He would be cut off, put to death and have nothing. And then at the end, the city would fall.

Let's have our slide five now, I wanted to talk to you about the sharp end, the sharp end of what happened at the end of the story. So slide five, the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple. You will know this from looking at the prophecies of Jesus Himself, that He predicted the destruction of the Temple, and the destruction of the city. He said, "All of this is going to happen within this generation." And we have a precise date for that. There is no equivocation over when this happened. We know that in AD 70 Titus, who was the son of the Emperor at the time, swept into Jerusalem, besieged it, destroyed the city, burned the Temple to the ground and crucified thousands and thousands of Jews. That's exactly what it says in Daniel 9:26:

Dan 9:26
...The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: war will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.



26 After the sixty-two “sevens”, the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: war will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.

This is how it was going to end. So we know that all the other things, so those six promises, those six fulfilments, need to happen before the destruction. The only thing that fits historically before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple is the appearing of Messiah, Jesus, the appearing of the One who came pretty much 490 years after Gabriel had predicted. This is really, really precise timeline prediction, describing the timeline of Israel, and after the destruction, the end of Israel's story. Like Paul said in Romans [5:6], "At just the right time, Christ died for the ungodly."

Just think about that at this Christmas time. Think about Gabriel, think about Gabriel arriving to announce to Mary, that she's going to conceive the Messiah. Gabriel had been carrying this in his head for 490 years. He'd already told Daniel once, and now he was telling the woman who was going to bear the very one who was coming to fulfil it all, at just the right time. Despite empire after empire after empire coming and going and coming and going. I don't know about you, but I sometimes feel overwhelmed by human history, by present history, you kind of scratch your heads and think, "What's 2021 going to be like?" We had no idea what 2020 was going to be like. What on earth is 2021 going to be like? And yet when we look at this story, we can be 100% sure that God does things at just the right time. No human intervention can deflect God. No empire can come and go and change the timeline that God has in mind. He brings Messiah just when He chooses, just at the right time.

So I'm wanted to conclude with some thoughts as we head towards Christmas. What can we learn as we study Daniel? What can we learn as we hear the Gabriel of the Old Testament, and think of the Gabriel who announced good news to Mary?

- The first point I want to say as we conclude: Daniel was someone who sought God in prayer, and he sought God in prayer earnestly. He was longing for God to come. He was longing for true change. Where is our own heart in seeking God? Daniel discovered, God responds to longing, heartfelt prayer.
- The second thing to consider, are we seeking God's bigger answer in Christ, or are we focused on short-term issues? Daniel was presently focused on the end of exile and simply returning to Jerusalem, and Gabriel told him a whole lot more. Gabriel said, "There's a bigger story that I want you to be aware of. There's a bigger issue at stake. And it's to do with the Anointed One." To what extent are we prepared to settle our own stories down here, and focus on the story of Jesus Christ as our true compass bearing, as our true north? Are we hearing for ourselves, what God is doing in this time? Are we hearing from God for ourselves, for our church, what God is doing in this time?

In the Christmas newsletter that I put together, the letter I wrote thanking people for their contributions through 2020, I made a point of saying, "What's God been saying to us through 2020? What's the timeline for our church, our present, and where are we going?" God has His own plans. They will inevitably happen. To what extent are we prepared to step into God's timeline for our church too?

Prayerful Response

So I just want to move into a time of response now, a time of prayer. So let's just be still. You may need time to revisit some of the references I've made, but let's pray for now, let's just be quiet.

Father, would You help us to see the bigger picture?

Would You turn our eyes away from short-term confusion and uncertainty and help us to look into the face of the One who is in charge of time?

Father God, we thank You for this amazing prophecy from the angel Gabriel. We thank You, Lord, that centuries before, Daniel was told of empires that would rise and fall and rise and fall, and then the Kingdom would come through the Anointed One. We thank You, that You know the end from the beginning.

Father God, we praise You for the amazing gift of the Messiah. We can only imagine the excitement of Gabriel telling Mary that it's all going to begin through her. And he knew the story. Lord, help us to enter into the story of Messiah coming.

And I want to focus, Lord, on Gabriel's prophecy of the Anointed One who was cut off, who would have nothing for Himself. We thank You, Jesus, that You

put an end to sin. We thank You, Jesus, that You atoned for all wickedness. We thank You, Lord, that You fulfilled everything. We thank You, Lord, You anointed the Most Holy Place with Your own blood. You fulfilled it all. You are the most perfect Messiah at just the right time.

And so, O Lord Jesus, in the light of what God has done, and of God's control over all things, would You cause us now, just in a moment of quiet, to submit our own timeline to You, to lay down our own agendas and to submit to Your timeline?

Lord Jesus, if You could be on time 2,000 years ago, we can trust You for 2020, and 2021, and 2022, until the end of our days. Lord, we trust You. We trust You with the immediate circumstances. We trust You with Your plan for us, for our church, for this town. In Jesus' Name, we pray. Amen.

Intercessions

I'm going to hand over now to Roger and Heather for our intercessions.

[Roger Homes:] So we are now going to come to a time of intercession. So let's pray.

First of all we want to pray about Christmas. We just thank You, Lord, for Jesus who came as a child. Thank You, Lord, that He grew up, and thank You for His life. Thank You also for His death on the Cross for us. And Lord, it's a bit unusual this year, Christmas is going to be a lot quieter for a lot of people this year, we just want to pray, Lord, for our family members and neighbours, our friends, that this unusual Christmas, that they would reflect on the real meaning of what it's all about.

We shall just pause now and give you an opportunity to think of any friends, family members or neighbours that you want to bring to God, that the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection, this year, would be real to them.

[Heather Homes:] Yes, Father God, we recognise that 2020 has been so far, a difficult year for so many people, but Lord God, I want to thank You this morning for Your faithfulness, for Your hands upon our lives, for Your love towards us, and for helping us to stay focused on You and helping us to be faithful towards You. Lord God, I pray that You would help us to sustain that in these coming months, even though we've got difficult things ahead. I pray that You would help us to keep our eyes focused on You, and our feet firmly on Your rock.

And Father, we also recognise that our government have had a testing time. Our government have had to make quite big decisions. And they're dealing with a pandemic that they've never dealt with. And they haven't had past history in how to deal with it. And I want to thank You for our government, Lord God, thank You that they have made the decisions that they've made, and I do pray that You would help our government as they go forward in this journey, to be wise in the decisions that they make. And we especially pray for Brexit at this time, where they are struggling to come to a compromise, or a decision with the EU. We pray that they would continue to work their way through the Brexit talks with a good decision, and a solid decision, so that our country could go ahead knowing that we're in a good place.

But, Lord God, we thank You, that even though they're asked to give way and situations change, whether it's Brexit or the pandemic, I want to thank You this morning that You're faithful and You're in authority and You are in power. And I pray that we would not lose sight of Your greatness and Your goodness and Your faithfulness through these difficult times. Thank You, that You never move the goal posts. You never move where You stand, even though we move as the situation around us moves. So help us, Lord, in our personal journeys at this time. Amen.

[Roger:] I'm just going to finish off by thinking of those that we know this particular time who may be ill, or maybe they're alone, or maybe in fact they might have been bereaved this particular year. I just pray for God's comfort to be upon them. So let's just bring those people to God now.

Lord God, we bring all these prayers to You now in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Conclusion and Blessing

[Andrew:] Amen. Thank you, Roger, thank you, Heather.

Just a few words to finish with, then, as we come to the end of our time together. There are many people I'd like to say thank-you to at the end of this calendar year before we head to actual Christmas Day. Thank you again to Michelle and others, the wardens. Thank you to people like Hamish behind the scenes, just putting together transcripts of what the services have been, putting things on the website so people can access them easily. Thank you, Hamish. Thank you to so many people trying to facilitate things in the building using Quiet Space, even though that's been on and off and limited. Thank you to group leaders, thank you to community leaders. Thank you to people behind the scenes, texting, social distance walking, keeping in touch with people who are alone. It's been very much appreciated by so many people. So God bless you for that.

Today's talk, and today's reading has probably been quite a complex matter, maybe it's the first time you've ever gone into it. Can I encourage you to get the richness of what we've heard today, go back and listen again or go and read Daniel, I want to encourage you, maybe as a Christmas devotion, read Daniel in the light of the coming Messiah. It will be good for your soul, and it will help you to trust in God's timeline.

So, let me finish with a blessing, and then we'll have our final song.

Lord, we trust You. We put into Your hands ourselves, our loved ones, our finances, our health. And may the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.
Amen.

Thank you. See you on Christmas Day.

Carol: Once in Royal David's City

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|---|---|
| <p>1. Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her Baby
In a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little Child.</p> <p>2. He came down to earth from Heaven,
who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable,
And His cradle was a stall;
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.</p> | <p>3. And, through all His wondrous childhood,
He would honour and obey,
Love and watch the lowly maiden,
In whose gentle arms He lay:
Christian children all must be
Mild, obedient, good as He.</p> <p>4. For He is our childhood's pattern;
Day by day, like us He grew;
He was little, weak and helpless,
Tears and smiles like us He knew;
And He feeleth for our sadness,
And He shareth in our gladness.</p> |
|---|---|

5. And our eyes at last shall see Him,
Through His own redeeming love,
For that Child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in Heav'n above,
And He leads His children on
To the place where He is gone.

6. Not in that poor lowly stable,
With the oxen standing by,
We shall see Him; but in Heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high;
Where like stars His children crowned
All in white shall wait around.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (Veni Emmanuel) – original 8th or 9th century Latin words translated by John Mason Neal 1818-1866 (published 1861) – Public domain

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