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Unshaken\_ Daniel Chapter 7\_The Long Game  
Dr. Mark Batterson

In 1884, Edwin Abbott wrote a brilliant little book 'Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions', it looks like this. I read it about 20 years ago. The entire book is an extra dimensional thought experiment. Abbott calls, one dimension, line land. All you can conceive of is one dimension called length and you can only move in one direction - forward. He calls two dimensions - flatland and you can now move sideways because you add breadth to length. Then Abbot introduces this mystical, magical place called 'space land'. But it's very hard for line landers and flatlanders to conceive of anything above them, because they have never looked up. Why would they? They have never conceived of this thing called height, this third-dimension. Now they sense this mysterious presence, but all they do is look around them and wonder what it could be. That's when this extra dimensional being appropriately named 'Sphere' enters the equation. Abbot calls him a fit apostle for the gospel of three dimensions. He reveals himself to the line landers and flatlanders. He says, "You do not know what space is. You think it is of two-dimensions only, but I have come to announce to you a third dimension." Hold that thought.

In physics, every dimension of space time is called a degree of freedom. In one dimensional line land you have the freedom to move forward. In two dimensional flatland you have the freedom to move forward and sideways. In three dimensional space land you have the freedom to maneuver forward, sideways and upwards. Every dimension adds a degree of freedom, allowing you to maneuver in a new way, and every degree of freedom redefines what is and what is not possible. Casey Cole says it this way, "You can leap over a four dimensional barrier in five dimensional space, you can untie an eight dimensional knot in nine dimensional space. Magical things are possible by a mere change in the dimensions of space."

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus gives his inaugural address, he is in his hometown of Nazareth, he goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath. The scroll is open to the book of Isaiah and Jesus says, "I have come to set captives free." Now we tend to think of that in legal terms, this is our get out of jail free card. And listen, that is one dimension of the freedom that we find in Christ. We are justified by faith - 'just as if I had never sinned' our sin is forgiven and forgotten by virtue of what Christ accomplished on the cross. But I want us to think of this in terms of physics. Listen to me, Jesus came to add a degree of freedom to your life, to add an extra dimensional reality to your life. He enables us to escape the space time limitations and maneuver in a new way with the help of the Holy Spirit. That's what the gifts of the Spirit are all about. And when we exercise those gifts, healing and faith and prophecy, words of wisdom, words of knowledge, heaven invades Earth, eternity invades time, God moves in miraculous ways in ways that, well, they're just impossible in four dimensions of space time.

Now, let me juxtapose that with this 2 Peter 3:8, "*With the Lord a day is like thousand years and a thousand years, are like a day.*" That makes no sense in four dimensions of space time. Newsflash, God does not exist within the space time dimensions he created. God is the eternal now. To borrow a phrase from theologian Paul Tillich; 'the challenge is this, all we've ever known is four dimensions of space time so it's very difficult for us to conceive of anything else.'

We sense this mysterious presence, don't we? And then we look all around but we don't have a category and so we often explain it away, or we anthropomorphize God, we create God in our image, we put God in our four dimensional box and what we end up with in the words of A. W. Tozer is a God who can never surprise, us never astonish us, never overwhelm us, never transcend us. How much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be said G. K. Chesterton, if the hammer of a higher God would smash your small cosmos. That is my prayer for you this weekend.

Two big ideas up front. One, God is bigger than big. The technical term is transcendence, "*As the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts declares the Lord.*" Isaiah 55:9. Astrophysicists estimate the commoving distance of the universe from one side to the other 93 billion light years. That distance is immeasurable and that's the point. "He is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine according to his power that's at work within us." Your best thought on your best day falls 93 billion light years short of how great and how good God really is. God - bigger than big which is amazing but let's be honest, a little intimidating too. So here's some good news. God is also closer than close; technical term imminence. He is not just God most high He is God most nigh and you see this in Psalm 36. God's love is meteoric, his loyalty astronomic, his purpose titanic, his verdicts oceanic yet in his largeness in his transcendence nothing gets lost, not a man, not a mouse slips through the cracks. God is great, not too because nothing is too big God is great because nothing is too small. He is God most high. He is God most nigh.

Well, what does any of that have to do with the book of Daniel? I'm glad you asked. Let me connect some extra dimensional dots and we're gonna pick up right where we left off last weekend, Daniel in the lion's den. According to the Talmud along with everything God spoke into existence during these six days of creation, God made certain provisions. He commanded the Red Sea to split apart for Israel. He commanded the sun and moon to stand still for Joshua. He commanded the Baltimore Ravens to feed Elijah, the fish to spit out Jonah, the fire not to burn Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and he commanded that the lions would shut their mouths. All of this God declared made provision for during those six days of creation. Now the Talmud much of which was compiled during this Babylonian exile by the way, it's not on par with Scripture. This is rabbinic tradition for better for worse but I find this fascinating and I think it's in keeping with the way God works.

If you're taking notes jot this down when God gives a vision he makes provision. We have seen this so many times and so many ways as a church, this is Ephesians 2:10, my life verse. "*We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works prepared for us in advance.*" Now we exist

within this construct called time so we think, forwards. God exists outside of these dimensions he created, and he actually works in the opposite direction. So we think forwards but God is working backwards. What we call history is teleology. It's a Greek word often translated perfect or complete. It's Philippians 1:6, "He began a good work and you will carry it to completion", teleos in the Greek. Imagine a giant jigsaw puzzle to teleos is the final piece of that puzzle. It's every piece perfectly in place. God begins with the end in mind, not just the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. And if you want to understand prophecy, I think we start right here.

Now with that as a backdrop, we're gonna jump right into Daniel seven, considered by many Jewish scribes to be the greatest chapter in the Hebrew Scriptures. The first half is biographical. We've got six court tales; we've been talking about it over the last six weeks. The second half is apocalyptic. We take a hard right turn in chapter seven we transition from history to prophecy. It's almost like we go from flatland to space land. Daniel puts on his prophetic hat, pulls back the curtain a time, peers into the future and reveals what he sees. Four visions, we're going to talk about it over the next six weeks. We're going to talk some eschatology a theology of the end times, we'll talk angelology more angelic activity in the book of Daniel than any other book of the Bible.

Ready or not here we go. Verse one, *"In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and saw visions as he lay on his bed. He wrote down the dream, and this is what he saw."* So we flashback to the first year Belshazzar this predates the lion's den, predates handwriting on the wall best guess, right around 653 BC two footnotes, right here.

There are some who would argue for a second century authorship, which of course means Daniel could not have written this book and I understand those arguments. I would hold to a sixth century authorship, in large part because Jesus seems to attribute authorship to Daniel in Matthew 24:15. I also think it's noteworthy that we transition from third person history in these first six chapters to more of a first person prophecy in chapter seven. Honestly, I think some higher critics have a hard time believing that Daniel could have prophesied what would happen in subsequent centuries with such precision. I think that's where we fall back on 2 Peter 2:21 prophecy never had its origin in the will of man. But prophets, though human spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

One more footnote, first half and second half of Daniel form this fascinating chiasm. Chapter two and chapter seven both contain a vision of four kingdoms with one distinction. In Daniel two Daniel is the interpreter of dreams in Daniel seven Daniel is the dreamer of dreams. And it says he wrote down the dream. We're going to talk about that in our post message Q & A.

Verse two, *"In my vision that night, I, Daniel, saw a great storm churning the surface of a great sea, with strong winds blowing in every direction."*

To the ancient reader the mention of the sea would have conjured up images of impending evil. A battle is brewing between right and wrong, between good and evil, political and social agitations are stirring up the nations of the world that hits pretty close to home. What do we do? What do we do when political winds blow when social wind storm what do we do as followers of Christ? To me book a Daniel is all about dual citizenship. Most of us citizens of the United States of America and I believe we have a civic duty to exercise our rights and responsibilities as Americans. That said, we are a non partisan church in other words, we don't affiliate with party or candidate; lots of people on both sides of the aisle at NCC. But non partisan doesn't mean we don't care. It doesn't mean that the political process is unimportant, so many of you have devoted your lives to public service just like Daniel. Listen, we honor you. We pray for you. And we won't always agree on absolutely everything. And that's where we flip the coin, as followers of Christ and we remind ourselves that our primary citizenship is in this thing called the kingdom of God. We don't put our hope in hash tags. We don't put our faith in political ideologies. I am in Christ, Christ is in me. That, my friends is the hope of glory and this is the prayer that we pray. *"Our Father who art Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."* We pray that prayer and when we do, we are praying that an extra dimensional reality called heaven would invade Earth that an extra dimensional reality called eternity would invade time. And that is precisely what's going to happen in verse 18. We'll get there. We'll get there.

Verse three, Daniel has a vision of four beasts coming up out of the sea in succession. And then in verse eight, a little horn comes out of 10 horns, toots his horn, speaks with tremendous arrogance. Verse 24, says that He will speak words against the Most High God and that he will wear out the saints. And we're gonna unpack some of that eschatology in week nine. In fact, we'll identify who that little horn is. And so come back in two weeks.

Here's the bottom line. Daniel is giving a forecast of these four kingdoms that come out of the sea. And it's not a great forecast, difficult days are ahead. This is not what the prophet wants to speak. This is not what the people want to hear. It's bad and it's going to get worse. But just when it seems like all is lost, Daniel has another vision that totally flips the script. In verse nine it's almost like a set change in theater. We transition from these four beasts coming up out of the sea, to a courtroom to a throne room, and it's a change of characters. It's a change of perspective.

*"As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze."*

You know what this sounds like? To me this sounds like a prophet in four dimensions of space time who was having a hard time describing a God who is omni-dimensional. This is the only place in all of scripture where God is called the Ancient of Days. I want you to notice where he is. Where is the Ancient of Days in the midst of all these earthly uprisings? Where is he in the midst of all of this

rebellion against everything that is good and right and just? I will tell you where he is. God is still on his throne.

And it gets better. Verse 13, *"Behold, on the clouds of heaven came one, like a son of man."* In Hebrew, ben-'adam, that designation used 107 times in the Old Testament, found 81 times in the gospels. Three primary titles given to Jesus in the Gospels, he is the son of David which references his royalty. He is the Son of God which delineates his divinity and he is the Son of Man, which underscores his humanity but there is so much more to it than that. When Jesus self identifies as the Son of man, and he does it 14 times in Mark's Gospel alone, he is saying, I am who Daniel saw, I am the fulfillment of this prophecy, I am the one who serves the cloud. I am the one who saves the day I am the one who writes every wrong. It's almost like Jesus raises his hand, all dominion, all glory, all authority read it in verse 14, all peoples all nations, all languages will serve me my dominion is an everlasting dominion.

And so here's Daniel he finds himself living between these two alternate realities, these two visions. You've got this earthly reality of political uprisings and social unrest. I mean, it feels like the world is falling apart feels like evil has the upper hand. Houston, we have a problem. But then there is this vision of an extra dimensional reality. This heavenly vision, the Ancient of Days seated on his throne and the Son of Man surfing the clouds. Simply put, God's got this and God's got you.

Now, is it just me? Or does it feel like we find ourselves with a similar tension right now? We feel this tension between our earthly reality and our heavenly theology. We are politically polarized and we're headed into an election. We are spatially distant. And honestly, this COVID curve is headed in the wrong direction. Tremendous tension around racism feels like our nation in a sense is being pulled apart at the seams, one third of Americans struggling with anxiety or depression. I want you to know if you're part of that one third, you are not alone. Listen, even prophets like Daniel, struggle with anxiety.

Check this out in verse 15, *"My spirit was grieved and anxious within me, the visions in my head alarmed me and agitated me."* If you aren't a little alarmed if you aren't a little agitated, are you paying attention to what's happening right now? That doesn't mean that we don't have the peace of God that passes all understanding guarding our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, we do. The question is what is God up to? Listen, I think God is waking us up. I think God is shaking us up. I think God is shaking, our false sense of security and our false sense of identity. I think God is shaking our false assumptions and false narratives. I think God is shaking our false idols and false ideologies. Guess what? That's not fun. But we find ourselves in a critical cultural moment. We find ourselves at a critical juncture as a nation. And I'll come back to that. Daniel says, My spirit was grieved within me. Even prophets grieve. In fact, they might grieve a little bit more than the rest of us. "To the prophet" said, Abraham Heschel, "even a minor injustice assumes cosmic proportion."

Here's the key. And this is a word for someone this weekend; you cannot get stuck in the stages of grief. Now, please hear me grief is as unique as your fingerprint. And we've got to give allowance to one

another to process grief in a personal way. And listen, if you try to shortcut grief, you will short circuit your soul. You have to walk through the process but you can't get stuck in denial or in anger or in bargaining or in depression. Listen If you feel like you're stuck, we want to help you we want to come alongside you [NCC.re/COVIDcare](https://www.ncc.edu/COVIDcare). And right now if you're at our online campus our prayer team ready and waiting to pray with you and for you.

This week Jo Carmichael, a part of our team at NCC shared an amazing devotional on our upper zoom about moving through the stages of grief. And she mentioned a sixth stage I didn't realize that a six stage had been added by David Kessler. Stage five is acceptance but stage six is meaning.

Let me share a testimony with you. Oh man. 20 years ago today July 23, 2000, I was standing right here, not here but I was preaching at movie theaters that Union Station. I got up behind that pulpit about five minutes into the message this intense abdominal pain. I literally had to walk out doubled over. Pastor Joel popped up and pinched hit for me. 12 hours later an MRI revealed ruptured intestines. Sepsis had been setting in; doctors said we got to do emergency surgery. I spent two days on a respirator. I lost 25 pounds in a week. I could have, I should have died at Washington Hospital Center 20 years ago today. Worst day of my life, hardest year of my life, surgery, another surgery. I mean my whole life revolved around trying to recuperate, a lot of scars to remind me of the pain and suffering. I would never want to go through it again. I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world, best day of my life.

Pastor Mark what are you talking about? You take very few things for granted when you have a near death experience. And you're grateful for just about everything especially your wife, kids. I love this church too. I don't know what you're walking through and I do not want to make light of it. These stages of grief they're hard to move through but somehow somehow, with God's grace, as you confront the brutal facts of maybe what was done to you that was so wrong that it makes me mad. You gotta approach it with unwavering faith and believe that there is a God, who can heal, and a God who can deliver and a God who can redeem. In Jesus name. Amen.

Verse 18, *"The saints have the most high God shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever."* We don't believe in happily ever after we believe in happily forever after. The question is, what do we do in the meantime, what do we do with all of this uncertainty with all of this anxiety? Listen, I don't have all the answers, but I know a good place to start. You pray like it depends on God and your work like it depends on you.

The purpose of eschatology, and we'll dig deeper in two weeks but the purpose of eschatology is not figuring out plot lines and timelines. The goal is preparing ourselves for the second coming of Jesus Christ. Eschatology is a great reminder - get ready for the part that God wants you to play. Do everything within your power to see his kingdom come, his will be done right here, right now.

Let me use this COVID crisis as a case study, lots of prognosticators, estimating death tolls, timing of a vaccination, giving us best case, worst case. Listen, we have no idea how long this is going to last. We're not sure what the ripple effect will be on society or economy or the church for that matter. But I want to push this envelope a little bit. I think uncertainty can be crippling if you aren't careful all you do is watch the news. We are not a people who let things happen we are a people who make things happen. We are a people who pray like it depends on God and work like it depends on us. And so listen, I think we take all the recommended precautions. I think we wear masks, we spatially distance, and we do it for the most vulnerable amongst us. That's how we love our neighbor. But I would take it a step further. Don't take it sitting down. Listen, I think we do everything within our power to prepare ourselves in case we get it. I started running several months ago to get my lungs into shape. I ran a marathon last week over seven days, not one day. Why? Well, I'm not training for a marathon. All the marathons are canceled. What I'm doing is trying to get my lungs as strong as they can be just in case I get COVID-19. I went on a diet this week to optimize my immune system. Listen, sleep is a huge deal - it releases proteins that help your body heal stress. If you don't manage it, it will disarm your immune system. Exercise, it boosts our immuno surveillance. All of these things are critical. I guess the question is, what does any of that have to do with eschatology? Right? Well, I think we take the same approach. Listen, I can't tell you when Jesus is going to return, I have no idea. And that isn't the issue. The issue is this. Are you ready? Are you ready?

Listen, I have never felt more daily dependence upon the Holy Spirit in my life. We need to be Spirit filled and Spirit led every single day. We need to get into God's word, get God's word into us. We need to get into prayer. Pray like it depends on God and we need to love like it depends on us.

Verse 28, we're going to close with this. *"Here is the end of the matter."* And can I just remind us don't lose faith in the end of the story. *"As for me, Daniel, my [waking] thoughts troubled and alarmed me and my cheerfulness of countenance was changed within me; but I kept the matter in my heart and mind."*

Listen, I am concerned about our countenance as a country. We need an extra measure of grace right now. We need an extra measure of wisdom right now. We need an extra measure of courage right now. This is not a moment for us to bury our head in the sand. This is a moment to stand in the gap. The word priest means bridge builder. We are the peacemakers. We are the reconciler. We are the repairers of the breach, Isaiah 58; If you have lost your courage, lost your faith, lost your cheerfulness of countenance. How do you get it back? How do you get that back? I know the place to start. I want to pronounce a blessing on your life.

I want you to listen to these words. *"May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you."* And here it is. *"May the Lord turn his countenance towards you and give you the peace that passes, all understanding."* That is our confidence. That is how we don't lose faith. That is how we prepare for his coming. That is how we live our lives every single day.

If you're at our online campus right now, and you have never surrendered your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, I want to challenge you to do it. You're in your car, you're at home, you're at the gym I want you to mark this moment because I want you to know, if you would surrender all of you to all of him it will change your life forever. If's that you would you just raise a hand right now? Would you take that step of faith? And we're going to sing a song; our band is coming right now. We're going to sing a song and it is going to be our declaration of faith. Maybe you're in one of those stages of grief; I believe that God is going to take you to the next stage. Maybe you feel like a line lander or flatlander God, where are you? Would you look up today? I believe that his healing and his deliverance want to invade the reality of your life right now. In Jesus name, Amen