I thought very seriously about just kind of stopping at Daniel 6 and not finishing on, but I deeply believe what 2 Timothy 3:16 says which is that all scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, and training in righteousness, so I decided I’m going to push through this, and God has opened my eyes to some powerful things, but we sort of approach apocalyptic visions in a little bit different way. Last week I said a few things about apocalyptic visions that are useful to know, and if you missed that you might want to go back and catch up just so you have that framework. We are going to throw up on the screen a few different ways you can listen to last week’s message: you can go to MissionHills.org, you can subscribe to the Mission Hills podcast on iTunes wherever you listen to podcasts, or you can download the Mission Hills app. And the reason I’m encouraging you to do that is because I said some things about how we think about apocalyptic visions. I don’t have time to go over them all today, so we are going to go ahead and jump into the second vision that Daniel got.

Daniel 8:1 says this, in the third year of King Belshazzar’s reign, I, Daniel, had a vision after the one that already appeared to me, so he’s acknowledging this is a second vision, and it’s the second vision during King Belshazzar’s reign, and that’s actually a significant timeframe because what was going on in Daniel’s life at this point means that Daniel received these visions when he was in a period of suffering. Daniel was suffering because he was friendless, powerless and clueless about what the future held. I say that he was friendless because at this point, all of the appearances indicate that Daniel’s friend, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, you may know those names from childhood stories -- they have died. Daniel is in his eighties at this point. He’s outlived most of his contemporaries, and he’s at a place where he’s really kind of alone. He’s a prison of war in Babylon still. His fellow prisoners of war all kind of died off, and so Daniel’s alone.

He had another friend he made Babylon. That was King Nebuchadnezzar. He became Nebuchadnezzar’s right-hand man over time, but at this point, Nebuchadnezzar has died, and Daniel’s been pushed out, and so he’s powerless. He no longer has a position of prominence or influence, and he’s been kicked to the curb by Belshazzar. He has no idea what the future holds. He’s clueless about the future. How many of you have ever felt one of these things at any point in your life? You know that’s a hard thing to feel, right? To be friendless or to be powerless or to be clueless about what the future holds -- any one of those probably signals a period of suffering, but if you have ever been in a place where you had all three at the same time, then you understand that Daniel is in a period of very intense suffering, and it’s in to this period of suffering that God speaks these visions, and I believe it was in these visions that Daniel was given, he learned something important about suffering that allowed him to face his circumstances, and not just survive his circumstances, but to thrive.

That’s kind of the prize of the day, the prize that we are looking for. What did Daniel come to understand about suffering that allowed him to face his difficult circumstances and to thrive in the midst of them? Daniel 8:2 says in my vision I saw myself in the Citadel of Susa in the Providence of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai canal. And those are some very specific places, and they may not seem terribly significant, but maybe the most important is this province of Elam. The province of Elam was a Babylonian province. It was about 200-miles away from the capital. And during the Babylonian Empire, Elam was not a very important place, but when the Babylonian Empire fell to the Persian Empire, Elam became the capital. What that’s doing for Daniel is, it’s sort of telling him what you are about to see isn’t about the time period you are living in right now. This is something that’s coming in the future, which is interesting, and if I had been Daniel I would have been like, that’s great, but what about now?

Give me something I can use in my circumstances right now. I don’t need to know about the distant future. Tell me what’s going to make a difference in my present suffering, and yet, I believe that’s what God is doing. He’s giving him a vision of something that’s in the distant future, but in that vision, there’s something profound that’s supposed to impact Daniel even in his present circumstances. I looked, he says in verse 3. I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. I watched the ram as it charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it, and none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great.
I should probably acknowledge at this point that we have some CSU fans in the house. Come back. If you are a CSU fan and you heard about this ram kicking butt and taking names, you may be off on a tangent -- the ram's about to die, okay, so -- let's just go ahead and break that mental association as quickly as possible. What Daniel is seeing here, he's seeing a picture of two empires that were very closely related called Media and Persia, and they are being represented by this one animal. The shorter horn is the king of Media. His name is Darius. We saw him a few weeks ago in Daniel. The longer horn is a king by the name of Cyrus. He grew up later, and he charged he charged toward the west and the north and the south. He came from the east and he spread his empire across this vast range. He was a very great king, and no one could stand against his power, but that was just for a time.

Verse 5, as I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole Earth without touching the ground. Now Daniel is getting this vision in the mid 500 B.C. period. What he's seeing is not going to happen until the 300 B.C. period, but almost every scholar I know believes that what Daniel is seeing at this point, is he's seeing the rise of the Greek Empire. And the rise of the Greek Empire was led by a particular king represented by the prominent horn here by the name of Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great came from the west and he conquered the entire known world in a period of about three to four years. It happened so fast, it was unheard of and that's probably what's represented by the idea that he crossed the whole Earth without touching the ground. He was going so fast. His kingdom rose so quickly, nobody had ever seen anything like it.

Verse 6 says it came toward the two-horned ram that I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at it in a great rage. I saw it attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against it; the goat knocked it to the ground and trampled on it, and none could rescue the ram from its power.

Daniel has just seen the Greek Empire destroy what was left of the Media and Persian Empire and take over the world. Verse 8 says the goat became very great, but at the height of its power, the large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven. It says at the height of its power, the large horn was broken off. So, at the height of his power, Alexander the Great died, and that's exactly what happened in history. Three or four years into his campaign, Alexander the Great contracted some kind of disease, nobody is exactly sure what it was, he died suddenly, and he died so young that he left no heirs. And because he didn't have any heirs, his kingdom basically fell apart and his generals began to fight over which pieces of the empire would each one hold, and eventually four generals represented by the four prominent horns eventually came up, and they became the leaders of what was left of the Greek Empire as it fell apart.

Verse 9, out of one of them came another horn. It started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land. Again, almost every Bible scholar I know believes what Daniel is seeing here, even though it's a few hundred years in the future, he's seeing the rise of a man by the name of Antiochus IV. He was represented as starting small because he wasn't a legitimate heir of any of the generals. His nephew was the legitimate heir of one of these pieces of the Greek empire, but through some political maneuvering, he managed to get his nephew pushed off, and he grew, so he started small, but then he grew in power. He began to conquer more lands, and he became much more aggressive toward the nation of Israel. That's what's represented by growing towards the Beautiful Land. The Beautiful Land is the nation of Israel, and at this point Daniel must have really resonated with that language. It was the place that he missed the most. It was the place that he really never expected to be able to go back to. And now he's seeing that his family, his descendants and his relatives at some point are going to face great suffering at the hands of this arrogant king.

Verse 10 says that it, that's the little horn, it grew until it reached the host of heavens, and it threw down some of the starry host to the Earth and it trampled on them. It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord. It took away the daily sacrifice from the Lord, and his sanctuary was thrown down. This description is interesting because if we are going to be perfectly honest with each other, it kind of sounds like God is losing, doesn't it? I mean look at the language. Antiochus, the little horn grew and threw down some of the starry host. Starry host is associated as quickly as possible. What Daniel is seeing here, he's seeing a picture of two empires that were very closely related called Media and Persia, and they are being represented by this one animal. The shorter horn is the king of Media. His name is Darius. We saw him a few weeks ago in Daniel. The longer horn is a king by the name of Cyrus. He grew up later, and he charged he charged toward the west and the north and the south. He came from the east and he spread his empire across this vast range. He was a very great king, and no one could stand against his power, but that was just for a time.

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So there is a statement here that he actually beat some angels. That doesn't have to be taken literally, the point is he's not just winning in an earthly realm, he seems to be winning battles in the spiritual realm too. It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the Lord's army. Who is the commander of the army of the Lord? That's the Lord, so this thing set itself up to be as great as the Lord, and if you were here last week, you may remember that I said at a certain point in his leadership, Antiochus IV said The Fourth is not a great nickname. I need a better nickname than The Fourth, and he settled on Epiphanes. That's going to be my nickname from now on. Everybody call me Epiphanes. Epiphanes means “God manifest.” So that's the nickname he chose for himself. Basically, hey, whenever I show up, just call me “God is in the house.” Do you see the arrogance of that? He insisted people recognize himself as God is in the house. He set himself up to be as great as the Lord. He took away the sacrifice from the Lord. What is being referred to there, at a certain point in his leadership, Antiochus actually forbade the Jews from making their morning and evening sacrifices. There were two sacrifices that were done on a daily basis at the temple in Jerusalem. There was a morning sacrifice. There was an evening sacrifice.

Antiochus forbade that from happening. He shut it down. But notice the language used here. It took away the daily sacrifice. It was like it snatched the sacrifices out of God's hands, and His, being the Lord's, the Lord's sanctuary was thrown down. Not only did he take away the daily sacrifices, but at a certain point he actually set up a pagan altar in the temple, and started sacrificing pigs, an unclean animal in the Jewish law, so
even if he allowed the daily sacrifices to resume, they couldn’t do them because the ground of the temple had been deconsecrated. They couldn’t use it for that, so the temple had been thrown down, but the important thing you need to recognize is the language. He threw down the starry host, he won spiritual victories. He set himself up to be as great as God. He took away from God the daily sacrifice. He threw the Lord’s sanctuary down. It really sounds like God is losing, doesn’t it? It’s supposed to. You go, why would God ever want it to sound like he was losing? The answer is because we often feel that way, don’t we?

I don’t mean in our heads. Like in our heads, we know God’s never losing, right? Like you are in church, so if I were to say to you, hey, does God ever lose? The answer’s going to be –

Congregation // No.

Craig // That was really weak.

[Laughter]

Craig // Imagine it like this -- guys, you will understand this. If your wife ever comes to you and says, hey, does this dress make me look fat? The answer is no! Like as quickly and emphatically as possible, right? You should have the same response if you are in church and somebody says, hey, is God losing?

Congregation // No!

Craig // Is God out of control?

Congregation // No!

Craig // In our heads, right? But there’s a difference between knowing that in our heads and feeling that in our hearts, and sometimes honestly, when suffering comes calling, when chaos invades our lives, we don’t really feel like God’s still in control. When you get the diagnosis of cancer, your kids go off the deep end, your marriage falls apart. You lose your job and you can’t find another one, you keep reading about school shootings, terrorist attacks. We don’t live in our heads at that moment. We live in our hearts, and our hearts often say, are you really in control, God? Are you really in charge? Because it doesn’t feel like you are. Honestly, it feels like you are losing.

And what God’s doing at this point is He’s saying, like I get it. I understand that sometimes you feel like that. I understand that sometimes that’s where you are, and that’s okay. God’s meeting us where we are because He wants to move us from where we are to where we need to be. That’s what God does. God meets us where we are in order to move us to where we need to be. And God’s a good father, so He knows the way you move someone from where they are to where they need to be is not to just tell them, don’t be there. Don’t feel like that. You need to change. That’s not real successful parenting. Like when I was the father of small children, I hated it when people gave my kids balloons. Some of you parents know exactly why, right? Inevitably, they let go of it, and it goes away, and they are devastated, right?

As a parent, you’re like, oh my goodness. It’s a balloon. A little bit of rubber and some helium. I can stick my hand down in between the seats of my car and probably pull up enough change to get you five of them. Why are you so upset, right? But that’s not how as a parent you move your kids from the moment of devastation to happiness again. You don’t look at them and say, stop feeling that way. You meet them where they are and you get down and say, I’m really sorry that happened. Oh, I know. That’s terrible. I get it. You are there. You are not just commiserating and sympathizing, but you are joining where they are, and then you can go, hey, let’s go get an ice cream cone. Let’s go get another balloon. You meet them where they are to move them to where they need to be. That’s what God’s doing. He says, I get it. Sometimes when suffering comes in, it really feels like I’m not on the throne anymore. It really feels like I’m out of control. It really feels like I’m losing, but that’s not the whole story, and then he begins to give us the rest of the story.

Verse 12 says this, because of rebellion, the Lord’s people and daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground. Do you see, there are two hints here that everything is not as it seems. Even though it might feel like God is out of control, the reality is that nothing could be farther from the truth. He says, this happened because of rebellion. That’s the rebellion of The Lord’s people. In other words, God isn’t being defeated. God is disciplining His people. His people have lost the sacrifices. The temple has been thrown down not because Antiochus is so powerful but because his people are in rebellion. They have chosen to live in disobedience. They have walked out from under God’s protection, and they have walked into danger, and God has allowed that to teach them the necessity of repentance, to get them to turn around and come back to Him.

He’s disciplining them because of their rebellion, but if He’s disciplining them, then who’s really in charge? God is. The daily sacrifice, His people and the daily sacrifice were given over to the little horn. They were given over to Antiochus. He didn’t take them from God, they were given to him by God because of the rebellion of his people, and the thing is, if God has given these things over to Antiochus, then they are his. You can’t
give something to somebody you don’t have control over, and so we begin to see these hints that all is not as it seems. Even though it feels like
God is out of control, the reality is that He isn’t. That’s something important that we have to grab a hold of in the midst of suffering. We have to
understand that God is in control even when it feels like He isn’t. Maybe you are here today and honestly, you are feeling like God is not in control.
Like you know in your head, maybe, that that’s not true, but in your heart, you’re feeling like, it sure seems like it.

Sometimes by faith we have to grab a hold of this truth that God is in control even when it seems like he isn’t, and God is beginning to give us the
hints of that truth.

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, how long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled? This vision concerning the
daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling under foot of the Lord’s people? How long?
I think that’s probably the most important part of this whole passage. I think that question is at the heart of what God wants us to understand
in the midst of whatever suffering we might be facing. I say that this is the most important part for two reasons. Number one, because it’s in the
dead center of the chapter. In ancient Near Eastern literature, whatever you found in the middle of something was typically the most important.
There are 27 verses here which means that verse 13 and 14 are in the dead center. I say this is really important. We need to pay attention to this.
I also say it’s really important and we need to pay attention to it because honestly, it’s the part of the passage that most speaks to our hearts when
we are suffering, because it’s a question.

Verse 14, he said to me it will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated, the sacrifices will start up again.
2,300. And I don’t know about you, but my first reaction to that is a little unfair. Like you were really specific with Daniel, right?
Daniel asks how long. I ask how long, I have never gotten an answer like that. And then I realized a couple of important things. First off, it’s not
quite as specific as you think it is because nobody’s quite sure what that means. It says 2,300 mornings and evenings, and there are two major
ways to interpret that. It could be 2,300 days. Pretty natural way to talk about days. The other option, though, is he’s talking about 2,300
mornings and evenings, in other words, morning and evening times, and in the context, what he’s dealing with here are the sacrifices, which took
place in the morning and the evening. So he could be talking about 2,300 of these morning and evening sacrifices, which would be 1,150 days.

So wait, which is it? 2,300 days or 1,150 days? No idea. Both of those actually fit with historical events, so we are not entirely sure. So it’s not as
specific as it seemed. Then I realized the much more important thing which was, why did Daniel care? This was hundreds of years in the future.
Daniel’s not getting an answer for how long his suffering was going to last. He was being told how long the suffering of God’s people was going to
last centuries in the future. Why would Daniel care? Because in this moment, God is speaking an unbelievably important truth to Daniel. That
truth is this -- there is always a countdown clock on suffering. Do you hear me? There is always a countdown clock -- there is always a moment
the suffering ends. There is always a timer that’s running, that if we are in God’s hands, and if God is on His throne, then no matter what suffering
we face, it’s always counting down to zero, and God’s watching the clock. Whether we can see the clock, whether we know when it’s going to hit
zero or not, there is a countdown clock on our suffering.

And this, I believe is the truth that Daniel began to wrestle with. You see, God’s people need to know that there is always a countdown clock on
our suffering. It was true for the people in second century B.C, and it mattered to them. It was true to Daniel, and it mattered to him, and it’s true
for you. Whatever it is that you’re suffering right now, there’s a countdown clock on it. Verse 15 says while I, Daniel, was watching the vision and
trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man. And I heard a man’s voice from the Ulai calling, Gabriel, tell this man the
meaning of the vision. As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and I fell prostrate. Son of man, he said to me, understand
that the vision concerns the time of the end.

And I have to stop at that point because the reality is that if you have spent much time in church, especially churches that ever talk about the end
times, when you hear the angel say this vision concerns the time of the end, it’s really natural for us to hear “the end of time.” In other words, the
end times. It’s the second coming of Jesus. That’s not what the angel is talking about. This has nothing to do with the end times. There may be
some patterns that get repeated in the Book of Revelation related to the second coming of Jesus, but when the angel here talks about the vision
concerning the time of the end, he’s not talking about the end times. He’s talking about the end of what? It’s the end of their suffering. There is a
countdown clock running on their suffering, and he says, I’m going to tell you about the time that the timer gets to zero.

And while he was speaking to me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground. And there’s something about that, that suggests that he’s
overwhelmed. Maybe it’s even symbolic of despair. And then he touched me and raised me to my feet. Daniel comes to life again. Daniel
understands something about suffering in this moment that allows him to come to life again, and to begin moving forward in a new and more faithful way. And he said I’m going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end. End of what? Their suffering. There’s a countdown timer on suffering. He says the two-horned ram, verse 20, that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. The shaggy goat is the king of Greece and the large horn between its eyes is the first king. The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power.

In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. I want you to notice, he says when rebels have become completely wicked. These rebels are God’s people. When they have become completely wicked, he says that’s when the countdown clock starts, and from that moment on it clicks away to zero at which point the suffering will end. The fierce looking king we talked about, Antiochus Epiphanes, a master of intrigue, he pushed his nephew off the throne through political maneuvering, he will become very strong, but not by his own power.

This is a reiteration of a truth we have seen time and time again through the Book of Daniel, and that is that all human authority is on loan from, who? It is on loan from God. As parents, our authority is on loan from God. As managers, our authority is on loan from God. As pastor, any authority I have is on loan from God. As governors, as kings, as presidents, our authority is on loan from God, but if it’s on loan from God, then who’s really in control? God is. It might look at times like God is out of control, but don’t be fooled, He is not. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people. That’s an interesting statement. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people. The mighty ones are God’s people. That feels contradictory. Then how does this arrogant upstart king destroy the mighty ones of God? And there is a little bit of sarcasm here because the point is, the people of God are supposed to be mighty because they have access to God’s power. They have access to God’s strength.

They should be unconquerable. They should be undefeatable. But what’s true of the people at this time? They are in what? They are in rebellion. Because they are in rebellion, they don’t have access to God’s power. When we are living in rebellion against God, His might is out of our reach. So there is a certain sarcasm. There is a sadness to this. The ones who should be mighty beyond imagination because they have access to all of God’s strength to fight their battles, they are weak and they are defeated because they are living in rebellion. So he defeats those who are mighty. Verse 25, he will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, when the people of God feel like, hey we’ve got this figured out, we can do this on our own, he will destroy many and take his stand against the prince of princes. Yet, he will be destroyed but not by human power.

There’s a countdown clock running on their suffering. God will not discipline them forever. Ultimately, this king will be destroyed but not by human power, which is exactly what happened. Jewish historical sources tell us at a certain point Antiochus Epiphanes contracted some kind of terrible intestinal disease. I was going to read their description. The Jewish historians love to describe exactly what happened to him, and it is graphic. I was talking -- thinking about sharing it, and my staff was like, please, don’t. They were a little queasy about it. But he contracted some kind of horrible disease, and maybe because of the disease, he ended up slumping over and falling out of his chariot when it was going at full speed, and it broke like almost every bone in his body. So he was killed very literally, but not by human hands. The clock hit zero. The countdown came to an end, and their suffering came to an end.

This vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given to you, Daniel, is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future. 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.

It’s hard stuff, right? As I said, I was really tempted a few weeks ago, let’s just stop preaching after chapter 6. I actually reached out to an Old Testament scholar friend of mine. He’s like a legit Old Testament scholar, and I said hey, give me some hints here. I said how do I preach this? How do I preach this pastorally? And the response I got back from him was, well the good news is that Daniel didn’t understand it either, so good luck.

I mean it wasn’t quite that, but that was kind of the gist of it. He was like, yeah, this is really hard, and I think we should probably take some comfort in that Daniel didn’t understand it either, but as I began to think about that, I realized that while Daniel didn’t understand it at first, I actually think that Daniel came to understand something very important. And the reason I say that I think he came to understand something important here, Daniel didn’t just survive his suffering. He didn’t just survive his difficult circumstances. He thrived. Even though he was kicked to the curb after rising to be Nebuchadnezzar’s secondhand man, the same thing happened with Belshazzar and then Darius. Daniel kept plugging on. Daniel kept moving forward. Daniel kept rising to the top. God kept blessing him because he kept moving forward in some kind of way, in spite of the suffering he was facing. What I realized as I wrestled with this is that Daniel had come to understand something about suffering through these two visions. Something that you and I need to know, because suffering is inevitable in this life.

The question of whether or not we’ll survive it, or thrive in the midst of it, depends on us understanding what Daniel came to understand. The question is, what is it? What did Daniel understand? The answer to that is what we found in the very middle of this vision. That is Daniel came to understand that there is always a countdown clock on suffering. The suffering is not endless. It is not infinite, that if we are in God’s hands, our God has started a countdown clock on our suffering, whatever form that it takes, and He is watching the clock tick down to zero at which point our suffering will end. That’s the key. We thrive when we remember that there is a countdown clock on our suffering. This is the truth that you
have to grab a hold of today. This is the truth that will allow you to not just survive but to thrive in the midst of suffering that you are experiencing right now, or suffering that may come tomorrow or a week, or a month, or a year, or a decade from now, that we survive and we thrive in the midst of suffering when we remember that there is a countdown clock on our suffering. It’s not endless. Do you understand this? Could you say it with me? Would you say there is a countdown clock on my suffering. There is a countdown clock on my suffering. Say it again. There is a countdown clock on my suffering. I don’t know what that suffering is for you. Maybe it’s something you are suffering in your body. Maybe it’s something that’s going on in your marriage or in your family or at work. Whatever it is, there is a countdown clock on it. It is when we realize that there is a countdown clock on it that we begin to live in the way that Daniel was able to live. We begin to live faithfully in spite of that suffering.

I don’t know when the countdown clock ends for you. I don’t know when the countdown is going to hit zero for your particular experience of suffering, I just know that it’s always going to hit zero at some point. Maybe it’s in this life. Maybe it’s at the moment you pass from this life into the arms of Jesus, but even if it’s then, it’s going to hit zero, and it’s not going to start up again. No matter what you are struggling through right now, there is going to be a moment when you pass from this life into the arms of a Father who not only pulls you in, but He wipes away every tear. He heals every ache. He makes whole every hurt. There is a countdown clock on our suffering whether in this life or the next, but there is absolutely a countdown clock on your suffering. And when you remember that there is a countdown clock on your suffering, I think three things happen. The first one is this: When we remember there is a countdown clock on our suffering, we don’t give up, right? We don’t give up. We don’t get off of the field and go sit on the sidelines. Not while the clock is still ticking down. Not while there is still time on the clock. We keep pushing forward. We don’t give up.

Second thing that happens is, not only that we don’t give up, but we push ahead boldly, right? That’s the second thing that happens when we know there is a countdown clock and it’s running toward zero on our suffering, we push ahead boldly. You know when I played soccer, it was usually those last couple of minutes on the clock when I’m behind by a point or two, and it’s clocking down toward zero, when I realized it was going to hit zero soon, we didn’t just like get through. We played harder. We often played harder in those last two minutes than any other time of the game because we knew it was about to hit zero. We pushed ahead boldly.

And related to that, the third thing that happens is that we take advantage of unique opportunities while the clock is still running. I don’t know if you understand this or not, but it’s a true truth. In the midst of suffering that we experience, God provides opportunities to do incredible things.

You know, as a pastor, I often find myself in hospitals visiting people. I can’t tell you the number of times that I have gone in to visit somebody who is really sick, and I say, how are you doing, they go, I’m doing awesome. My response is why, are they getting ready to release you? Are you about done? They are like, no. No end in sight. Well how are you doing awesome? Oh, because I have had this incredible conversation with this nurse or doctor about Jesus and how I’m able to face this because I have this hope, and God begins to use that in powerful ways. Or I’m struggling with my kids, and it’s allowed me to build a bridge to a neighbor who is struggling in their family situation, and they are coming to church with me, and they are beginning to ask questions about the Gospel, and God is using it in powerful ways, and it’s incredible.

Listen, if there is a countdown clock running on our suffering, there’s also a countdown clock running on the unique opportunities that you and I have as the people of God in the midst of that suffering, and when we remember there’s a countdown clock running, we seize those opportunities. Take off the academic hat. We say, you know what? Some of you are thrilled by this Antiochus stuff, and you are interested in Alexander the Great and how many days -- and that’s all fine. That’s good. We dealt with it, but if we put it aside for a second, and I put on my pastor’s hat -- and I don’t know what the pastor’s hat looks like. It’s a metaphor. My prayer for you and for myself is that we would somehow take hold of the truth that Daniel took a hold of in the midst of seeing this vision of distant suffering, and he learned this incredibly important truth. Suffering, whatever form it takes, whenever it come, however long it lasts, there’s an expiration date on it. There is a countdown clock running on our suffering, and God calls us to grab a hold of that truth and to live with the knowledge that the timer is running down to zero.

Would you pray with me? God, we confess that suffering often takes our eyes off of you. Sometimes it frightens us so much that it feels like you are not in control anymore, and maybe even sometimes in our hearts we feel like you’ve lost. And we know that’s not true, but sometimes that’s where we are, and Lord, I thank you for this vision that you gave Daniel. I thank you that you were willing to meet him where he was, and to confess to him that you understand it, that you see why we feel like that sometimes, you met him where he was so you could begin to move him to where he needed to be, and you do that with each of us. Lord, I pray that you would meet each of us right now where we are and whatever experience of suffering we might be dealing with. Help us to take comfort in the fact that you get it, that you understand, but that the reality is that you are still on your throne. You are still in control, and whatever suffering we have experienced, whatever suffering we are facing right now, the clock has started. The countdown has begun. The minutes are ticking away until our suffering is done. We don’t always know when that will be, Lord, but we are not called to keep our eyes on the clock. We are called to live in light of the fact that the clock is running down. So we ask that you give us the courage and strength to do that, and to thrive because we remember that there is always a countdown clock on our suffering because we are your children, and you are our good, good Father. In Jesus’ name, amen.