WHEN CHAOS COMES CALLING

Thrive
Daniel 7 // Craig Smith
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Craig //

[singing]

It's the end of the world as we know it
It's the end of the world as we know it
It's the end of the world as we know it
And I feel fine

That's not what the Bible means by apocalypse. In fact, the Greek word, apokalypsis really means revelation. It means God revealing something. So basically, it's God saying, hey, I know it feels like the world is falling apart, but it's not. Can I give you a peek behind the curtain as to what is really going on? God reveals the behind the scene stuff that allows us to realize, hey, the world really isn't falling apart in the way that I thought it was. So really, what happens is, apocalyptic writing is supposed to help us feel that God is in control despite of the chaos of life.

That's the purpose of apocalyptic writing to help us feel that God is in control in spite of the chaos of life. I said feel on purpose because one of those basic truths that we find in scripture about God is that God is in control. His power is infinite. His knowledge is infinite. Because of that, he is in control. That's basic truth. But there is a difference between knowing that truth and feeling that truth, isn't there? It's one thing to know that God's in control. It's another thing to feel that God is in control. It's when we feel that God is in control that we really begin to see that truth change the way that we live, change the way that we behave, change the way that we think, the way that we act -- all that stuff. Apocalyptic writing is supposed to help us bridge the gap of what we know in our head and what we feel in our heart so it begins to make a difference in the way that we live our lives.

That's one of the reasons, by the way, that apocalyptic visions typically rely on vivid imagery rather than precise details. Apocalyptic visions aren't normally made up of, here's a year, here's how many days, this is going to happen, and this is going to happen. Instead of that, what we typically get in apocalyptic writing is vivid imagery because precise details speak to the head, they speak to the intellect, but vivid imagery speaks to the heart. It speaks to the heart, and that's what God's doing with apocalyptic vision. He's speaking to our hearts. It's interesting to me that whenever God gives apocalyptic visions, he always gives it to people in the midst of chaos. He always gives it to people who are in the midst of something that makes them feel like the world is coming to an end. My world is coming to an end. Everything's falling apart, and God says, no, no, no, it's not.

Then he begins to speak to our hearts, and he uses this vivid imagery, and because he uses vivid imagery, there is a rule that we have to keep in mind as we think about apocalyptic visions like the one we are going to see and for the next few weeks. That rule is this, the more we seek precision, the more likely we are to miss God's point. The more we seek precision, the more likely we are to miss God's point. What I mean by that is that the church has kind of a long history of looking at apocalyptic visions and trying to be precise about what historical event was the fulfillment of this? What historical person was this vision talking about? What about this element of the imagery? Is it related to this historical thing? We try to match it up with the newspapers. We try to match it up with the history books. We try to match it up with what we think's going to happen in the future, and we try to be really precise, but the problem is, the more precise we try to be, the more likely we are to miss God's point. Think about this. God could have told Daniel, hey, Daniel? In 372 years, a man by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes is going to arise from the ashes of the Greek empire, and in 167 B.C. -- I know you don't know what B.C. means, but that's okay. We'll go with it for now.

In 167 B.C., he's going to desecrate the temple in Jerusalem, but in 164, that temple will be reconsecrated, and it can be used for worship again. Did God have access to those details? Yes, He did. But what we are going to see is that God didn't give that kind of precise detail to Daniel. Why not? Because He didn't want to. Because the point that He's making doesn't depend upon precise detail. Do you hear me? The point that God
is making doesn't depend upon precise detail, so when we approach apocalyptic visions with an attempt to match everything up with precision, what we are doing is we are moving further away from the point that God was attempting to make. I'm not saying we can't do it at all, but I'm saying it needs to be the secondary or the third-ary -- I'm such a geek I actually know the proper word is tertiary.

But it should be the second or third or fourth thing that we do. It should never be the first thing because when seeking that kind of precise detail as the first thing we do, what we are doing is we are seeking a point that is different from the one that God is making. Why don't you go ahead and grab a Bible and make your way to Daniel 7 where we are told this: in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying in bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream. We are going to pause there for a moment because I want to make sure we understand the historical situation that Daniel is in. Daniel says this vision came to him when he was in the first year of Belshazzar’s reign, and Belshazzar was the second king that Daniel served under, and that's important because here's Daniel's story if you don't know it, or you need a quick reminder. Daniel was a Jewish person. He was born and raised in Jerusalem, but then Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king came, and he destroyed Jerusalem, and he took Daniel and his friends as prisoners of war, and he brought them back to Babylon, so Daniel's world fell apart. Chaos came calling.

Chaos descended into Daniel's life. He was in a foreign place. He was bereft of family. He didn't have any idea what the future held for him, but he chose to remember that God is bigger than my Babylon, and to continue to honor God, and because of that, God blessed Daniel, and he actually rose to become Nebuchadnezzar's right-hand man in the Province of Babylon. He had power and authority. At a certain point Daniel must have looked around and went, okay, the chaos has receded. Life has gotten stable. Things are good. And then Nebuchadnezzar died, and he was replaced by his son-in-law Nabonidus, and Nabonidus put his son Belshazzar in charge of the Province of Babylon, and Belshazzar was not Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar trusted Daniel. Belshazzar did not, and so as we saw a few weeks ago, Belshazzar pushed Daniel out and suddenly chaos came calling again. Daniel's world fell apart again. The world as Daniel knew it came to an end. He must have been in a place of going, what's happening? What does my future look like? What's God doing? It was in that moment, as it always is, that God gave this apocalyptic vision that He revealed what was going on behind the scenes.

He only does that when we are in the midst of these difficult circumstances. Verse 2 says this, Daniel said in my vision at night I looked, and there before me were four winds of heaven churning up the great sea, so Daniel has a vision of the ocean, and the ocean in the ancient world was kind of a scary place. Honestly, it's still a scary place today. I find the ocean terrifying. I'm not talking about going to the beaches, white sandy beaches with waves coming, and that's great. I'm talking about like actually out on the ocean where there are like krakens living down there, and you never know what's going to come up, and then waves -- it's scary kind of stuff. Well what Daniel's seeing, it's not just on the beach. He's out in the middle of it, kind of, and he says the winds are coming from the four directions, the four compass points, and they were whipping the waves in every direction. It's not even wave after wave, it's wave after wave coming from every single direction, and it's frothing, and it's frenzy. The point is, it's chaos, which he probably would have gone, yeah, that's my life right now. Everything is chaos. Everything is out of control, and four great beasts, verse 3, four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off, and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and the mind of a human was given to it.

And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, get up and eat your fill of flesh. After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule. After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast -- terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all of the former beasts, and it had ten horns.

Now, if I were Daniel, and my life was chaos, my life was a mess. I was scared, and God said, hey, it's okay. Let me show you what's going on behind the scene, and that's what He showed me -- I would have been like, go ahead and close the curtain. I don't need anything else, right? Because what's happening really, here, is this is turning up the temperature on the chaos. The chaos is just getting worse and worse. He sees these four creatures, now here's exactly where we begin to apply that rule that I said that if we are seeking precision, we are going to miss the point, and the temptation is to go, well what does each one of the beasts represent? You know, why does it have wings? Does that represent speed? There are all kinds of things we can try to do, but in doing that we miss the central point that is this, these are corrupt creatures. They are corrupt creatures. They are not the creatures that God designed. That's how Daniel would have reacted to this vision because these are creatures that don't fit into their category. If you go back to the first page of scriptures in Genesis 1, what we are going to see is that every time God created, He separated. This is day. This is night. This is the water above. This is the water below. I'm going to create vegetation according to its kind. He only does that when we are in the midst of these difficult circumstances. Verse 2 says this, Daniel said in my vision at night I looked, and there before me were four winds of heaven churning up the great sea, so Daniel has a vision of the ocean, and the ocean in the ancient world was kind of a scary place. Honestly, it's still a scary place today. I find the ocean terrifying. I'm not talking about going to the beaches, white sandy beaches with waves coming, and that's great. I'm talking about like actually out on the ocean where there are like krakens living down there, and you never know what's going to come up, and then waves -- it's scary kind of stuff. Well what Daniel's seeing, it's not just on the beach. He's out in the middle of it, kind of, and he says the winds are coming from the four directions, the four compass points, and they were whipping the waves in every direction. It's not even wave after wave, it's wave after wave coming from every single direction, and it's frothing, and it's frenzy. The point is, it's chaos, which he probably would have gone, yeah, that's my life right now. Everything is chaos. Everything is out of control, and four great beasts, verse 3, four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off, and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and the mind of a human was given to it.

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I'm going to create sea creatures according to their kind. I'm going to create land creatures according to their kind. I'm going to create birds according to their kind, so God sets things into categories. It's a very consistent theme. In fact, many of the Old Testament laws were about keeping things in their categories. They were told don't wear cloth woven from two different kinds of fabric. Keep things in their categories. Daniel would have looked at these creatures and gone, well, these categories are obliterated. It's lions with wings, what is it? And his response to that would have been revulsion. He would have said this is a corrupted thing. This is not the thing that God intended. As we are going to see in a little bit, these creatures represent kingdoms. And the point is that these are corrupted kingdoms. These are corrupted governments. God gave us governments
for particular purposes, but these governments are not functioning according to their purposes. They are corrupted. They are not doing what they were intended to do. They are unholy abominations. That would have been his reaction to it. These are unholy things.

While I was thinking about the horns on the last beast with ten horn, while I was thinking about horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted by it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully. So, it just gets weirder, right? I mean you have this last creature with teeth of iron, it’s got these ten horns, and now there’s another little horn that pops up, but this one has eyes. That’s creepy, and it’s got a mouth, and it’s speaking boastfully. But you don’t need to be a bible scholar to catch the point. This thing is arrogant, right? And if you have been following along in Daniel up to this point you know we have seen this theme over and over again which is that God rebukes arrogance, so what’s happening here is it’s setting the stage for God to issue a rebuke, which is exactly what happens next, verse 9. 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.

In other words, into the midst of this chaos, suddenly, quiet. God shows up. God is the Ancient of Days, and the purpose of that particular label for God there is to say that God goes way farther back than all of these governments. In other words, His power is from of old. His power is from the beginning. All of the other governments that arise, they are children. They are infants, but God’s power goes all the way back to the very beginning and beyond in that His power is eternal. Does that make sense? And the point is compared to God, these other nations are utterly insignificant. His clothing was white as snow because unlike these corrupted governments, He is pure. Snow symbolizes purity. The hair of His head was white like wool because when you get white hair, that’s symbolic that you have lived long enough to hopefully have acquired what? Wisdom. White hair symbolized wisdom. Now if He really wanted to show that He was wise, He would have showed that His head was shining.

[Laughter]

Appreciate that. Thank you. His throne was flaming with fire. That’s symbolic of judgment and purity. Not purity, but bringing purity, purifying things, and its wheels were all ablaze, which is interesting, His throne had wheels? Yeah, I mean imagine a throne set on a chariot. The point is that God’s power doesn’t operate at a distance. He’s not watching from afar. He can go right into the action. He can come right into our lives where things are most chaotic. He can bring His power. He can make things right because He can come right into the action. The point is that the judge has appeared. Verse 10 says, a river of fire was flowing, coming out from before Him. Thousands upon thousands attended Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated and the books were opened.

People spend a lot of time trying to figure out, what court is this? Is it court of the angels or saints? That’s not the point. The point is, court is in session. A verdict is about to be delivered. A sentence is about to be set. Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. This little horn had set itself up against God. Can God, the judge, really deal with this thing? I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. Which is a little anticlimactic, right? I mean you have this horn, this little horn that’s boasting, and what you expect is some kind of cataclysmic battle, some kind of huge clashing of forces, but what you get is this kind of like, God said, now you’re gone, which is kind of the point, honestly.

What we are being told here is that God’s control is absolute. God doesn’t have to fight to make His will happen. He doesn’t have to do battle with these other forces. His control is absolute. We get this anticlimactic picture. The boastful horn, you’re done. Because His control is absolute. Verse 12 says the other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but they were allowed to live for a period of time. That’s an interesting statement. The point is that God stripped all of these other beasts, and as we see in a minute, these are kingdoms. He’s stripped them of their authority. That those kingdoms come to an end. They are not what God intended, so He brings them to an end, but He says, He allowed them to continue for a time. It wasn’t an abrupt ending. God declared the ending, but that these kingdoms continued for a while. I think what we are supposed to understand from that is this. God is in control even when it seems like He isn’t. Even when we look around and go, if God were in control this wouldn’t be happening. If God were really in control, if His control were really absolute, I wouldn’t be dealing with this, we wouldn’t still be facing this, but God says, sometimes for reasons of my own, I let things continue on for a little while, but don’t let that fool you into thinking that I’m not in control.

God is in control -- even when it seems like He isn’t. Some of you are probably here today going, in my life right now, it does not feel like God is in control. If God were in control, would I have this much chaos? Would I have all of these things? Don’t let that trick you into thinking anything other than the truth, and the truth is that God is in control even when it seems like He isn’t because His timing is perfect because He’s wise.

Now 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. And honestly, we could probably spend all day on those couple of sentences. Let me cut through all of the possible ways to talk about this, and let me just give you -- kind of the bottom line. Daniel just saw Jesus. He just saw Jesus. Couple of reasons I say that. One of them, he’s like the Son of Man. It’s an interesting phrase. He’s like a Son of Man. Son of man is a good phrase for a human being, but this one is like a Son of Man. He’s human, and -- there’s something more going on. He’s not just human. There’s something more going on which is also shown by the fact that he comes with the clouds of heaven. In the Old Testament, whenever God appeared, clouds were almost always associated with His appearance, so this one who is human and -- appears with the clouds which indicates that He’s divine, and by the way, this is Jesus’ favorite title for himself. You read the Gospels and you will see Jesus constantly talking about the Son of Man. It was his favorite term for himself because he’s borrowing that language that he gave to Daniel, hundreds of years before.
So when Jesus showed up on the scene, he said that one like the Son of Man that Daniel saw? That’s me. So Daniel just saw Jesus. These four kingdoms come to an end, and after that, Jesus appears, the Messiah comes. Verse 14 says he was given authority, glory and sovereign power, all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed. Daniel has a glimpse here of the church. The church is not the same thing as the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God in human history. But he’s seeing the church as an expression as a manifestation of God’s rule and reign. He’s saying it’s no longer restricted to one language or one ethnicity or one nation. It’s all people from all tribes and all languages, they come together under the banner of Jesus Christ, under his kingdom, under his authority, and that kingdom, unlike all of these other ones? It’s never going away.

It will grow and grow and grow and eventually, it will be the only one out there. It will never falter, it will never fade. It will never pass away. Now, I Daniel was troubled in spirit. You may go, I thought this was supposed to be encouraging, yeah, but -- it’s a little intimidating too, isn’t it? Daniel sees this incredible glimpse of Jesus, but he realizes, it’s going to be a little while before we get there. Between here and there, there’s a lot of stuff that I would really rather not go through, so I Daniel was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind, they disturbed me. I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all of this. So, he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the Earth, but the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever -- yes, forever and ever. I love the simplicity of this. Daniel’s been given a vision with a tremendous number of interesting and puzzling and terrifying details, right? I mean we got horns and iron teeth and wings and leopards and all that stuff, and so he goes to this angel and he goes would you tell me what all this means? Give me some precision. The angel goes, yeah, I will. There’s going to be four kingdoms, and they are going to go away, and then God’s kingdom is going to come, and we’ll be done. What? That’s it? Yeah, that’s it. Bam. See? That’s the point. He doesn’t get into all the details. He just says, understand, all of these kingdoms that you are facing? They are temporary. All of the chaos that’s invaded your life? I’m going to deal with it.

When I do, it will be done. It will be done. Daniel’s not that much different than the rest of us, though. His response is like, that’s awesome, but could we talk a little bit more about the details? Verse 19 says, then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, that’s the one he focuses on. Which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws -- the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell -- the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

Could you give me a few more details? Could you be a little more precise? And he gave me this explanation: He said the fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on Earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole Earth, trampling it down and crushing it. The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones, he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time. But -- but, and he comes back to this drum beat. The court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under the heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him. This is the end of the matter. We’re done. I Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself.

Daniel asks for detail, and he gets a little bit. We could spend a lot of time on this, but let’s just give you a couple of bullet points. What did Daniel see here? What Daniel saw here is this, Daniel was given a vision of four kingdoms that would rise and fall. The first of the kingdoms was the Babylonian kingdom. He was living through that at the moment. Nebuchadnezzar was Babylonian, Belshazzar who was king at this moment, that’s the Babylonian kingdom. But then he also saw the rise and fall of a kingdom by the name of Mede, then a kingdom by the name of Persia, and ultimately, a kingdom by the name of Greece, or the Greek kingdom. He sees all four of these. He pushes in on that fourth one. He says, I need to know more details. It’s different than the others. The fourth kingdom, Greece, was different because it came from the western world rather than the eastern world. The other three kingdoms, they are all eastern kingdoms. Greece was from the western world, and it was fundamentally different from its culture, and its approach to everything, so it was different. That was the fourth kingdom.

The ten horns were ten rulers that arose after Alexander the Great, who founded the Greek Empire, died. Alexander was an interesting figure historically. He was an incredible military ruler. He basically conquered the entire known world. He swept in from the west and conquered the entire known world in about three years. He was a very young man, and he died unexpectedly. He didn’t have an heir which meant he didn’t have anyone to inherit the kingdom, so what happened is the kingdom splintered as different generals and military rulers fought to contain, retain control of this thing that he had built, and basically the empire splintered into ten different fragments. There were four kings that basically ended up beating out the other kings, and then there was one in particular that was very important from a Jewish perspective. One that arose. His name was Antiochus Epiphanes. That’s the little horn. The little horn was a man named Antiochus Epiphanes.

Epiphanes is an interesting name because it means “God manifest.” This is not the name that his mama gave him. At a certain point he said, I need a nickname. This is what it’s going to be. Everybody will call me Epiphanes. Call me God manifest. Call me God on the scene. Call me God has shown up. Sound boastful to you, just a little bit? Yeah. The time, times and half a time that Daniel sees refers to a period of about three and a half years between the time that Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple in Jerusalem, 167 BC and it was restored and useable again for
building muscle memory. He was building the ability to block. It was becoming an automatic response, or the new version of it. Jacket on. Jacket "karate kid" movies? Wax on. Wax off. He got really frustrated because he didn't understand what was happening. What was happening, he was I'm beginning to build muscle memory that really makes a huge difference when it really gets hard. It's like the karate kid. Do you remember the And then there's another stoplight, and then the guy in front of me is driving 20 miles per hour under the speed limit, and chaos, it's a little thing, going to leave the church. The elders are going to be mad. I'm going to get fired. Like nobody else has thoughts that just run out of control like we respond that way, that becomes our natural response. We just automatically put those bumpers up. We have to do it in small ways. If I'm this kind of automatic response that when chaos comes calling we go, hey, hey, God knew this was coming, and God is in control of this, and when three things that you can do. The first one is just this, that you can build spiritual muscle memory. What I mean by that is that you begin to build And if you are honest and you say, they are not. Maybe one of them is up, but I don't think both of them are, or maybe neither one of them are up, and I feel like I'm constantly falling into the gutter and my heart and my thought and my emotions, how do I get the bumpers up? Let me give you three things that you can do. The first one is just this, that you can build spiritual muscle memory. What I mean by that is that you begin to build kind of automatic response that when chaos comes calling we go, hey, hey, God knew this was coming, and God is in control of this, and when two bumpers God said put your thinking in here. I'm not God is not surprised by what's coming. He's not surprised by what's coming. He sees with incredible detail. He sees with precision. After the fact we look back and go, wow. Like that's not a broad-stroke prophesy. That's unbelievably detailed because God's like, yeah. I know all of that. I'm not surprised by any of it. I'm not surprised by anything. Put that up on one side of your thinking. The second bumper is this. God's in control of what looks like chaos to us. God is in control of what looks like chaos to us. Whether that is in the world or in our personal lives, He's not surprised by it, He's in control of it. So what God says is put your thinking between these two bumper, and let's go forward together. Daniel had to go through some really difficult things. Seeing this vision didn't mean that the next day everything got better, in fact, Daniel continued to go through this process. He continued to rise to the top and become the right-hand man, and then a new king came in, and he had to start all over again. Then a new king -- and he would start all over. He kept having these setbacks, but somehow Daniel continued to move forward in sufficient a way that he kept rising to the top. As we saw last week, Pastor Kip shared this idea that Daniel became the right-hand man to four different kings. In spite of the chaos around him, he didn't just survive, he thrived. Why? Because of this vision. Because of these two bumpers God said put your thinking in here. I'm not surprised by anything. I'm in control of everything. And Daniel lived in light of that. He kept his thinking out of the gutter. He kept moving forward in light of those things, and the reality is this, we thrive when we refuse to let chaos shake our trust in God's control. That's the recipe for thriving we get from this chapter. That we thrive when we refuse to let the chaos that comes shake our trust in God's control. Two questions for you. Question number one, where does my life feel most chaotic right now? Where does your life feel most chaotic at the moment? Some of you are going, everywhere. It's the whole thing. The world seems like it's coming to an end. My world feels like it's coming to an end. Everything is out of control. Maybe that's you. Maybe it's just a place in your life. Maybe it's your marriage or your kids or someplace, but almost all of us, at all points in our lives, have a place where chaos feels like it's the order of the day. Everything feels like it's out of control. Where is the place that your life feels most chaotic, and then question number two, are the bumpers up? Are the bumpers up? Are you living between these two bumpers that God's not surprised by anything and He's in control of everything? Because that's how we keep ourselves, our hearts, our minds, our thinking out of the gutter, and we keep moving forward with God to that place where He makes it all right. Are the bumpers up? And then there's another stoplight, and then the guy in front of me is driving 20 miles per hour under the speed limit, and chaos, it's a little thing, but it's in those moments when I go, you know what? You know what? You know what? God knew this was coming. God is in control of this. I'm beginning to build muscle memory that really makes a huge difference when it really gets hard. It's like the karate kid. Do you remember the "karate kid" movies? Wax on. Wax off. He got really frustrated because he didn't understand what was happening. What was happening, he was building muscle memory. He was building the ability to block. It was becoming an automatic response, or the new version of it. Jacket on. Jacket
off. Anybody? He’s learning blocks. He’s learning these moves. They are becoming part of his muscle memory, and we do that in little ways when we are not threatened by real chaos, so that when real chaos comes calling, this is the way we respond. God is not surprised by any of this. God is in control of all of this. God is not surprised by any of this. God is in control of all of this, and the bumpers stay up. That’s one way we can do it.

Another way we can put the bumpers up is we can look for ways that chaos allows us to broadcast our trust because chaos can become a platform that we can demonstrate to others that we are not destroyed by chaos. That in fact chaos is just an opportunity to show others who our trust is ultimately in. It’s not in that house that we suddenly can’t afford because we lost the job, because we got sick. My trust isn’t in my stuff. It’s not in my house. It’s not in my 401K. My trust is in God, the Ancient of Days who was not surprised by any of this, who is in control of all of this. When we begin to see chaos as an opportunity to show others who our trust is in, we begin to see chaos not as an enemy, but as an opportunity, and that puts our bumpers up.

And then the third thing we can do is we can begin to celebrate progress instead of fearing setbacks. See what tends to happen, when we are in the midst of chaos, every new thing that happens feels like it’s putting us even further back. It’s getting worse, right? But the reality is that every time something new happens, even if it feels like a setback, the reality is that we are checking off the boxes. We are moving forward to that time when God makes it all right. And when we realize that, suddenly each of those moments doesn’t become something to be afraid of. It becomes something to be celebrated. I was coming home from a trip earlier this spring, and we landed, and the snow started right after we landed, and it turned really bad. It was a blizzard, so we were driving back from DIA on C-470, and it was a long, slow trip, and it wasn’t horrible because the plows were out, and they were in front of me, and they were kind of plowing out the road, but the snow was coming heavy, but at least it was well lit, and the road was really wide, so it was kind of okay, but it was exhausting. But at a certain point I had to get off of the highway.

I got on to Parker Road. I went through Parker, and then I had to get off of Parker Road, and I ended up on Crowfoot Valley Road to take me into Castle Rock. And Crowfoot Valley Road was way worse. The plows hadn’t been out yet. The snow was really deep. There were very few lights, so I was just getting the headlight look, and that was all snow coming at me. The road was much narrower. Things were worse, but I felt better. I felt better when I made that turn. You know why? Because I was almost home. Even though the circumstances were that much more difficult, I was almost home. Rather than fearing that setback of things feeling worse now, what I was doing was I was celebrating the fact that I was getting closer to the conclusion. That’s one of the way we put our bumpers up. We remember that every new thing that happens, from God’s perspective, yep, I knew this was coming. Check. We are getting closer. We’re getting closer. We’re getting closer, so instead of fearing those setbacks, we begin to celebrate them as progress.

We thrive as God’s people when we put up the bumpers, when we refuse to let chaos shake our faith in God’s control. That’s how we move forward with him to those places that he has seen, and is longing to get us to, and that we can’t wait to be at. Will you pray with me?

Lord, thank you that nothing we ever face will be a surprise to you, and thank you that nothing we’ll ever face will be out of your control. We confess that we are often more fearful of things that happen to us than is right because we serve a God who knows and is in control. We ask your forgiveness for those ways that we have not trusted you. We ask for your forgiveness for those ways that chaos has shaken our trust in your control, and we ask you to put up the bumpers so we can thrive as your people even in the midst of chaos. In Jesus name, amen.