

The Apocalypse is Here!

A reflection on Daniel 12:1-3

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For those of you who have not heard, the apocalypse has happened! Hostess has gone bankrupt. People everywhere are grieving over the loss of Twinkies, Sno-balls and Ho Ho's. Facebook wash awash with laments over the injustice of a world devoid of these sweet treats. Some wonder if death is not better than a world without Twinkies. The cry has arisen, how long, O Lord, must we live without cream-filled spongecakes!

During any apocalypse some rejoice and some cry foul. In the Twinkie apocalypse, I imagine some dentists are rejoicing over the fact that there are fewer sugary treats to cause cavities. In apocalyptic thinking, these health minded dentists are good. Other dentists are decrying the financial impact this will have on them as they lose out on lucrative fillings. In apocalyptic thinking, these profit minded dentists are evil. These are the central arguments of apocalyptic thought: good and evil, justice and injustice. In the apocalyptic world things are black and white: good and evil are clearly identifiable. After all – apocalyptic – means revelation. The point of apocalyptic writing is to reveal who and what is good and who and what is evil.

It may be hard to fathom, but apocalyptic writing is actually supposed to be hopeful rather than frightening. Apocalyptic literature is written by those who are suffering or who have lived through a time of suffering. It is a lament that ultimately asserts the authority of God over human powers of evil and injustice. The reading from Daniel today uplifts the hope that is often disguised in apocalyptic writings.

In Daniel we find the following hopeful things:

1. God sends a protector to his people – than archangel Michael.
2. Michael will triumph deliver those who are faithful to God.
3. Those who are faithful will be granted new life through resurrection.
4. The resurrected faithful will be part of the heavenly host who live in the presence of God.¹

The apocalypse of Daniel reveals that God is at work to deliver the faithful and to defeat evil. The apocalypse of Daniel affirms that those who are faithful to God in spite of earthly suffering are not faithful in vain – their suffering will yield a reward.

So, what's is going on in the world that leads to the apocalyptic lament and affirmation found in the 12th chapter of Daniel? The book of Daniel is a historical commentary. It mainly refers to the time of suffering under Antiochus Epiphanes IV around 165 BC. During this time the practice of Judaism was outlawed. Jews were hanged for keeping the Sabbath and keeping a kosher diet. Other tortures included executing Jews during the time of prayer and force feeding Jews pork. Jews who turned away from their faith and faith practices were

¹ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?tab=1&alt=1>

rewarded with wealth, power, and social status.² So, faithful Jews are asking themselves, “Where is God in the midst of our suffering?”

The that the Book of Daniel gives is: “God is with us.” We may not see God at work, we may not understand God’s plan, but that does not mean that God is not with us. When times get tough – apocalyptic separates the faithful from the unfaithful. The faithful cry out to God in their suffering and in their suffering affirm that God is ultimately in control. The unfaithful flee from God and the faith-they give up on God. Suffering is the crucible in which faith is tested and in which hope or despair wins. Apocalyptic writers are the ones who stand in the midst of suffering, with have no reasonable expectation of imminent deliverance from suffering, and who yet proclaim that God is at work to deliver us from this present evil.

The author of Daniel proclaims that suffering is the result of evil and that God ultimately conquers evil. However, in our lifetimes, we may not see the evil that is the cause of our suffering defeated by God. The challenge is to live faithfully in the midst of suffering. Because not doing God’s will is a denial of God’s power. Because not living according to the will of God allows evil free reign in the world. As we live according to the law of God’s love and forgiveness in times of suffering, we continually confront evil with good, injustice with justice, despair with hope.

In our world, evil so often seems to be winning. But the author of Daniel says, wait, watch, live faithfully, God is at work to deliver us. God does deliver through many means. Sometimes through ordinary means like a people who are bonded in solidarity against evil and through the death of Antiochus Epiphanes. Sometimes through extraordinary means like a man named Jesus, who is the son of God, who died on a cross and is raised from the dead and who has ultimately conquered evil. Suffering doesn’t mean God is absent, sometimes it is the very sign that God is present and conquering evil.

² Proclamation: Pentecost 3-Series B. Fred Craddock and Leander Keck, Fortress Press, 1976, p. 41.