

Daniel 6:11-28
"Telling It Like It Will Be"

We have all heard some classic examples of the old proverb, "no faith, no vision." In 1943, IBM chairman Thomas J. Watson said, "I think there is a world market for about 5 computers." In 1946, Darryl F. Zanuck as head of 20th Century Fox said, "TV won't be able to hold on to any market it captures after the first 6 months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night." James Hoffa as president of the Teamsters Union remarked, "I don't need bodyguards." A man named France's Marechal Foch concluded in 1911, "Airplanes are interesting toys, but of no military value." Adolph Hitler pontificated "The Third Reich will last 1000 years." He was off 988 years. General George Custer observed, "There are only about 300 Indians down there at Big Horn." His estimate was off by 2800%. Edward J. Smith as captain of the Titanic said, "This ship will never sink." English cleric and scholar Thomas Malthus envisioned the world population growing so fast that we would all drive each other crazy by the end of the 19th century. It didn't happen until today. Head of the US Patent Office William Everett predicted that he'd have to close up shop soon because everything had already been predicted. All he missed was TV, jet planes, ball point pens, disposable diapers, computers, internet, and countless other things. All these examples show that where there is no faith, there is no vision.

Many people down through history lose vision in life. Right now, according to Princeton University emeritus professors, Anne Case and Angus Deaton, in a book *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*, our own nation is facing a crisis of hope in a two-class society.

One third of the population with bachelor degrees are doing well, while the other 2/3's with blue collar skills are facing despair and a loss of hope, heightened during a time of pandemic. This

2/3's has resorted to overeating, alcohol, opioids, with 10,000 opioid deaths a year, and suicide, which is on a strong rise after declining for 100 years. Education K-12 has become focused mostly on the college bound. Since 1972, the bottom has fallen out of blue collar wages, with waning health insurance coverage that was once tied to employment, becoming an almost impossible hurdle to handle financially. All this has led to a crumbling society, shattered home lives, and declining connections to communities and churches. Case and Deaton think the situation is pretty dire, yet they believe people must somehow rise up again, as they did at the end of the 19th century, a time when 4 amendments to the Constitution were passed, giving women the right to vote, trying to curtail alcohol through Prohibition, introducing an income tax to overcome inequality, and combating corrupt state governments through direct election of senators. Yet hope for many remains hard to find.

People down through history have often lost vision in life. Three centuries before Jesus' birth, the Jewish people were in danger of losing their vision. They had been carried away into exile by the Babylonians and allowed to return to their homeland by the Persians. As they struggled to rebuild the temple, the walls of their capital Jerusalem, their whole country, they soon found themselves overrun by Alexander the Great and the Greeks, whose culture spread over the whole world. When Alexander died, his world empire was split up. Eventually the Jews found themselves ruled by Greek Syrians.

In 175 BCE, Antiochus IV, also called Epiphanes, meaning "God manifest," became ruler of Syria and Judah. He tried to force the Greek way of life on the Jews, and came to hate them as pious, rigid resisters. So he marched on Jerusalem and quartered his troops in the temple. He banned circumcision, sabbath observance, public and private worship of the Jewish God, and possession of scriptures. Anyone having a copy of the law was executed. Antiochus IV turned the temple over to the worship of

Zeus, sacrificing pigs on the altar and forcing many Jews to eat pig broth. His sacrilege of the temple was called the Abomination of Desolation. In the eyes of the Jews, this was the worst thing to happen since the world came into being. Many began to doubt God, that God was just, and that God would ever deliver them.

In 176 BCE, a Jew named Mattathias and his 5 sons became known as Maccabees, named after one son Judah's nickname as a ferocious "hammer" in battle. They initiated a guerilla war of independence. Eventually Antiochus IV was defeated, the temple cleansed, and the Jewish festival of lights, called Hannakuh, was instituted. At the beginning of this revolt, a man of faith wrote a defense of the revolution, a defense known in the Bible as the Book of Daniel.

Now the Book of Daniel is a tricky book to interpret. It is kind of like the book a chap bought at an airport bookstore as he rushed to a flight. After scanning the titles, he grabbed one called *How to Hug*. When he was airborne, he discovered he had actually purchased Vol. 5 of an encyclopedia. He got more than he bargained for. The Book of Daniel is like this.

The Book of Daniel appears to be written about events 450 years before the time of Antiochus IV. But we must remember the Jewish religion at the time of Antiochus IV was banned.

Any writer during the Jewish revolution would have to write in coded language. So the writer of Daniel looks back 450 years into history to the first great exile of his people to Babylon. He uses a great Jewish figure of the past named Daniel to speak to his people as they faced Antiochus IV. The book is about Daniel, not by Daniel.

The first half of the book contains 6 great stories of faith. In story 1, Daniel and 3 friends are carried from Jerusalem to the Babylonian court of King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel and his friends

refuse to eat meat and wine dedicated to pagan gods, but still become healthier than all other court members. The point to the Jews of Antiochus IV's day is to not give in and eat forbidden food like pig's broth.

In story 2, King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream of a statue with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and legs of iron and clay. At the threat of death to all court wisemen, Daniel interprets the statue as representing 4 successive empires, the empires of Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. The latter empire of Greece includes Antiochus IV's Syrian rule, symbolized by the iron leg. The entire statue will be smashed by the kingdom of God. The message to the Jews of 167 BCE is that Antiochus IV will be smashed.

In story 3, Daniel's 3 friends go into a fiery furnace rather than worship Nebuchadnezzar's idol. A guardian angel saves the friends. The point to the Jews of Antiochus IV's day is that if they go into the fiery furnace of persecution, God will save them.

In story 4, Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a great tree falling and of a crazy animal. Daniel interprets the dream to mean that the great Nebuchadnezzar, a king of pride, will be humbled into 7 years of madness like an animal. To the Jews of 167 BCE, this means that Antiochus IV will be humbled like a mad animal.

In story 5, Nebuchadnezzar's successor Belshazzar gives a banquet using golden temple vessels. Though Belshazzar was the actual son of Nabonidus, he is called Nebuchadnezzar's son because he succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as king. Amid the feast, a hand writes on the wall. Daniel alone can interpret the writing. Babylon will fall, and Belshazzar will die that very night. The point to the Jews of 167 BCE is that Antiochus IV will die soon for his sacrilege of the temple.

In story 6, Daniel goes to a lions den rather than give up his prayers. The message is clear to the Jews of 167 BCE. Continue to worship God and be delivered.

The latter chapters of the Book of Daniel picture 4 beasts representing the great empires of Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. All these empires will be demolished by God, who is the Ancient of Days. Though the prophet Jeremiah seemed to predict an exile of only 70 years, an angel named Gabriel assures Daniel that Jeremiah meant 70 weeks of years or 490 years. 167 BCE is the end of those 490 years, for the time of deliverance has come. The Greeks and Antiochus IV will fall, because God's kingdom of faithful people will be established, led by one like unto the Son of Man. Deliverance, justice, and resurrection will come to the Jews.

The Book of Daniel is not merely a book on *How to Hug* but a book on *How to Hope*, how to tell is like it will be, despite all odds. Today, we may not have a Nebuchadnezzar trying to force us to worship pagan idols, or an Antiochus IV threatening to execute us for practicing our religion. But we do contend with oppressors, false idols, and the temptation to lose vision in life. We live in a world of great violence, rampant weaponry and guns, environmental havoc, climate change induced disasters, debilitating disease, broken relationships, scandals, and loss of faith in religion.

We live in a world where people's horizons are often limited to "what's in it for me"; a world of countless Antiochus IV's, Nebuchadnezzar's; a world of fiery furnaces, lions, and weird dreamers; a world that often threatens, if not with open persecution, with subtle seduction.

But when we refuse to give in, when we keep vision and faith in God and ourselves, we are like the Jews of old, clinging to a kingdom not fully seen, but a kingdom that will surely be. We tell it, not like it is, but like it will be.

I think of a boy called Sparky, named after a comic-strip horse called Sparkplug, a nickname the boy never did shake. School was all but impossible for him. He failed every subject in the 8th grade. He flunked physics in high school. He got a flat zero. He flunked Latin, algebra, and English. He made the golf team, only to lose the most important match of the year. He also lost the consolation match. He was awkward socially. No one disliked him, they just didn't care about him. He talked to no one outside of school hours, and never dated. Sparky was a loser. He knew it and everyone else knew it. He rolled with it, and settled for mediocrity. There was only one thing that brought him contentment and a little pride, his artwork. He submitted cartoons to the high school yearbook, but they were rejected. He wrote a letter to Walt Disney giving his qualifications to be a professional artist. When a form letter asked for examples, they were rejected with the message that Disney hired only the finest artists.

But he kept the faith. He began to write his autobiography in cartoons, describing his childhood self as a little boy loser, a chronic underachiever. The boy who failed the 8th grade, the young artist whose work was rejected by a high school yearbook and Walt Disney Studios, that young man was named He created the Peanuts comic strip about a little cartoon boy whose kite would never fly, a little boy who never got to kick the football, a little boy known as Charlie Brown. His life was a witness that against all odds, we can have hope, faith, and love, and tell like it will be.

Those who tell it like it will be have similar spirit to that of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who died this past Sunday. He was a South African Nobel Peace Prize winning icon, an uncompromising foe of apartheid and racism that gripped his country and the world. He spoke up for LGBTQ rights and the rights of the poor and disadvantaged everywhere. He tried to "tell it like it will be" as a bold, plucky, buoyant, impish, funny, but

always courteous, clergyman, an Anglican Archbishop, nicknamed “The Arch,” who sought humanity in everyone, even in his adversaries. He took on what he thought was right, and condemned what he thought was wrong to everybody, presidents, prime ministers, fellow Africans, religious leaders like himself.

After preaching from the pulpit and working nonviolently to bring about the fall of apartheid in 1994, he called the country’s multiracial society a “rainbow nation.” He even condemned the leaders of the revolution when they abused human rights themselves, and though a self-described socialist, he condemned communism. In 1998, he headed the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission to listen to harrowing testimonies of torture, killings, atrocities, even weeping openly.

In a book written later, entitled *Book of Forgiving*, he said this. “Forgiving our loved ones or our enemies is not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not about patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True forgiveness exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth.

It could even make things worse. It is a risky undertaking, but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end, only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing. In our own ways, we are all broken. Out of that brokenness, we hurt others. Brokenness says, ‘Meet me here, speak my name. I am not your enemy, I am your teacher. I may even be your friend. Let us tell out truth together, you and I.’”

Once asked how he wanted to be remembered, he replied. “He loved. He laughed. He cried. He was forgiven. He forgave. Greatly privileged.”

Desmond Tutu embodied the words of American theologian Reinhold Niehbur. “Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in a lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which

is true and beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love.”

That's what the writer of the Book of Daniel did. He portrays ancient Daniel praying in hope, "God is wise and powerful! Praise God forever. God controls the times and the seasons. God makes and unmakes kings. God gives wisdom and understanding. God reveals things that are deep and secret; God knows what is hidden in darkness, and God the Divine One is surrounded by light." (Daniel 2:20-22) This prayer reminds us that we are to tell it like it will be, especially as we enter the new year.