

What Child Is This?

*“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.”
(Matthew 1:21 ESV)*

*“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy
that will be for all the people.”
(Luke 2:10 ESV)*

One Like A Son Of Man

December 17th, 2023

Daniel 7:1-18

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Introduction:

Good morning Cornerstone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Daniel 7:1-18; you’ll find that on page 744 in the church Bibles. This is the third Sunday in Advent. The word “advent” means “coming” and refers to “the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event.”¹ In church, when we use the word “Advent”, we are talking about the coming or arrival of the Christ; so for our Advent series this year we’ve been asking and answering the question “What Child Is This?”

Who is this Christ who has come and is coming again?

This week we are looking at a prophecy about the coming Son of Man. That’s one of the titles for Jesus that feels a little foreign to us. We understand Son of David, we understand Son of God – we understand “prophet like Moses”, but what about this Son of Man thing? We know we’re on the right track here because Jesus STEPS INTO this prophecy at the climax of his trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin. When the High Priest put him under oath and asked him:

“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” (Mark 14:61 ESV)

Jesus said:

¹ Oxford Languages online.

“I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:62 ESV)

Jesus gave his identity by referencing this prophecy in Daniel 7. Under oath he confessed that he was the Christ, he was the Son of God – and he was the Son of Man. “To really understand who I am”, he says, “you need to look at me through the lens of Daniel’s prophecy” – which is exactly what we intend to do this morning.

Now, before we get into the prophecy itself in Daniel 7, let me provide a bit of background so that you can better appreciate what you’re about to hear. First of all, Daniel, the man who had this vision, was one of the young Jewish aristocrats who was taken as a captive as part of the FIRST WAVE of deportations to Babylon in 605 BC. Daniel had actually been in Babylon for 19 years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 – which resulted in another HUGE WAVE of deportations to Babylon. By this time however, Daniel had risen to a position of prominence in the royal court in large part due to his ability to interpret dreams.

Now, if you are a Bible reader you will have noticed that Daniel’s dream here in chapter 7 is VERY SIMILAR to the original dream that Daniel interpreted for Nebuchadnezzar back in Daniel chapter 2. In Daniel 2 King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream – he knew it was important, but he couldn’t remember the details of the dream and he didn’t have a clue as to the interpretation and he was very frustrated that none of his so called Wise Men could help him, so he was going to have them all executed, but then Daniel stepped forward and he was able to TELL THE KING THE DREAM and the interpretation – by the Spirit of the Most High God. The dream was about 4 great empires that would arise in human history – Babylon being the first of those. Scholars usually identify the 4 great empires as Babylon, Medo-Persian, Greece and Rome. In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream they are all represented by a huge statue that had a head of gold, chest of silver, torso of bronze and legs of iron – with then feet of iron mixed with clay. The climax of that vision is recorded in Daniel 2:34-35:

As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that

not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:34-35 ESV)

So the substance of that first vision is that there will be 4 great human empires – the fourth of which seems to have some sort second act – but regardless, four great empires - and then a stone from heaven comes and strikes the line of human empires – undermining its stability and ultimately destroying it and replacing it with a kingdom that will last forever.

That’s the substance of the first vision. Daniel’s vision here in chapter 7 BUILDS on that original foundation. It provides ADDITIONAL CLARITY, CONTENT and HOPE. We’ll read the vision, we’ll discuss what it’s saying and then we’ll use that to further develop our understanding and appreciation of the One who is coming and coming again.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1:

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. 2 Daniel declared, “I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. 3 And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. 4 The first was like a lion and had eagles’ wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. 5 And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, ‘Arise, devour much flesh.’ 6 After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. 7 After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. 8 I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

9 “As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.

10 A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

11 “I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

13 “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like **a son of man**, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

15 “As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. 16 I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. 17 ‘These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. 18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’ (Daniel 7:1-18 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

In this vision, which as we’ve noted, is a companion to Nebuchadnezzar’s vision in Daniel chapter 2 we see A PICTURE OF HUMAN HISTORY, A PICTURE OF ULTIMATE REALITY and A PROMISE OF EVERLASTING DOMINION. Let’s begin with the picture of human history, which we see in verses 1-8.

A Picture Of Human History

Daniel sees the 4 winds of heaven STIRRING up the waters of the sea. In Apocalyptic literature “the sea” usually represents the chaos and tumult of the peoples. So “the sea” is HUMAN HISTORY, and the point is that GOD IS STIRRING THE POT. As he stirs the pot, empires arise and fall – which raises the question – are these empires from God or are they from Satan?

And the answer is both.

In Revelation 13 you have the New Testament version of this vision. Once again, we have a beast rising out of the sea that looks like a bunch of animals.

And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. 6 It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. 7 Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. (Revelation 13:5-7 ESV)

So a BEAST has authority for a certain limited amount of time to harass and harry the saints of God – even to conquer them. So this is CLEARLY a manifestation of Satan’s power. Satan is animating human powers, governments and empires to oppress and oppose God’s people.

Ok.

And yet – it is God who is stirring the pot! It is **the winds of heaven** who stir the sea – so the point is that God is RIGGING THE GAME. The devil is trying to run things, but actually, God is in charge. The devil THINKS he is winning, but actually, God’s purposes are being advanced; that’s the message.

So, back to Daniel 7, we’ve got 4 great empires – a flying lion, a bear, a leopard, and then a fourth beast which is dreadful and terrible – with IRON TEETH. This beast seems to have TWO incarnations. Out of it comes 10 horns and among them, another horn, who displaces some of the others and speaks blasphemous and arrogant things.

And of course we like to speculate about that, don’t we? Who is the little horn who speaks blasphemous things? Is it President Obama? Is it President Trump? Is it – fill in the banks with the name of whatever politician you are upset about at the time. It’s a fun game to play, but to play that game is to miss the point that is being made in the arrangement, because the way this story is laid out is intending to communicate that what is happening DOWN HERE at the level of human history is ACTUALLY NOT what is ULTIMATELY important. At the end of verse 8 there is a sudden scene shift. The perspective of the vision moves UP from the ground level of human history to the HIGHER PERSEPCTIVE of ULTIMATE REALITY. That’s what really

matters! Because decisions UP THERE create changes DOWN HERE. So we need to keep our eye on the UPPER STORY. Tremper Longman III says helpfully here:

“In essence, we have gone up the chain of being. Evil human kingdoms were described as horrifying hybrid animals; the divine realm is imaged as human beings. The association is perfectly appropriate in a broader biblical view because, after all, Genesis 1:27 tells us that God created men and women in his own image.”²

Ok, so, in the next phase of the vision we are moving UP A LEVEL. Now we begin to see a picture of ultimate reality.

A Picture Of Ultimate Reality

In verse 9 it says:

“As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat” (Daniel 7:9 ESV)

So we’ve got thrones changing hands down here, we’ve got people jockeying for positions down here, we’ve got leaders emerging who are speaking arrogant and blasphemous things DOWN HERE – but as I looked, Daniel says, I saw THRONES being placed UP THERE and I saw the ANCIENT OF DAYS taking his seat on the only THRONE that really matters.

That’s the message of the vision as a whole!

As history is moving along down here, the really important events are happening up there. And when things happen up there, their impact is felt immediately down here:

“I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.” (Daniel 7:11-12 ESV)

² Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* in The NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 186.

So as soon as court goes into session UP THERE, Daniel sees history beginning to speed toward its conclusion down here. Actions taken up there decisively undermine the power of the BEAST down here. The kingdoms of the earth continue to exist for a while, but they are no longer the important players in this drama. Something else – SOME ONE ELSE – is now seated on the throne and HE is the only character from this point on who ultimately matters.

Daniel SEES this enthronement in verses 13-14:

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like **a son of man**, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14 ESV)

So in the UBER STORY – the controlling story - Daniel sees “one like a son of man” – a human person, but clearly more than a human person – Daniel sees this person standing before the Ancient of Days – standing before God – and being given dominion and glory and a kingdom that will include people from every tribe, tongue and nation on planet earth.

That is the decision made up there in the UBER STORY – that immediately changes the course of human history down here.

So by putting these visions together – the one Daniel interpreted in chapter 2 and then the one he himself has here in chapter 7 – we learn that the STONE sent from heaven is actually a SON – one like a Son of Man. His coming decisively undermines the power of the BEAST and establishes a Kingdom that will grow and fill the earth.

And of course, that is exactly what we see in the earthly life and ministry of Jesus!

Jesus referred to himself as the one who binds the strongman! In Matthew 12:29 he said:

Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. (Matthew 12:29 ESV)

I've come to steal a Kingdom, Jesus says, so the first thing I have to do, obviously, is bind the strongman! That's why I've come! I have to knock the strong man out. I have come to tie him to a chair. With that done, we can go ahead and plunder the house.

This is how the Apostles of Christ spoke about his ministry. Paul said:

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Colossians 2:15 ESV)

So, Paul says, this is how GOD changed the course of human history! He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them IN HIM – in Christ. Jesus is the intervention that decisively turns the tide of human history. He BRUISES the head of the strong man. He knocks our enemy unconscious. He deals him a decisive blow.

And that's why – by the way – everywhere the Gospel of Jesus goes, the power of the devil is diminished and human beings and human societies immediately begin to flourish. Jesus BINDS THE STRONGMAN and brings life and strength to human beings!!!

Like yeast, he is working his way through the whole batch of dough! His movement is spreading and it is growing!!! Remember the STONE sent from heaven grew into a great mountain – well so too the Kingdom of Heaven inaugurated by Jesus. Jesus said:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. 32 It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” (Matthew 13:31-32 ESV)

Alright, so JESUS is the GREAT INTERVENTION. His coming is THE STONE that SHATTERS the power of our enemy and establishes a kingdom that will grow and fill the earth – praise the Lord!

So we've seen a picture of human history, we've seen a picture of ultimate reality and now in the final scene we are given a promise of everlasting dominion.

A Promise Of Everlasting Dominion

Look at verses 15-18.

“As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. 16 I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. 17 ‘These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. 18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’ (Daniel 7:15-18 ESV)

Now the word translated here as “kings” can also mean “reigns” or “rules” – so most commentators take this to mean that 4 kingdoms will come each with their archetypal king or ruler. Babylon with its Nebuchadnezzar, Persia with its Cyrus, Greece with its Alexander the Great and Rome with its Caesar – BUT none of that ULTIMATELY MATTERS because the Kingdom is coming with its CHRIST and his REIGN will be FOREVER, and EVER and EVER!

So, in a sense, this vision actually BUILDS upon the prophesy that was unpacked by Pastor Steve last week. He talked about how Isaiah was given a vision of a Coming One who would reverse the flow of Israelite history. There would be a long line of leaders who would take the people down, down, down and down into death and disaster – but then One would come who would lead them up, up, up into life, glory and dominion – well here, that national story is being transposed into a GLOBAL KEY. The Coming One will not just reverse the flow of Israelite history, he will reverse the flow of HUMAN HISTORY.

You see, he is not just the Seed of Abraham – he is the Son of Man!

He has come for ALL OF US!

He has come to do FOR US what we could never do for ourselves and to pay for what we have done in his body on the cross. He has come to break our chains and to hamstring our enemy so that we can BE AGAIN the people we were created and intended to be.

IMAGE and LIKENESS of God!

We were made to RULE!

We were made to RESEMBLE!

We were made to REPRESENT!

And because of Jesus – because of his Divine Intervention – we CAN and we WILL!

Look at how the story ends. Look at verse 18:

But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’ (Daniel 7:18 ESV)

Now, that’s not the ending we expect, is it? We expect that to say: “And the Son of Man will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever and ever” but that’s not what it says. You see, Jesus didn’t COME to WIN BACK what he had lost - because he had never lost anything. Jesus enjoyed a glory with the Father in the beginning that could never be threatened by events and happenings down here – so that’s not what this is about. The Second Person of the Trinity WAS FINE, IS FINE and will always BE FINE – but WE suffered a tremendous defeat back in the Garden. We fell. We lost. We became enslaved. We became LESS. And Jesus entered into human history to change that.

He came to make us MEN and WOMEN again. He came to end our captivity. He came to give us victory over our enemy. He came to make it a fair fight – in fact, more than that, he came to rig the game in our favour.

Do you see that?

Jesus came – and like a STONE SENT FROM HEAVEN he fell on the devil’s head. He knocked him cold. He tied him up. He bound the strongman – now his body still has some life in it, but the devil will never be the same. He’s done. It’s over for him.

But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’ (Daniel 7:18 ESV)

That’s what Jesus accomplished for us in his coming.

He came to give US back what the enemy had stolen. That how every great redemption story ends! When God bound the strong man in Egypt and set his people free from that terrible tyranny he didn’t send them out empty handed, rather he said:

“but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.” (Exodus 3:21-22 ESV)

Do you see that?

God always gives you back what the enemy has stolen.

Redemption involves restoration AND repayment.

Now listen, as I said off the top, the main reason we are looking at this prophecy is to better understand and appreciate Jesus – that’s the whole point of an Advent series: to focus our attention on the Christ who has COME and is COMING. So that’s the main point – but at the same time, SEEING THAT POINT has certain implications. This is WHY for example, the Apostle Paul reminds his people that they don’t need to fight and squabble over money. Did someone steal from you? Did someone fail to pay you what you think you are owed? You tried to work it out, but you couldn’t see eye to eye?

OH WELL – Paul says. MOVE ON. WHO CARES? Do you not understand that when the Son of Man returns to set up and consummate his kingdom here on earth, he will conduct a FINAL

AUDIT. And you will participate in that audit! Remember, he came to ESTABLISH THIS KINGDOM FOR YOU!! So whatever you think you've lost here, you get back at the end! Do you not get that?

So:

“Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?” (1 Corinthians 6:7 ESV)

You don't NEED closure right now on everything. You can take a few hits because the Lord will give you back EVERYTHING that the enemy has taken from you when he comes to consummate his kingdom.

So chill out.

Look a little further down the road. In the coming of Jesus – the stone sent from heaven, the Son of Man – in his coming human history has been set upon its final trajectory. There may be twists and turns but the destination has been established. He has been GIVEN A KINGDOM by the Ancient of Days and his WIL and INTENTION is to share it with us!

That's the plan brothers and sister – and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The devil may howl and rage all he wants - but his power has been decisively broken. He is a spent force. Christ is the only power in the universe that matters now, and:

his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:14 ESV)

So what child is this?

The child who changes the game. The child who wins a kingdom and who shares it with all those who put their faith in him. The child who WILL BE KING AND RULER OVER ALL.

That's the Christ whose coming we celebrate at Christmas. That's our Jesus and that's our hope this Advent season - thanks be to God!

Let's pray together.