

The Triumph of God's Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Father, again, we thank you that you speak to us through your word, the Bible. And we thank you, Father, that although Daniel was written a long time ago in a different context, we find ourselves today in somewhat of a similar context, such that the message you gave to Daniel and your people back then is very much relevant for us today, as always.

So, Father, we pray that you'd help us to work hard at understanding your word this morning, that we might be encouraged by it, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I saw a rather amusing church sign a little while ago, which says this on the next slide, don't let worries kill you, let the church help.

Yeah, I didn't think about that one too carefully. But we can worry about all sorts of things, can't we? In fact, some of the girls said in their prayers some of the things that they worry about, or parents worry about, like money or being liked, I think they mentioned.

There are lots of things we can worry about, and we can even worry about our future in this world, particularly given what we see happening around us. For example, I'm assuming you have heard how last week North Korea fired a missile over Japan, and now the tension between North Korea and the US is such that yesterday, the newspaper headline was this on the next slide, North Korea and United States on the brink of war warns Putin.

Now, I don't particularly trust President Putin, and it's easy to be an alarmist, but nonetheless, he seems to be right. The disturbing current events can make us wonder and worry about our future.

[1 : 40] Or take yesterday's news about the TV advert by Dads for Kids promoting Father's Day today. TV channels have run ads like this for 15 years, but this year they are banned.

So on the next slide, it's all about the postal vote. And so the ad is deemed too political because it highlights one gender, fathers.

Now, it's amazing that organisations like Free TV are now so scared to even promote fatherhood because of society's changing views of gender and marriage.

One writer even said, will this mean that Father's Day will be no more? You see, disturbing events can make us wonder and even worry about our future. Or on the next slide, the court case against Hobart Presbyterian minister, which some of you will have heard about, Campbell Markham, who wrote against homosexuality on his blog back in 2011.

So six years ago, and now someone who is actually not gay has filed a discrimination case against him, which he's now fighting in the High Court this month.

[2 : 51] And if that can happen to people in Tasmania, what does that mean for us here in Victoria? After all, we have the illustrious title of being the most progressive state in Australia.

In fact, some of the staff asked me the very question in our staff meeting this week, go on, what's going to happen? Now, again, I don't want to be overdramatic, but we live in disturbing times which can cause us to worry about the future, can't they?

Yet it was the same for Daniel. He lived in a disturbing time. In fact, if you look at your Bibles in chapter 7, verse 1, Daniel's vision occurs in the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon.

Now, this is the king we actually met back in chapter 5. So we're out of chronological order here.

Chapter 7 actually takes us back in time to about 10 years before chapter 5.

Belshazzar ruled for 10 years. This is chapter 7 is his first year. And then chapter 5 was his final year, 10 years later. And it's a disturbing time because gone are the days of King Nebuchadnezzar who actually acknowledged God's rule.

[3 : 57] Do you remember chapter 4? Nebuchadnezzar was humbled, became like an animal, and then he looked up to heaven, he acknowledged God's rule, he was restored, and he proclaimed God's rule to his whole kingdom. But now Nebuchadnezzar is dead.

There is a new king on the throne, and this king does not like Daniel's God. In fact, if you remember from chapter 5, he actually set himself against God, and he was arrogant.

He did not respect Daniel's God at all. And so Daniel might well have wondered, what is this going to mean for us as God's people? Now we have this king. Well, it's in that context that God gives Daniel a vision of the future to help him basically persevere in the present.

Before we look at the vision, I also need to say that this is the first of four visions which make up the rest of the book of Daniel. Most churches, not most churches, a lot of churches actually don't do chapter 7 to the end because it's just a bit weird and wonderful.

It is a hard kind of genre to understand. It's no longer just stories or narrative. We come to a style of writing that has lots of imagery and symbols. It's called apocalyptic.

[5 : 04] It's, think, book of revelation. Same style as that. And the trick, though, to reading this sort of writing is to look at the big picture without stressing over the details.

It's a bit like looking at an impressionist artwork from Van Gogh or someone. If you stand too close, you just see dots of paint. So on the next slide, I've got an example. It's just dots of paint.

It's hard to work out what it means close up. But if you stand back, I've got the original here. Well, not the original. Well, if only. But when you stand back, it's clear, isn't it?

The big idea is clearly his flower, his famous flower painting. And so that's the trick you need to remember when we come to this style of writing. And so with that in mind, let's turn to the first part of Daniel's vision with its beastly kings and kingdoms, point 1 in your outlines and verse 2 in your Bibles.

This will be the longest point for us this morning. So verse 2, we'll pick it up at verse 2. Daniel said, Now it's worth noticing immediately that these beasts come from the sea.

[6 : 18] And the sea in the ancient world was often a symbol of chaos and evil. So if you remember Jesus, when he healed the man with the legion of evil spirits, the spirits went into the pigs, the pigs ran off the cliff and into the sea.

It was kind of like this metaphoric evil returning to where evil dwells, if you like. Or in the book of Revelation, where it describes heaven and the throne of God, it says there is no sea.

Not because, you know, God's against surfers and ocean lovers. I hope not. I love the ocean. But because the sea was a symbol of chaos and evil. And in heaven, there will be no chaos or evil.

And so the fact that these beasts come from the sea already signals bad news about these people. And the second thing to notice is that these beasts are really beastly.

They're not pleasant. So verse 4, The first was like a lion and it had the wings of an eagle, which is not normal. 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.

[7 : 21] And the mind of a human was given to it. And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. And it was raised up from one of its sides. And it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth.

And it was told, get up and eat your fill of flesh. Not particularly pleasant. Verse 6, Now if you just scan over in your Bible to verse number 17, to kind of cut to the chase a little bit, we're told that these beasts represent kings or kingdoms.

It seems to be used interchangeably in this passage. Who rule for a time. But they are deliberately described as beasts rather than humans, human kings.

Because they do not rule God's way. And do you remember in the book of Genesis, God created humans to rule over creation and to care for it. That's primarily what it means to be made in God's image.

And yet these kings are not described as humans, but as beasts and unnatural looking ones at that. Because they do not rule as God created humans to rule. That's the idea of this beastly description.

[8 : 38] And now immediately we want to know exactly who these kings represent, who these beasts represent. And what each part, which detail of their description means and so on. But again, we're not told actually.

There is good reason, though, to think that they represent the four big kingdoms from Daniel's time onwards. So Babylon, Persia, Greece and then Rome.

Although there's disagreement, particularly about the last one. The bottom line is we're not clearly told who they represent. And I suspect that's deliberate for two reasons.

Firstly, so that Daniel and his people are forced to trust God. And secondly, because these type of rulers can describe lots of rulers in history.

Not just the ones that came in Daniel's time. In fact, we'll see Jesus apply that in next week as we look at chapter 8. But having said all that, I think we can get an idea that the lion probably represents Nebuchadnezzar.

[9 : 41] After all, chapter 7 is parallel with chapter 2. And in chapter 2, there's four parts of the statue, if you remember, which parallel the four beasts here. And in chapter 2, we're clearly told that the first part of the statue, the golden head, was Nebuchadnezzar.

So perhaps the first beast here is Nebuchadnezzar. What's more, he was humbled to become like an animal. He crawled around in chapter 4, do you remember? His hair grew, chapter 4, verse 33, like the feathers of an eagle.

And here this lion has the wings of an eagle. And then in verse 4 here, this lion is lifted to its feet and given a human mind. It's restored to some sort of humanity to right rule under God.

And that's exactly what happened to Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4, do you remember? He was humbled, but then he acknowledged God's rule as humans were supposed to. And so he was restored. He was lifted off all fours to his feet and his mind was also restored.

And so there are good reasons to think that that's Nebuchadnezzar. Of course, we're not told explicitly. And so it could be applied to lots of kings throughout history. Now, Emperor Constantine, for example, converted to Christianity.

[10 : 50] So perhaps, you know, it could also represent him, someone who was humbled, but then lifted up to rule as humans were meant to rule under God. And then in verse 5, we have a bear who, well, could be the next big kingdom after Babylon, which is Persia.

Persia was made up of two nations, the Persians and the Medes. And the Persians were the strongest side. And so the bear was lifted up on one side, perhaps because that represents Persia, the stronger side.

And they were a bloodthirsty lot, hence the three ribs in its mouth. I don't know why there's three. We're not told. Let's don't focus on the details. But they were told to eat.

In other words, they're a murderous bunch. And while that's probably Persia in Daniel's time, again, it can represent lots of kings in history. Just think Genghis Khan, Adolf Hitler, or even in our own time, Bashar al-Assad, who allegedly released that gas attack earlier this year in Syria.

And then in verse 6, we have the leopard with the four wings and the four heads. The number four often represents all. Like, think four corners of the world, you know, all the world.

[12 : 01] And so four wings suggest covering all the known world with great speed, perhaps. And the four heads suggest ruling over all the known world. A head was often seen as a ruler.

And that does fit with Alexander the Great, who conquered the known world very quickly, just 11 years, which was remarkable for the time. But again, it could represent other kings as well.

Either way, what we do know is that they don't rule under God. And the fourth one in particular opposes God. Do you see verse 7?

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 the former beasts, and it had ten horns. While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them.

[13 : 00] And three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully. This beast is different.

It has ten horns. A horn was a common symbol for power. And ten often represents great or complete. So back in chapter 1, Daniel was said to be ten times better than all the other wise men. In other words, he was way greater than all the other wise men. And so perhaps this kingdom with its ten horns, it means that this kingdom is way greater or powerful than all the other kingdoms before it.

Either way, it has iron teeth and it tramples everything underfoot. Perhaps it represents the Roman Empire with its mighty legions that were feared the world over. It made great use of iron and marched from place to place, trampling everything down that they conquered.

We don't know for sure. But from this king, we do know one will come, a little horn, with a rather big mouth. It speaks boastfully as though it is God.

[14:08] In fact, if you look at verse 21, it wages war against God's people and seems to defeat them. In verse 25, it opposes God and oppresses God's people. This is the type of king that as a Christian, you just keep well away from.

But who is he? Well, again, we're not told. People have different views. It could be Antiochus IV, who will meet next week, who set himself up as God and did horrific things to the Jews. But he came from the Greek Empire, not the Roman Empire. So perhaps it could be Emperor Nero, who burnt a lot of Christians. Or perhaps even at General Titus, who sacked God's temple in 70 AD. We don't know. What we do know is it represents someone who opposes God and oppresses his people. And having had a look at these four beasts and what we could try and glean from them, you might be wondering, how on earth is this supposed to encourage Daniel? If he's living in disturbing times that are worrying in the future, how is seeing that meant to be encouraging? Well, first of all, you need to notice that these beasts are all under someone else's control.

[15:20] So working backwards, verse 6, the leopard was given authority to rule by someone else, it seems. Or verse 5, the bear was told what to do by someone else.

Or verse 4, the beast was lifted up and given a human mind by someone else. And in verse 2, we meet someone else because it's the four winds of heaven that churned the sea in the first place and enabled all the beasts to rise up.

In other words, God is in control of these kings. You might be asking, why does he allow them to rise up in the first place? Well, we live in a fallen world. They're going to rise up. And yet, we see here that God is in control of them. In the words of chapter 2, verse 21, God sets up kings and deposes them or brings them down and will judge them. And that's exactly what Daniel now sees God doing.

Do you see 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.

[16:26] His throne was flaming with fire and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire that was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him and 10,000 times 10,000 stood before him.

The court was seated and the books were opened. The Ancient of Days is, of course, God. We sang about it earlier. And he's not called ancient because he has white woolen hair, which some of you here today will be glad to know.

But it's because he always existed. And notice God is pure, which is probably what white means. It's hard to know what the fire coming from the throne and on the wheels really refers to.

It could be awesome. It could be holiness. We don't know. But what we do know is this kingdom is the greatest. For thousands attend him. In fact, if 10 represents what is great or complete, then 10,000 times 10,000, well, that's greatness beyond degree, isn't it?

And this God now sits in court and opens the books. This is a courtroom scene. And God is about to judge. See verse 11.

[17:37] Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire.

The other beasts were stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time. You see, while kings rise and rule in beastly ways, God is in control.

He's the one who both sets them up and brings them down in judgment. And his judgment will be fair. I think that's the point of the beast with the little horn who is completely destroyed, while the other ones are allowed to live for a little while longer.

It's almost as though the one who is most evil, who opposes God, is judged most severely. Now, while this could refer to judgment in terms of losing their power, you know, a bad president loses an election or a dictator is assassinated or whatever, I think the picture here is meant to be one of final judgment.

Either way, for Daniel and for us living in disturbing times that, you know, cause us to worry about our future, God is saying, look, there will be beastly rulers that come, but don't worry, I am in control and I will judge them all.

[18:51] I remember driving down Doncaster Road and I got to Tunstall Square where the Coles was just outside there. I think that's where it sort of turns into Mitchum Road.

Anyway, a car came speeding past me and cut me off. I'm sure they, I thought they were going to clip me. It was very, like, well, I was angry actually, and I found it very hard not to retaliate because of what this person did.

But I just kept driving. And when I got down to where the Springvale Road exit is, I saw him on the side of the road pulled over by a cop.

And I must confess, I felt like justice had been done. But that doesn't happen to all people every day, does it?

But this vision is saying it will happen to all people on the last day. Justice will be done for God will judge them and it will be fair. And yet God will do even more than that for his people.

[19 : 51] Which brings us to the second part of Daniel's vision, the shorter part. So point to verse 13. Verse 13 repeats verse 2, the same sort of language. So we know this is a second part. He says, 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. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that shall never be destroyed.

Here in the second part of Daniel's vision, we meet a king who is like a son of man. The phrase son of man just means a human. So we're all sons of man if you like.

In fact, in chapter 8, God will call Daniel a son of man. Chapter 8 verse 17. But the point here is that this king will be a human and not a beast like the other ones.

In other words, this king will rule under God as God created humans to rule. But he will also be God and have God's authority.

[21 : 03] You see, this man does not drive a BMW, a Mercedes, the latest model of chariot. He rides on the clouds of heaven, do you see? And only God did that in the Bible. So on the next slide, we read from Psalm 68.

Sing to God. Sing in praise of his name. Extol him. Notice who rides on the clouds. The clouds are God's car, if you like. Or the Lord makes the clouds his chariot.

And yet this king will also ride on the clouds. In other words, he will be God and have God's authority, which is what verse 14 says. He is given all authority.

And so we have this new king who will replace the beastly kings. And this king is both human and God and has all authority. Now, does that remind you of anyone?

I've got a few ums. I'm not sure if everyone's there. So that's Jesus. Thank you for. Yeah. You're more responsive than the other ones. I had to force it out of them anyway. Yeah, Jesus. And God's going to replace the beastly kings and his kingdom with this perfect king and the forever kingdom.

[22 : 11] You see, this kingdom of Christ is the one you want to be a part of. Because this is the one that will endure forever. This one is the one that's going to triumph in the end.

When we moved to Melbourne, we were told we need to pick an AFL team to follow. And so I asked, well, which team wins all the time? They gave me different answers depending on who I talked to.

And so we just chose the team from the suburb we lived in in Sydney, which was Carlton, their third bottom on the ladder. We picked the wrong team. But anyway, being one of God's people is actually being on the right team, the winning team.

For God has his perfect king who rules lovingly under God, and his kingdom will endure forever. His kingdom will triumph. And so for Daniel living in disturbing times, which made him worry for his future, this was meant to encourage him.

And yet seeing such visions seems to have overwhelmed him. So he understandably asked what it all means. Point three, verse 15. I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me.

[23 : 18] I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all this. So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things. Now, it's hard to know whether there's an angel standing there after he's finished dreaming or whether it's still part of his dream.

But this person acts like his tour guide, if you like. And Daniel asks for the meaning. And it's important we hear what this tour guide says because he's about to summarize everything that Daniel has said.

In other words, this is the key thing he wants Daniel to know. So what is it? Well, verse 17. 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. In other words, while there would be kings, beastly kings who rise up, God's kingdom will triumph. God's people will win.

That's the message. And so for the Jews living in disturbing times and with a worrying future, they have confidence to persevere. Because God is in control.

[24 : 30] He will judge. And his people will win. The perfect king and his kingdom will triumph, you see. Of course, our human nature is always to want to know more, especially if it's bad news so we can avoid it.

And that's what Daniel seems to do now. That is, I think we see a very human Daniel who, despite being told the main message, still wants to know more. You see verse 19? Then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, 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 all 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, killing them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favour of the holy people of the Most High.

And the time came when they possessed the kingdom. Now notice here that Daniel has already worked out a fair bit, hasn't he? He wants to know about the ten horns, yes, but he's understood that the little horn is opposing God and waging war against God's people.

[25 : 50] He's understood that the Ancient of Days will then judge it. And he's understood that God's people will then possess the forever kingdom. But he's still not sure about the ten horns or the little one.

And so the man answers in verse 23, he gave me this explanation. The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on the earth. Well, we kind of already knew that. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it, which again we know.

The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them, another king will arise, different from the early ones, and he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people, and to try and change to set times and laws, which we've heard. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times, and half a time. But the court, verse 10 again, the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever, as we heard earlier.

Then the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under 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.

[27 : 04] Now, I deliberately was pointing out as we read that, that most of what this person tells Daniel, Daniel already knew. He'd either worked it out already, or was told it already.

In fact, there's very little new information. The new information is that the horns represent kings, and that God's people will be delivered for a time, and times, and half a time.

But that's not particularly clear, is it? And so this tool guy doesn't actually give Daniel a whole lot of information. He really repeats the key message, that people, kings will rise, but God will judge, and God's kingdom will triumph.

You see, when it comes to disturbing times that make it for a worrying future, God tells us actually what we need to know, to keep trusting him. He doesn't tell us all the details, like who those particular kings are, or whether there was actually literally ten of them, given that the number ten can just mean complete, so it could be a complete number.

Nor does he say when it will happen. I mean, at time, times, and half, who knows what that means. You see, if God told us everything, then would we trust him?

[28 : 20] Or would we go it alone, now that we had all the information? God tells us what we need to know, in order to keep trusting him. He doesn't tell us everything, but he does tell us what we need to know, to keep trusting him.

That's what he does with Daniel here. Now this Daniel ends, notice in verse 28, how deeply troubled, and a face that looks like he's about to be sick. So it seems like this vision, actually hasn't had its intended effect, to encourage him, does it?

And yet we know it must have, at least in part, because nine years after this vision, the last year of Belshazzar's reign, chapter five, Daniel, we read, stood up to the king, told him off, and said, the writing's on the wall, buddy.

You're going to be judged. You know, what makes someone willing to do that, stick their neck out and do that? And then last week in chapter six, we heard that Daniel defied Darius's law, and continued to pray to God alone, even though he knew he'd be thrown into the lion's den.

What made him able to do that, to stand firm, to persevere? Well, partly because God gave him this vision nine years earlier, which told him, yes, beastly rulers like Belshazzar will rule, but God is in control, and God will judge them, while his kingdom will triumph.

[29 : 39] In other words, this vision was part of what helped Daniel persevere through worrying times. And yet, we have even more reason to do the same, because we have Christ, who's already begun to fulfill this vision.

So here's a question for you. Have a look at your Bibles, in chapter seven, verse 13. Where does the Son of Man ride his cloud to? Where does the Son of Man ride his cloud to?

Does he ride it to earth, you know, like when Jesus returns? Or does he ride it to God, like when Jesus rises from the dead? It's to the ancient of days, isn't it?

And in our second reading, on the next slide, Jesus is about to be crucified, raised to life, and he says, from now on, from this moment, my death and resurrection, you will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds, or at the right hand, and coming on the clouds of heaven.

You see, it's when Jesus dies on the cross and rises to new life, that he approaches God in heaven, and receives all authority to rule. That's why at the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus says, Jesus, of course, will still return one day to judge the nations on judgment day, and he may come on the clouds again then, and then every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, but the point is, Daniel 7 has already begun to be fulfilled in Christ, and so we have even more confidence than Daniel did, that God will judge the nations and rulers of this world, and we will triumph.

[31 : 19] You see, if someone makes a promise to you, you might believe it because you know the person who makes it, just like Daniel believes the vision because he knew God who gave it, but if you start to see someone beginning to keep that promise, then it gives you even greater confidence, doesn't it?

I mentioned before that I quite like my lamb roasts, not that we have it very often, but that wasn't a hint, Michelle, no, she's in Cresce, so I'm going to get myself in trouble there, but last Christmas, Michelle promised me one, and that promise of a future roast helped me persevere through the busyness of Christmas, it's very good, and I believed the promise because I knew who made it, but then I saw Michelle buy the leg of lamb and begin to prepare it the night before, and I had even greater confidence that that promise would be kept.

Now, it's a bit of a silly illustration, but hopefully you get the point. Daniel 7 is God's promise to his people, which is much greater than a lamb roast. It was meant to help them persevere through their disturbing times that made for a worrying future, and they believed that vision because they knew God who gave it, but we have even more reason to believe it because we have Christ who's already begun to fulfill it, you see.

Christ has already died and risen, already approached the Ancient of Days, already given all authority. Christ, the Son of Man, the perfect King, rules now. And so we live, yes, in disturbing times that might make for a worrying future, like the possibility of war between the US and North Korea, the increasing absurdity of political correctness, banning Father's Day ads, the growing persecution of Christians around the world, and yet, it's a message we've heard before, we need not worry.

Yes, beastly rulers will rise, but God remains in control, and he will one day pull them over, so to speak, and book them, call them to account, while we will drive past them to enjoy God's forever kingdom under his perfect King.

[33 : 31] Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for this reminder that we need in our day, that despite the disturbing times around us, that might cause us to worry about our future as a society and as Christians, that you tell us that this is normal, that beastly kings will rise, and

yet, you are still in control, and more than that, you will judge them, and we, your people, who are part of your kingdom, will triumph.

Father, thank you for this vision that Christ has already begun to fulfill. Thank you that the Son of Man, the perfect man, rules even now. And so, Father, we pray that you'd help us to persevere with confidence despite what we see around us.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.